

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 50.6%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Micah 4 & 5

Monday: Micah 6 & 7

Tuesday: 2 Kings 19, Isaiah 37 & 2 Chronicles 32:20-23

Wednesday: 2 Kings 20:1-11, Isaiah 38:1-22 & 2 Chronicles 32:24

Thursday: 2 Kings 20:12-19, Isaiah 39, & 2 Chronicles 32:25, 27-29, 31

Friday: Isaiah 40

Saturday: Isaiah 41

Current # of email addresses in the group: 624

I hope everyone had a great week full of deep Thankfulness to our Great God!

UCG launched a new website update this past week. I'm excited about the new site, but there are always unintended outcomes of such a big endeavor. One such unintended outcome was that the reading program on our San Francisco page was wiped out and lost during the transition to the new site.

The archive information is still available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 80

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 533 – SUNDAY: December 1st

Micah 4 & 5

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "It is not clear when the rest of the prophecies of Micah were delivered. It is possible that chapters 4-7 were delivered before or during Sennacherib's invasion. However, there is reason to believe they were given later, as we'll see. We do know from Micah 1:1 that they were given prior to Hezekiah's death—but this did not come until 15 years after Sennacherib's invasion. Therefore, we have a fairly broad time span here.

Micah 4 begins with essentially the same words recorded in Isaiah 2:1-4 about Christ's millennial reign to come in the last days. But Micah adds some other important details.

First of all, he adds that "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4). This shows that everyone will have personal property and be able to enjoy the fruit of their own labor. It also shows that there will be no reason to fear crime or assault. For, as God says in Isaiah 11:9, people will not be permitted to harm each other in the world under Christ's reign. Indeed, as more and more people are converted to God's ways, fewer and fewer will even seek the harm of others—until it becomes a rarity. Indeed, the peace and harmony that will prevail is presented in Zechariah 3:10, where we are told that "everyone will invite his *neighbor* under his vine and under his fig tree." This tells us that while we are to enjoy our property and the fruit of our labors, these blessings are also to be shared with others.

Micah goes on to say that this time of peace and great blessing will begin with a regathering of God's afflicted people and a restoration of Israel's former dominion (Micah 4:6-8).

Micah 4:9-10, while perhaps referring to Judah's anguish at the time of Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C., could well refer to a later time. As already mentioned, the next year following the invasion, in 700, Sennacherib actually managed to regather his strength and put down Merodach-Baladan of Babylon once and for all—with Sennacherib placing his son on Babylon's throne. This could have caused cries of anguish from the Jews. In 695, however, Sennacherib attempted a naval invasion of Elam, which failed. The Elamites attacked Assyrian-controlled Babylon and took Sennacherib's son prisoner. Babylon was thus returned to native Chaldean rule. A major battle between Assyria and the Elamites in 692 ended in a stalemate. But in 689, Sennacherib

sacked the city of Babylon, reasserting Assyrian rule over the area. This may have greatly upset the Jews, who perhaps still pinned their hopes on Babylon to overthrow the Assyrians.

Look again at Micah 4:9-10 from this perspective. God basically says to the people of Jerusalem: What are you crying about? You've still got your king and leaders. So why do you act like you're in agony? Well, guess what? You *are* going to be in agony. You're going to be taken away by the very ones in whom you've hoped—the Babylonians—to Babylon. But God promises to deliver them from there. While this probably referred to the ancient Babylonian captivity of Judah, it seems also to refer to the end time, considering Micah 4:11-13. In these verses, it appears that Judah is used to beat down nations that come against Jerusalem. This could be a reference to the Israelis' military power since the state of Israel was formed. However, it seems more likely to refer to Judah's participation in battle in events surrounding Christ's return (see Zechariah 12:6; Zechariah 14:14).

Then again, "daughter of Zion" in Micah 4:13 could perhaps be taken spiritually—as a reference to the glorified Church of God at Christ's return. "I will make your horn [i.e., might] iron" and "You shall beat in pieces many peoples" (Micah 4:13) could tie in with Christ's promise to the Church: "And he who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give *power over the nations*—'He shall rule them with a *rod of iron*; they shall be *dashed to pieces* like the potter's vessels'" (Revelation 2:26-27).

