

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 51.9%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Isaiah 42

Monday: Isaiah 43

Tuesday: Isaiah 44

Wednesday: Isaiah 45 & 46

Thursday: Isaiah 47

Friday: Isaiah 48

Saturday: Isaiah 49

Current # of email addresses in the group: 624

Happy Sabbath! It's been a crazy week, but thankful that we are now once again in God's Sabbath Rest! I hope that you are all safe & well.

We continue our study this week in Isaiah!

The audio archive information is 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:

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3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 81

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

Day 540 – SUNDAY: December 8th

Isaiah 42

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The first four verses of chapter 42 are quoted by the apostle Matthew to describe Jesus (Matthew 12:18-21), and the chapter continues in its description of this Messiah to come (verses 6-7; compare Luke 2:32; Luke 4:18). *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* states: "The law of prophetic suggestion leads Isaiah from Cyrus to the far greater Deliverer, behind whom the former is lost sight of. The express quotation in Matthew 12:18-20, and the description can apply to Messiah alone (Psalm 40:6; with which cf.

Exodus 21:6; John 6:38; Philippians 2:7). Israel, also, in its highest ideal, is called the 'servant' of God (ch. 49:3). But this ideal is realized only in the antitypical Israel, its representative-man and Head, Messiah (cf. Matthew 2:15, with Hosea 11:1)" (note on Isaiah 42:1). Some statements in Isaiah 42 refer to Jesus' first coming, some to the second.

Verses 2-3 refer to His gentleness at His first coming and toward those who are humbly seeking Him at His second coming. But verses 13-15 show another side of Jesus—His power and wrath toward evildoers during the Day of the Lord.

Returning to Christ's gentleness in verse 3, His not breaking a bruised reed appears to mean that upon those who are lowly and hurt, having already suffered punishment, Jesus will not add to their punishment. Indeed, just the opposite, He will take special care of them and restore them to health and happiness—and even grant them spiritual vitality. "Smoking flax" in the same verse is rendered "dimly burning wick" in the RSV and NRSV (see also *JFB Commentary*). This appears to represent those who at one time had a fiery zeal but are now as a mere smoldering candle wick about to go out—their faith and hope in God's deliverance is almost gone. Jesus will not quench what is left in them. Again, just the opposite, He will rescue them, not only restoring their faith and zeal, but through the granting of His Spirit giving them such a fiery zeal for God as is otherwise humanly impossible.

Verse 4 says He would bring law to the world (compare 2:2-4). Verse 21 of Isaiah 42 says one of His responsibilities would be to "magnify the law and make it honorable" (KJV). In Christ's famous Sermon on the Mount, far from doing away with God's law as many argue, He explained the spiritual intent behind God's law and actually made it even more binding—showing that God's law is to regulate even our thoughts, not merely our actions (see Matthew 5:17-48).

Isaiah 42:14 shows that the punishment on Israel is painful to God, as is often the case when parents have to discipline their children. To God it will have been like birth pangs—ending with His at last "delivering" them. Rabbinic teaching refers to the time just before the Messiah comes as the "birth pangs of the Messiah." Verses 15-16 show the miraculous way in which Christ will lead the exiles back from their captivity. It has also been suggested that this is representative of Christ leading spiritual Israel, the New Testament Church, ever since its inception to ultimate deliverance in the Kingdom of God. That may well be, as the Church is paving the way, so to speak, for the return of physical Israel and eventually all of mankind, which must be grafted into Israel as well (see Romans 11).

In Isaiah 42:18-20, the "servant" and "messenger" of God is Israel—now spiritually blind and deaf. This is clearly illustrated in the remainder of the chapter. The people sit in captivity and punishment because of their disobedience. In the ancient Babylonian captivity, Christ's coming to magnify the law was yet future. Now He has already come and still the people do not heed. This has been the cause of the Israelites' suffering through the ages. And it will culminate in the worst time of suffering ever. Yet even in captivity, the people will not at first repent and turn to God." [END]

Day 541 – MONDAY: December 9th

Isaiah 43

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "This section of Isaiah beautifully shows how merciful and loving, even warmly affectionate, our great God is.

We left off in chapter 42 with Israel's obstinate refusal to obey God. "But now," says God in Isaiah 43:1, "...Fear not, for I have redeemed you." God emphasizes that He is the One who created and formed Israel (verses 1, 7, 15, 21; 44:2, 21). He will help them and deliver them,

even though they have not relied on Him (Isaiah 43:22). While God declared Himself Israel's "Redeemer" in Isaiah 41:14, it is in chapters 43 and 44 that this concept is discussed in detail. And the theme is revisited frequently throughout the remainder of the book.