Micah 5:1 has been interpreted in various ways. It is not clear if the "daughter of troops" refers to the Jews or the invaders. The "He" who lays siege appears to be the Lord (Micah 4:13), though that is not certain. The striking of the judge of Israel has been seen by some as the treatment of Zedekiah at Jerusalem's overthrow by the Babylonians. However, others see it as a reference to the striking of the supreme

Judge of Israel, Jesus Christ, by His enemies (compare Mark 15:19). In the end, Christ will triumph.

Micah 5:2 refers to Bethlehem Ephrathah. Ephrath was the ancient name of Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19). The verse refers, of course, to the birth of Jesus in that town (see Matthew 2:4-6; John 7:42).

Interestingly, Bethlehem means “House of Bread,” and Jesus would come as the true bread of life on which we must be sustained to have eternal life (see John 6). It should be pointed out that this verse states that Jesus is “from everlasting”—that is, eternity past, meaning He is without beginning (compare Hebrews 7:3; see our booklet [Who Is God?](#)).

Micah 5:3 says that Jesus will give up the Jews “until the time that she who is in labor has given birth.” Together with Micah 5:4-5, it seems clear that this is not a reference to Judah giving birth to the Messiah—since Judah was still given up to enemies at that time and even after. Rather, she who is in labor is likely the spiritual Zion, who gives birth to a “nation born at once” (compare Isaiah 66:8)—that is, the glorification of those of God’s Church (His spiritual nation) at Christ’s return.

Consider, then, the remainder of Micah 5:3: “Then the remnant of His brethren [or, more likely, the remnant of Israel *who are* His brethren] shall return to the children of Israel.” Jesus’ brethren—the members of God’s Church—are the remnant of Israel, the elect according to grace (see Romans 11:5). The glorified members of the Church will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. Afterward, Jesus and His brethren “shall return to the children of Israel”—that is, to lead and govern the returning Israelite exiles. Jesus then feeds His flock, *not* as He came the first time, in the flesh, but in divine power and majesty—bringing truth and peace to the ends of the earth (Micah 5:4-5).

The time designated as “when the Assyrian comes into our land” (Micah 5:5) is not clear. It seems to be an end time prophecy. Perhaps the seven shepherds and eight princes refer to leaders of a Jewish or Israelite resistance of the last days—who help other forces bring about the destruction of Europe just prior to Christ’s return. It is also possible that this is a reference to events that have already occurred in our time—the utter devastation of Germany in World War II—that is, if Micah 5:5-6 correspond to the time of Micah 5:7-9.

Micah 5:7-9 refer to the great military strength of Jacob (the nations of modern Israel) in the end time. This appears to refer primarily to British and American military strength in its heyday. This period of strength is seen coming *before* Jacob’s military power is at last cut off during the coming Great Tribulation (compare Micah 5:10-14). In that awful tribulation, which is yet to come, Israel’s cities will be destroyed (Micah 5:14; compare Ezekiel 6:6). But in the end, God will execute vengeance on the nations (Micah 5:15).” [END]

Day 534 – MONDAY: December 2nd

Micah 6 & 7

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Chapters 6 and 7 appear to be directed primarily to Israel rather than Judah—although this could have *included* Judah. It is not clear when this prophecy was delivered. Based on the time span of Micah’s ministry (see Micah 1:1), it is possible that it was actually given prior to Israel’s first deportation or second deportation—and yet appended to the end of his book. However, it is also possible that it was given late in Hezekiah’s reign. If the latter is true, the message would seem almost exclusively for the end time, since Israel would have already gone into captivity (yet with perhaps some application to ancient Judah, as mentioned). Of course, even if the prophecy was given before Israel’s captivity, it would still

clearly apply to the end time as well, based on the details in the latter half of chapter 7.

Chapter 6 “is in the familiar form of a lawsuit which God brings against Israel” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on chap. 6). God calls the “mountains” and “hills” as witnesses (Micah 6:1-2). While perhaps a literal reference to the land, which existed when the covenant with Israel was first made, it is just as likely that “mountains” and “hills” refers to great nations and smaller nations, as is often the case in biblical prophecy.

Actually, God makes the point that the Israelites act as if they have a case against *Him*. But He is clearly innocent of all charges. Just the opposite, God has repeatedly worked to save and help Israel. As an example, Balaam caused much grief to the Israelites by leading them into idolatry—but when used by Balak in an attempt to curse Israel, Balaam uttered many blessings and demonstrated God’s love and protection for His people (Micah 6:5; Numbers 22:2–24:25).

Micah 6:6-8 offers one of the clearest statements of a theme scattered throughout many other places in the Old Testament, as well as the New, which places the sacrificial system in its proper perspective (see 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 51:16-17; Hosea 6:6). God did not want sacrifices just for the sake of sacrifices. And He certainly did not want the abhorrent sacrifice of children at all—though many societies of that day thought this a legitimate sacrifice, including, at times, the Israelites.

God’s real goal for mankind was and is to produce righteous character. God defines true goodness, which is what He says here that He really requires of us. It is, first of all, to “do justly”—that is, to live righteously (according to God’s commandments, Psalm 119:172) and to judge and deal fairly. It also includes loving mercy—having a thankful heart for God’s mercy and a compassionate heart that shows mercy to others,

expressing itself in a willingness to help others in need. And finally, it means to walk humbly with God, trusting Him for guidance and direction. Christ called these things the “weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23). Justice corresponds to living justly and judging with righteous judgment. And walking humbly with God is synonymous with walking by faith—humble and trusting, as a little child.

Micah 6:16 refers to the wickedness of Omri and especially his son Ahab, who were the first kings of Israel to bring Baal worship into prominence. Of Omri the Bible states, “Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:25). He founded the city of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24), which was virtually synonymous with idolatry. Israel is shown to be following Omri and Ahab’s evil ways. Again, this could refer to ancient Israel. But it also applies to the nations of modern Israel, as widespread false Christianity is really a modified form of ancient Baal worship. The name Baal means “Lord.” Many today worship a “Lord” they believe to be the true God—yet they are sadly deceived.

As Micah 7 opens, Micah is dismayed at the lack of righteous fruit in the society. In Micah 7:3, he mentions a corrupt prince. This seems to be part of an end-time prophecy, and perhaps just means that all of Israel’s leaders in the last days are corrupt. However, if this prophecy were given late in Hezekiah’s reign, it could perhaps have applied to Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh—who would eventually prove to be Judah’s most wicked ruler. Manasseh was coregent with Hezekiah in Judah from around 697-686 B.C.—just over a decade.

Regarding Micah 7:5-6, Christ actually explained the meaning. Jesus often quoted the prophets when preaching—the very ones He originally inspired. And such was the case when He stated that He came not to bring peace, but a sword—referring to the fact that those who

chose His way would often be greatly opposed and even betrayed by close friends and family members. He quoted Micah 7:6 in this context (see Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:49-53).

Micah 7:7-9 should be of great comfort to us. Micah appears to be describing his own predicament and hope—but the same kinds of situations affect every Christian. Moreover, his words express the hope of Israel as well. Often God will allow us to experience consequences because of our sins. But upon our repentance He does forgive us—and He will ultimately save us. “She who is my enemy” (Micah 7:10) is probably a reference to the false Christianity that has prevailed since the second century and is to dominate the world in the end time—referred to in Revelation 17 as “Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.” She—that is, this evil system—will ultimately be destroyed, God promises. Of course, a forerunner of this system existed in Micah’s own day even in Israel and Judah—as Canaanite paganism, rooted in Babylon, was in many aspects nefariously blended with God’s true form of worship.

In Micah 7:12, “From Assyria and the fortified cities, from the fortress to the River” could perhaps be translated “From Assyria and the cities of Egypt, from Egypt to the River [Euphrates]” (see NKJV margin). This would parallel other verses that show the Israelites of the end time returning from both Assyria and Egypt in a great second Exodus (e.g., Isaiah 11:11). The territory of the northern kingdom will again be inhabited by the Israelites (Micah 7:14).

The second Exodus will be accompanied by great miracles, as the original Exodus was (Micah 7:15). All nations will see and fear (Micah 7:16-17). But the greatest testimony of the events is the measureless mercy of God—who will pardon Israel’s sins upon their repentance despite all the injustice and evil they have committed against Him (Micah 7:18-20).

This evokes the remark of “Who is a God like You...?” in Micah 7:18, similar to the words in Exodus 15:11, “Who is like You, O Eternal...?”—which were part of the song that the Israelites sang to God when He delivered them from Pharaoh at the Red Sea. The statement in Micah provides an interesting play on words because the name *Micah* means, “Who Is Like the Eternal?” Micah himself stood in awe of the incredible mercy of God.