God will demand the release of His people, just as He demanded it from Pharaoh in ancient Egypt (Isaiah 43:6). He will sacrifice other peoples for the sake of His people, particularly the Babylonians (verses 4, 14), just as He did with ancient Egypt (verse 3). Of course, God gave the ultimate sacrifice in the person of Jesus Christ—for not only Israel but for all people.

God's judgment on other nations in the course of redeeming His people applied in small measure to the fall of ancient Babylon, which allowed the return of a small portion of the Jewish captives to the Holy Land soon after. But there were no great and awesome visible miracles accompanying the ancient return of the exiles as those described in this chapter. Thus, the prophecy is primarily for the last days.

In Isaiah 11, God explained that He would bring His people back from modern Assyria and Egypt (verse 11). This, He said, would necessitate drying up the Euphrates River for the northern captives and drying up the Red Sea (as in Israel's ancient Exodus) for those returning from Egypt (verse 15). And in chapter 43 we again find mention of this deliverance through these waters (verses 2, 16).

Israel is to serve as witness to the fact that God alone is Savior (verses 10-13). Incidentally, it should be mentioned that some use verse 10—"Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me"—in an attempt to disprove Christ's divinity and to show that there will be no other future divine members of the God family. However, it should be recognized that the word "God" in the verse is *Elohim*—a name that itself denotes a plurality in the Godhead (see our free booklet [Who Is God?](#) to learn more). Furthermore, *of course* no God could be formed

before or after God—for there is *no such time* as before or after God, who is eternal.

Continuing on, God's end-time deliverance of Israel in the second Exodus will be so great that the ancient deliverance in the first Exodus from Egypt will be little thought of (verse 18; compare Jeremiah 16:14-15). God will create the miraculous highway of return in the desert, a route provided for with a lush environment from new springs and rivers (Isaiah 43:19-21). This represents a spiritual reality as well. God will direct the footsteps of His people back to Him spiritually. And this will be accomplished through waters in the desert—representative, as explained in Isaiah 44:3, of the pouring out of God's Spirit. Indeed, Jesus mentions "rivers of living water" in reference to the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

Sadly, in the meantime, Israel is still given over to unfaithfulness and disobedience—failing even to call on the true God in time of trial. In listing the Israelites' problems, it is stated in Isaiah 43:27 that their "first father sinned." This might be a reference to Jacob, as his name is used in this passage (verses 22, 28). However, Jacob is an example of repentance and it therefore seems odd that he would be meant here. Perhaps the phrase denotes the father of all mankind, Adam, or even the reigning monarch or other national leader (compare 1 Samuel 24:11; 2 Chronicles 29:11). "Mediators" and "princes of the sanctuary" in verses 27-28 refer to the religious leaders. Until Israel repents, the entire nation is given over to punishment—indeed, "the curse," which they have brought on themselves (verse 28; compare Deuteronomy 27:11-26; Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

But Israel will yet be the model nation God intended it to be—a right example for the other nations to follow." [END]

Day 542 – TUESDAY: December 10th
Isaiah 44

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In chapter 44, God again refers to Israel as "My servant" and "chosen" (verses 1-2)—and even "Jeshurun" (verse 2), a poetic name for Israel meaning "Upright One" (see Deuteronomy 32:15), symbolizing a cleansed and purified people. The people are brought back to God through His granting them repentance and then pouring out His Spirit on them (verse 3). Willow trees, in verse 4, need a great deal of water to be sustained. Just so, God will sustain His people spiritually through a great and steady supply of the Holy Spirit.

No longer will the name of Israel and worship of the Eternal be a reproach as it was in captivity. Indeed, the people will proudly bear the names of Israel and of God (verse 5).

In verses 6-8, God declares that there is no other God. The Jews use these verses to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. "Orthodox" Christians use them to argue that God the Father and Jesus Christ are one singular being. But these verses do not support either premise. Rather, God the Father and Jesus Christ do indeed constitute one God—but that one God is the God *family*. The word *Elohim*, as mentioned in the previous reading's highlights, is a noun that is plural in form but often singular in usage, denoting, along with other evidence, that more than one being constitutes the one God. Apart from the true God family, there are no other gods. That is the point of these verses. To learn more about this subject, request or download our free booklet [Who Is God?](#)

Much of the rest of chapter 44 deals with the folly of idolatry. The *NIV Study Bible* points out in reference to verse 13 that, "man was made in the image of God...but an idol is made in the image of man." In Romans 1:23 Paul stated that idolaters had exchanged "the glory of the incorruptible God" into the images of various things, including that of "corruptible man."