Interestingly, the Jews have a traditional practice called *Tashlich*, meaning, “You will cast,” taken from the Hebrew words of Micah 7:19. For most this is done on the Feast of Trumpets, although some do it on the Day of Atonement, which seems more fitting. It involves throwing lint and bread crumbs from one’s pocket—or casting a stone—into a body of water. The concept is that in the same way, God will cast their sins away. Amazingly, it is in the ultimate fulfillment of the fall Holy Days that most of the Jewish people will at last find the redemption these customs portray.

But for all those whom God is calling in this age, redemption is available now. Consider the imagery of a stone sinking to the bottom of the ocean—never to be seen or heard from again. This is what God says is done with our sins. How grateful we should all be for His unbounded grace and mercy. What a truly wonderful God we serve.” [END]

Day 535 – TUESDAY: December 3rd

2 Kings 19, Isaiah 37 & 2 Chronicles 32:20-23

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Hezekiah takes the field commander’s blasphemy to God. Through Isaiah, God assures him He has heard it and will deal with the Assyrians. Then the Rabshakeh returned to his king but “did not find Sennacherib at Lachish. Sennacherib had gone to besiege Libnah [about five miles north of Lachish], and from there set out for the Valley of Eltekeh to meet the Egyptian Army which had

come to the aid of Judah” (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah, *Macmillan Bible Atlas*, p. 99).

Eugene Merrill gives details regarding the participation of Egypt, now ruled by Pharaoh Shebitku: “In the spirit of general rebellion following Sargon’s death in 705, Shebitku with his armed forces moved north in 701 to join the Palestinian states, including Judah, in an effort to withstand the new king of Assyria, Sennacherib. By the time Shebitku arrived, Hezekiah may already have promised his tribute to Sennacherib. Whatever the case, the Assyrian broke off further hostilities against Jerusalem when he learned that Shebitku was on the way. Sennacherib then confronted the forces of Egypt and Judah at Eltekeh. Victorious, he divided his army, leaving part to provide defense against the Egyptians and sending the others to Jerusalem, apparently to punish Hezekiah for his collaboration with the rebels.

“By then a second large contingent of troops from Egypt, led by the crown prince Tirhakah, was on its way. Sennacherib was soon apprised of this, but communicated to Hezekiah that he should take no comfort from it since the Assyrians had completely destroyed all their previous enemies (2 Kings 19:9-13)” (*Kingdom of Priests*, p. 416). This is a reference to the letter that Hezekiah received (2 Kings 19:14). “Egypt did indeed prove to be a ‘splintered reed’ [as the Assyrian official had warned] (2 Kings 18:21): Shebitku and Tirhakah retreated without doing the Assyrians further harm” (p. 416).

But far greater forces were pitted against Assyria. Hezekiah went back to the temple, this time taking Sennacherib’s blasphemous letter and laying it out before God (2 Kings 19:14).

Have you followed Hezekiah’s example when facing “an impossible” trial? That is, have you taken a letter, a bill, a legal paper or some other document that threatened your well being and read it aloud to God,

kneeling before His throne in prayer, imploring His help? It is a moving and inspiring way to pray in a time of truly serious need.

Following Hezekiah's appeal, Isaiah is once again used to confirm God's anger at the Assyrians' blasphemy and presumptuousness, and to bring God's reassuring message about how God would defend Jerusalem, provide for Judah and renew its population growth.

Sennacherib's prism records: "He [Hezekiah] himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city. I put watch-posts strictly around it and turned back to his disaster any who went out of its city gate. His towns which I had despoiled I cut off from his lands...."

Regarding the remainder of this account, Werner Keller writes in his book, *The Bible as History*: "Surely now must come the announcement of the fall of Jerusalem and the seizing of the capital. But the text [of the prism] continues: 'As for Hezekiah, the splendour of my majesty overwhelmed him...30 gold talents...valuable treasures as well as his daughters, the women of his harem, singers both men and women, he caused to be brought after me to Nineveh. To pay his tribute and to do me homage he sent his envoys.'

"It is simply a bragging account of the payment of tribute—nothing more.... The Assyrian texts pass on immediately from the description of the battle of Jerusalem to the payment of Hezekiah's tribute [which had been paid earlier!]. Just at the moment when the whole country had been subjugated and the siege of Jerusalem, the last point of resistance, was in full swing, the unexpected happened: Sennacherib broke off the attack at five minutes to twelve. Only something quite extraordinary could have induced him to stop the fighting...." (1980, p. 260).

Sennacherib doesn't tell us what happened, but the Bible does. God miraculously intervened and slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (2 Kings 19:35). Sennacherib returned in disgrace to Nineveh, where he of course did not report his ignominious defeat. Rather, he did what he could to make it look like a victory. T.C. Mitchell of the British Museum writes, "The Assyrian annals tacitly agree with the Biblical version by making no claim that Jerusalem was taken, only describing tribute from Hezekiah of gold, silver, precious stones, valuable woods, furniture decorated with ivory...iron daggers, raw iron and musicians" (*The Bible in the British Museum*, 2000, p. 59).

The Bible then states that Sennacherib, while worshiping in the temple of Nisroch, was murdered by two of his own sons. "The name Nisroch has been identified as the god Nushku or a corrupted form of Marduk, the traditional god of Mesopotamia. The events depicted here [i.e., surrounding Sennacherib's murder] took place 20 years after God's deliverance of Jerusalem. When his father was assassinated, Esarhaddon took the throne and ruled from 681 to 668 B.C." (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 2 Kings 19:37). This means that Sennacherib did not actually die until five years after *Hezekiah's* death. Still, Sennacherib had to live the rest of his life with the memory of his terrible defeat. It was so crushing that never again would he mount a military campaign against Judah." [END]

Day 536 – WEDNESDAY: December 4th

2 Kings 20:1-11, Isaiah 38:1-22 & 2 Chronicles 32:24

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Many date Hezekiah's sickness and the visit of Babylonian envoys as having occurred prior to Sennacherib's invasion. One reason for this is the fact that Hezekiah proudly shows the wealth of the national treasuries to the Babylonians, as we'll see (2 Kings 20:13)—and yet Hezekiah gave away much of the treasuries to

Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:15-16). Another important indicator is God's statement in 2 Kings 20:6 that He will defend Jerusalem and Hezekiah against the king of Assyria—seeming to indicate Sennacherib's assault, which would necessitate that it had not yet occurred. Finally, destruction is seen looming over Jerusalem *following* Hezekiah's sickness (see 2 Chronicles 32:24-25). Therefore, we will proceed on what appears to be the likelier supposition—that Hezekiah became ill prior to Sennacherib's invasion.

But his sickness must have come *right* before—earlier in the same year as the invasion. In 2 Kings 18:13, we are told that Sennacherib (who invaded in 701 B.C.) came in the 14th year of Hezekiah. Thus we understand Hezekiah's sole reign upon the death of his father to have begun around 715 B.C. Hezekiah's 29-year reign is reckoned from 715 to 686 B.C. Since Hezekiah's life is extended 15 years beyond his sickness, this would place his sickness in 701. The Bible says his illness came "in those days" (2 Kings 20:1; 2 Chronicles 32:24; Isaiah 38:1)—that is, in the days of Sennacherib's invasion. And this must have indicated a narrow span of time, as we've seen.

Sadly, as faithful as Hezekiah had been, in preparing for war against Assyria, he and his people were not looking to God but to their military capabilities and strategies. Isaiah had stated this very thing in Isaiah 22:8-11, which we read earlier. God, then, allows Hezekiah to fall prey to a deathly illness involving some kind of lesion. Hezekiah thus refocuses on his commitment to God—fervently praying for healing. And God promises to heal him.

It is interesting to note Isaiah's prescription of a poultice of figs even given God's promise to heal. "The practice of applying figs to an ulcerated sore is well attested in the records of the ancient Middle East, being mentioned as early as the Ras Shamra (Ugaritic) tablets of the second millennium B.C." (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on Isaiah 20:7).

This shows that we are to do what we physically can to relieve ourselves of illness in addition to fully relying on God's healing. In addition to purely supernatural miracles of healing, there are natural laws of health and healing that God created for healing. All healing comes from God—and our working within His laws of health and healing does not betray trust in Him. Even using physical methods such as Isaiah prescribed, it is still God and His laws that do the healing. Thus, God's promise to heal can include using the systems of the body and is not limited to overt miracles. In Hezekiah's case, perhaps God supernaturally healed part of Hezekiah's problem and let natural healing methods alleviate the other part.