The description of the craftsman who uses part of a tree to warm himself and cook his food, while worshiping the rest as a god is particularly graphic and even amusing (verses 13-17). Indeed, we can really see God's sense of humor here, as He describes the scene (verse 15) and then twice repeats it (verses 16-17, 19). It's almost like He's saying: "Hello? Hello? Don't you get it?" While idolatry is, of course, a serious matter, there is something to laugh at in the utter ridiculousness of it all. And yet God says that He has shut the people's eyes so that they cannot see the absurdity (verses 18-19)—which really means that because of their rebellious and stubborn refusal to acknowledge obvious truth regarding God, He has given them over wholly to their own twisted way of thinking, allowing them to be further confounded. They remain willingly deceived (verse 20) by the arch-deceiver, Satan the Devil (Revelation 12:9).

The margin notes in some Bibles state that the Hebrew for "shut their eyes" in Isaiah 44:18 literally means, "their eyes are smeared over." The New International Version renders it, "their eyes are plastered over." This presents a graphic picture of those whose spiritual blindness is complete.

At last God will rescue the Israelites from their own foolish descent into idolatry. Indeed, among the modern nations of Israel, Roman Catholicism is widely practiced, wherein people pray to lifeless statues for help. Even those who don't practice idolatry in that sense often do so in looking to mere created things for deliverance—such as possessions and money. God tells the people in verse 21 to remember the ridiculous word pictures He has painted in this chapter—to see the foolishness of relying on created things rather than the Creator. And now at last they will. For God will blot out their sin and redeem them (verse 22)—bringing them finally to right understanding. It will be a time of great rejoicing (verse 23).

Here we see one of the main reasons that skeptics want to divide the book of Isaiah, claiming that this part could not have been written by Isaiah the prophet—the amazingly accurate prophecy of Cyrus. As with the future Jewish king Josiah (1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:15-20), here is an instance of someone whose name and deeds are recorded by God long before his birth. Cyrus was the first ruler of the Persian Empire. He was destined to bring down Babylon in 539 B.C. and would issue the decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem (Daniel 1:21; Ezra 1:1-4). The temple and Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, so this prophecy must have seemed strange indeed (compare Isaiah 44:28).

Herodotus, the fifth-century-B.C. Greek historian, recounts a story of Cyrus' birth and youth—which is here summarized. Asyages, son of Cyaxeres, the king of the Medes, had a daughter named Mandane, whom he gave in marriage to a Persian noble. Astyages had a dream that this daughter would have a child who would rule in his place, taking over not only his kingdom but all of Asia as well. Astyages feared the prospect of being replaced. So when Mandane had her first child, a son, Astyages ordered one of his servants, Harpagus, to have the child killed. Yet Harpagus didn't want to commit such a vile act himself and therefore entrusted it to a herdsman named Mitradates. But Mitradates, on discovering that his own child had just been stillborn, decided to rear Mandane's son as his own.

Later, when the boy was around 10, his true identity became known. The boy's grandfather, Astyages the Median king, was infuriated. He had Harpagus punished by having the man's own son killed and then revoltingly served to him at a royal dinner—after which Harpagus secretly vowed revenge. But the king made no move against the boy, who was now recognized as a Persian noble. Later, in 558 B.C., this boy, Cyrus, became a king among the Persians, yet still subject to Astyages' Median rule. Harpagus encouraged Cyrus to overthrow Astyages. Eventually persuaded, Cyrus launched a coup and led his growing forces

to victory. By about 548 B.C. he ruled all of Persia and Media. And in 539 he conquered Babylon, so that the Medo-Persian Empire succeeded the Babylonian Empire. And Cyrus then issued his proclamation freeing the Jews to rebuild the temple, just as God foretold. Perhaps the above story of Cyrus' close brush with death soon after his birth, if true, represents an attempt by Satan to thwart God's specific prophecy from being fulfilled. Yet Almighty God will not be thwarted.

Indeed, Cyrus himself worshiped pagan gods. Yet God was still able to use him to fulfill His will. This demonstrates God's power. Proverbs 21:1 states it well: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." [END]

Day 543 – WEDNESDAY: December 11th

Isaiah 45 & 46

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In Isaiah 45:1, God explains how Cyrus would be able to conquer by way of the "double doors" (the "two leaved gates" of the King James Version). This is a reference to the surprising way that Cyrus was able to invade the seemingly impregnable city of Babylon. Indeed, when the armies of Cyrus encamped around the gargantuan city, the Babylonians, looking down from towering walls, merely laughed. They were certain they could hold out against any siege for many years. But Cyrus' men carried out a remarkable action. The Euphrates River flowed into Babylon through massive gates. So Cyrus had his men divert most of the river by removing ancient dykes that kept it in its course (referred to in 44:27). He also managed to get a spy into the city, who had the inner gates along the river unlocked. Then, in the predawn hours, under cover of darkness, Persian forces waded into the city through the mostly drained riverbed. Before sunrise, the great city of Babylon was conquered—and all according to prophecy.

It is interesting to consider that in the end-time, the Euphrates River will be dried up "so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared" (Revelation 16:12). As mentioned in the highlights for Isaiah 21, it is likely that the Medes and Persians of the end time (along with other eastern forces) will be instrumental in inflicting a measure of terrible defeat on end-time Babylon prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Christ will smite the Euphrates in leading the exiles of Israel back to the Promised Land (Isaiah 11:15)—to utterly supplant end-time Babylon's leaders, who will previously have been headquartered in Jerusalem.

Finally, we should consider the picture of Cyrus as a type of Israel's ultimate Redeemer—the Messiah. Indeed, Cyrus is called Mashiach (Messiah or "Anointed") in 45:1. The Hebrew for Cyrus here is Koresh. The meaning of the name is debated. In Hebrew this would appear to mean something like "Possess the Furnace." We can certainly see a tie in to the coming of the Lord as a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29; compare 2 Thessalonians 2:8). In Persian the name is Koorush or Korrush. (Cyrus is the Greek form.) The name in Persian is said to mean "sun" or "throne"—although this is disputed. Interestingly, Jesus is called the "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2), in the same context where it is mentioned that "the day is coming, burning like an oven"—that is, like a furnace (verse 1). And of course, Jesus is to inherit the throne of the earth.

As Cyrus conquered and succeeded ancient Babylon, so will Jesus Christ conquer and succeed end-time Babylon—yet in a much greater way. Some might see Koresh in Isaiah 44 and 45 as exclusively applying to Christ. Others might view it as exclusively applying to Cyrus. Yet clearly, both deliverances—anciently through Cyrus and in the future through Jesus—are pictured in this section. It is a miraculous witness to Cyrus himself that God calls him by name (45:3), and this is despite the fact that he has not known God (verse 4). Clearly, this does not refer to

Christ. (Interestingly, Josephus relates in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chapter 1, how Cyrus read and was motivated by Isaiah's prophecies about him.) On the other hand, the statements about righteousness being rained from the skies and salvation being brought forth from the earth (verse 8)—that is, the spiritual conversion of Israel and then the world through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as well as apparently the resurrection of the righteous dead from their graves—is certainly not a reference to the deliverance of Cyrus. Rather, it describes the return of the ultimate Savior.

Some use verse 7 as it is rendered in the King James Version—"I make peace, and create evil"—to argue that God is the author of evil. However, the New King James better renders this last word as "calamity." God certainly brings calamity on the disobedient. Evil, on the other hand, is any violation of His will. He therefore did not create evil (see "Why Does Evil Exist?," *The Good News*, Jan.-Feb. 2002, pp. 22-24). Again, "calamity" makes much more sense here. So should we then think that every single calamity is from God? Not at all. Frankly, Satan is responsible for much of the evil and calamity that exists in the world. And, tragically, people bring evil or calamity on themselves as a result of unwise personal choices and sin. Further, many people suffer as a result of decisions and actions that others make—such as children who suffer abuse from adults. (For more information on this subject, request or download our free booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*)

So what's the point of the verse in question? One of the fundamental rules of Bible study is to read a difficult-to-understand verse in its context. As explained above, in this section of Isaiah, God is confronting Israel about its corruption with idolatry, pointing out repeatedly how hollow its idolatry is in contrast with who and what He is. That's what He's essentially saying in Isaiah 45:7.