We then see the sign of the sundial. This was an incredible miracle. Like the miracle of Joshua's long day, it involved stopping the earth from turning—and this time rotating it backwards a ways. Consider that the surface of the earth at the equator is moving at a speed of more than 1,000 miles per hour. The laws of inertia demand that if the earth were suddenly stopped, everything on its surface would go flying forward—and massive upheaval would result on land and sea. So God had to have kept everything calm and in place. It is truly staggering to contemplate. Certainly Hezekiah understood it to be a great miracle. But given our scientific knowledge today, we are able to realize the immense complexity of this miracle far more than Hezekiah possibly could have.”
[END]

Day 537 – THURSDAY: December 5th

2 Kings 20:12-19, Isaiah 39, & 2 Chronicles 32:25, 27-29, 31

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Merodach-Baladan of Babylon was, as we’ve seen, involved in his own ongoing struggle to gain independence from Assyria. He ruled as king twice in Babylon—first from 721-710 B.C. and later for a short time in 703. “Amazingly, Marduk-apla-iddina [Merodach-Baladan] rebounded...and instigated yet another rebellion

in 700. Again, and for the last time, he was put down; and Assur-nadin-sumi, a son of Sennacherib, was installed as regent in Babylon” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 414). What this tells us is that, though he wasn’t then on the throne, Merodach-Baladan was still a factor in 701—when Hezekiah was sick and Sennacherib invaded.

We can therefore see why he would be sending a delegation to Jerusalem at this time. Ostensibly it was to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from illness, but there was surely more political motivation behind it. Indeed, this was likely part of an attempt to forge an alliance with Hezekiah against their common foe, Assyria. Hezekiah was more than willing to show off his wealth—possibly to prove that he had enough to help finance a joint rebellion—and did so with a certain amount of pride (2 Chronicles 32:25).

Isaiah, however, warns that all of that wealth would eventually be taken by the Babylonians when they were no longer friends—perhaps even prompted by the reports taken back by these visitors. Sadly, Hezekiah’s response is not one of humility or repentance—only selfish satisfaction at the fact that this won’t transpire in his days.

God was greatly displeased at Hezekiah’s attitude in the whole affair. Though the king had been miraculously healed and been promised deliverance from the Assyrians by God, here he was again looking to his wealth and the help of foreign powers to overcome Assyria. And he was not sorry at Isaiah’s rebuke. “Therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 32:25). Indeed, God withdrew from him as a test (2 Chronicles 32:31). This all seems to refer to God allowing the catastrophic invasion of Sennacherib.” [END]

Isaiah 40

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Beginning with this chapter, the remainder of the book of Isaiah takes on a different tone—so much so that some have tried to claim it was really written by a different author. Part of the reason is that chapters 40-55 appear to be addressed to the people of Jerusalem while they are in captivity—and their captivity was not until many years after Isaiah's death. However, the New Testament assigns 23 verses from all sections of this book specifically to the prophet Isaiah (1:9; 6:9-10; 9:1-2; 10:22-23; 11:10; 29:13; 40:3-5; 42:1-4; 53:1,4,7-8; 61:1-2; 65:1). So Isaiah's message was written for the future—for Israel and Judah in their imminent captivity *and* in their end-time captivity.

The message is to comfort and console the exiles. Luke 2:25 refers to the future redemption of Israel as the "Consolation of Israel"—which was to be accomplished through Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul tells us that God comforts us so that we may comfort others (verses 3-4). Learning to be a comforter is learning to be like God. At times, chronic or serious trials can be very discouraging for a Christian, leaving one to wonder why God allows them. One of the reasons is to train us to be able to lend aid and comfort to those experiencing the same or a similar type of difficulty. A person with no experience with trials is limited in his ability to empathize and sympathize with those who truly suffer. On the other hand, the person experienced in receiving God's comfort *while enduring trials* is well equipped to offer godly comfort to others.

Verses 3-5 of Isaiah 40 are identified by all four Gospel writers as applying to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23)—who announced the first coming of the Messiah. However, Jesus indicated that John only partially fulfilled these prophecies—that their

ultimate fulfillment would come in the end time (see Matthew 17:10-13, especially verse 11).

Notice the message: "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low" (Isaiah 40:4). What does this mean? Does it mean that all mountain ranges on earth will be flattened and all valleys filled in? If so, it would mean no more Grand Canyon. No more Yosemite Valley. No more Matterhorn. No more great cascading waterfalls and other such beautiful wonders of God's creation. A perpetually flat landscape, with only slight dips and rises. Is this what God means? No, for while there will likely be topographical changes to the surface of the earth, "every" valley and "every" hill will not disappear. If that happened, the whole world would be flooded. Indeed, Scripture says that Jerusalem itself will be an exalted mountain during Christ's reign.

So what does the prophecy here mean? It appears to have both a figurative and a literal meaning. Mountains and hills being brought low can represent large and small nations being humbled, and valleys being raised can represent oppressed and downtrodden people being exalted (compare verses 17, 23, 29; 2:11-17; 24:21; 60:10, 14, showing that God hates pride, and how the haughty will be humbled and the humble—especially the faithful saints—will be exalted). Yet again, there is apparently a literal fulfillment as well. Consider that the passage is discussing the building of a highway (verse 3). It is *in the construction of this highway* that mountains are brought low and valleys are raised—crooked places made straight and rough places smoothed (verse 4). Thus, if there's a mountain in the way, it is brought low; if a valley would impede the highway, the valley is raised up (compare 42:15-16; 49:11). Furthermore, since the purpose of a highway is to facilitate interchange between separated people, we can look at this figuratively as well. Any obstacles that separate and divide people will be removed (compare 19:23; 62:10).

Remember that this reference applied in part to the work of John preparing the way (the highway) for Jesus' first coming. No physical highway was then being built. Rather, John preached a message of repentance and many of his followers became disciples of Jesus. Yet John's work of preparation was a forerunner of an end-time work of preparation—preparing for the second coming of Christ. Again, it is accomplished through a message of repentance and helping people in the process of conversion and overcoming sin.

At Christ's return, the Israelites and then the whole world will be helped in the same process. When He comes, there will be a literal highway of return for the exiles from Assyria and Egypt. But more importantly, that highway will represent *spiritual* return to God—repentance—as well as harmony with other people through that way of repentance. Part of the repentance process will include people coming to terms with and turning from hatred and competition that has existed between nations for sometimes thousands of years.

Verses 6-8 are cited by Peter in discussing the solution to the fleetingness of human life (1 Peter 1:24-25). The same analogy of man's life being as the grass of the field is used by James as well—applied especially to the futility of riches as a panacea (James 1:10-11; see also Job 14:1-2; Psalm 103:15-16). Verses 9-11 show the zeal and courage the Church should have in preaching the joyous "good tidings!" Verse 13 is quoted twice by Paul (Romans 11:34; 1 Corinthians 2:16).

One of the many recurring themes in this section of Isaiah is the greatness of God's power as the Creator of the universe, of the earth and of man upon the earth (verses 12, 22, 28; for more examples see also 42:5; 44:24; 45:12, 18). In verse 26, we are told to lift our eyes upward—to the heavens. God calls all in the "host"—that is, the celestial bodies, including all the stars—by name, an amazing fact also mentioned in Psalm 147:4. It is amazing since there are at least a

hundred billion galaxies of a hundred billion stars each. Scientists estimate the universe at around 15 billion years old. Yet to name every star at a rate of one per second would take more than 21,000 times that long—a mind-boggling feat that God gives but a passing mention. The greatness and awesome might of God should be of true comfort to His people.

The chapter ends with the wonderful verses about waiting on God. "To wait [on God] entails confident expectation and active hope in the Lord—never passive resignation (Ps. 40:1). Mount up...run...walk depicts the spiritual transformation that faith brings to a person. The Lord gives power to those who trust in him.... The eagle depicts the strength that comes from the Lord. The Lord describes his deliverance of the Israelites in Ex. 19:4 as similar to being lifted up on an eagle's strong wings. In Ps. 103:5, the strength of people who are nourished by God is compared to the strength of the eagle" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Isaiah 40:31). It is a remarkable picture. Through faith in God's power, our waiting can be a time of soaring." [END]

Day 539 – SATURDAY: December 7th

Isaiah 41

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In verse 2 God mentions sending someone "from the east." In verse 25 He says this person is "from the north" yet also "from the rising of the sun"—which again means from the east. So it is likely that the same person is being referred to. Yet who is this person?

First of all, we need to bear in mind that this whole section of prophecy is given to comfort the exiles of Judah and Israel—in both their ancient and future Babylonian captivities. It is describing a time of punishment on their enemies. Thus, the person being sent would seem to be a deliverer sent to free them from captivity. Indeed, most commentaries

equate this person with the Persian ruler Cyrus, who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and released the Jewish exiles. This is a sensible conclusion since Cyrus is explicitly referred to by name in basically the same role just a few chapters later (Isaiah 44:28-45:4).

"One from the east refers to Cyrus, king of Persia (559-530 B.C.; see 46:11)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 41:2). And as for "from the north...from the rising of the sun" and his calling on God's name (verse 25): "The conquest of Media by Cyrus (550 B.C.) made him master of the territories north of Babylon. Cyrus, who did not personally know God (Isaiah 45:4), nevertheless called on God's name when he released the exiles (2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:1-4)" (note on Isaiah 41:25).

Yet remarkably, Cyrus is referred to in chapters 44-45 as God's shepherd and God's anointed. He is clearly being used as a forerunner of Jesus Christ, who is sent by God the Father to ultimately free the exiles in the end time. Jesus comes from the north since God's throne is said to be "on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north" (Isaiah 14:13). And reference to Christ's coming from the east is found in the New Testament: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:27).

Israel is referred to as God's servant—a servant being one who obeys a master, lord or employer. "The term was bestowed on the person chosen to administer and advance God's kingdom (Exodus 14:31; 2 Samuel 3:18). In chs. 40-55, the title of servant is bestowed implicitly on Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1-4) and explicitly on God's prophets (Isaiah 44:26), the nation of Israel (Isaiah 44:21; Isaiah 45:4) and particularly on the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 52:13)" (*Nelson*, note on Isaiah 41:8). The Beyond Today Bible Commentary on the next chapter covers this in more depth.

Also in verse 8, the Israelites' blessing is shown to be rooted in their descent from Abraham, God's *friend*. This incredible designation occurs in two other places in Scripture (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7). This friendship with Abraham extends to his descendants, and it is what ultimately brings favor and victory to Israel.

Those who are incensed against Israel (Isaiah 41:11), or war against Israel (verse 12), will be as nothing. God will help His chosen people (verses 13-14). "Exiled Israel seemed as feeble and despicable as a *worm* (Job 25:6; Psalms 22:6 [the latter verse prophetic of Christ in His final suffering])" (*Nelson*, note on Isaiah 41:14).

But God will deliver Israel—and not merely through unilaterally destroying its enemies. The Israelites would *themselves* thresh the mountains and hills (verse 15), symbolic of the nations around them and their false religions (compare Isaiah 2:2; Deuteronomy 12:2; Jeremiah 3:21-23). "The lowly 'worm' (v. 14) would be transformed into a threshing sledge (Isaiah 28:27) that removes mountains, the symbols of opposition and the location of pagan temples and palaces (Micah 1:3-5)" (note on Isaiah 41:15). This did not happen in Israel's ancient return from Babylonian captivity—in which only a small percentage of Jews (and none of the northern tribes) returned to the Promised Land. This shows the prophecy to be primarily for the end time.

Furthermore, God is presented as performing miracles for the returning exiles, meeting their basic needs in the desert as He did for Israel of old (verses 17-20). This also did not happen in the ancient return from Babylonian captivity. But it will happen in Israel and Judah's future when Christ comes back. And Jesus will ultimately crush Israel's enemies, in a much greater way than Cyrus ever did (verse 25).

Finally, God satirically shows the foolishness of idolatry. Idols cannot proclaim the future. They can't proclaim anything at all. God challenges

idols in verse 23 to "do good or evil." What He's really saying is: "Do anything!" But of course, they cannot. The nations were and still are mired in idolatry—or, in God's words, "wind and confusion" (verse 29). And this is not limited to overtly pagan religions. Idolatry and many pagan practices and ideas are deeply embedded in traditional Christianity, which is really a counterfeit religion mixing some authentic Christian concepts with ancient paganism. Thankfully, Christ is coming to set all aright." [END]