Pick up the context in verse 6: "That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other." Now, continue on into verse 7: "I form the

light and create darkness." The same thought continues in the following phrase: "I make peace and create calamity." Notice the contrast in both cases. God is basically saying: "I can make it light or dark. I can give peace and prosperity or I can bring calamity." In other words, "I can do everything in contrast to your idols, which are incapable of anything." Again, remember the context. God repeatedly says, "I am God; there's nobody like Me."

Finally, God shows His dominion over the creation in general and mankind in particular by picturing Himself as a potter working with clay. Unlike worthless idols, He controls the universe and directs the destiny of man. Yet, it should be noted, He still gives us all free will (to learn more on this subject, see the article "Twist of Fate").

Verse 13 was fulfilled in part when Cyrus freed the Jewish captives, allowing them the choice to return to their homeland, and even issued a proclamation that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). This decree allowed for the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt as well—but a major effort to rebuild the city was not made until Nehemiah's later initiative, allowed and aided by King Artaxerxes (who was the son of Xerxes and stepson of Esther, Nehemiah 1-2). Of course, a much greater fulfillment of this prophecy will be when Jesus Christ—of whom Cyrus was only a type—frees the exiles of the last days and rebuilds Jerusalem as the wondrous capital of the world.

Anciently, Egypt and territories south (verse 14) were not handed over to Cyrus. But they did fall to Cyrus' half-mad son Cambyses, who was a cruel tyrant. In the end time, these areas will actually be delivered from oppression by the returning Jesus Christ. Then they will be given over to the Israelites as servants. Yet what kind of deliverance is that? Consider that their temporary servitude will actually be for their good, because the Israelites they serve will be converted Christians looking out for

their interests. These servants will see the goodness of God in action. Treated so well, they and other previously Muslim peoples will at last repent of their former hatred against the Jews and other Israelites.

Verse 18 shows that God's original creation of the earth was not in vain (Hebrew *tohu*). Therefore Genesis 1:2 should properly be translated, "The earth became without form [*tohu*] and void [*bohu*]..." (See the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Genesis 1 and pages 16-17 of our booklet *Is the Bible True?* for a more complete explanation of this often debated scripture.)

Again, we see mention of the foolishness of idolatry. It is ridiculous that supposed gods who are worshiped as supernaturally powerful must be carried around by the worshipers (verse 20; Isaiah 46:7). Eventually, "every knee shall bow" to the true God (verse 23). Verse 23 is quoted by Paul (Romans 14:11) to show that we all give account individually to God, and therefore we do not need to spend our time judging our brothers and sisters in Christ (verses 10-13).

Continuing in Isaiah 46, Bel and Nebo (verse 1) are Babylonian deities. "The reference to Cyrus and his victories over Babylon now brings to mind the futile gods of that great civilization, Bel (also called Marduk) and Nebo. Babylon's defeat proves God's superiority (Isaiah 46:1-2). And what a different relationship He has with His people. Pagans carry their gods. The Lord carries His people (vv. 3-4). Israel's incomparable God alone shapes and reveals the future, a future that holds salvation for her (vv. 5-13).... How wonderful to have a God who holds us up, rather than an idol we must lug around on our shoulders" (Bible Reader's Companion, chap. summary of 46-47).

Only the true God is able to declare what will happen in the future and then bring it to pass. Incidentally, chapter 46 explains how God knows the future. It is not because the future already exists so that He is able to look forward in time. Rather, He declares what will be (verse 10) and

in His omnipotence makes sure that it happens (verse 11). Yet it must be explained that He does not cause anyone to sin (James 1:13). Rather, He is able to foretell sin because He knows how demons and people will react under given circumstances—and He has ultimate control over circumstances (see the article "Twist of Fate")

Finally, "a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country" (Isaiah 46:11) is a reference "to Cyrus (Isaiah 41:2) and to the speed and power of his conquests (Isaiah 41:3)" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Isaiah 46:11). And as already explained, the coming of Cyrus was a type and forerunner of the coming of Christ in power. It is in Christ that God's righteousness and salvation are at last brought to stubborn Israel (verses 12-13)." [END]

Day 544 – THURSDAY: December 12th

Isaiah 47

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Isaiah 47 deals once again with Babylon. Remember that at the time Isaiah wrote, Babylon was still subject to the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians, we may recall, sacked Babylon in 689 B.C.—late in Isaiah's lifetime. However, the portrayal of Babylon in this chapter shows her to be preeminent over the nations. So it again appears that God was speaking to Isaiah about events far in the future—but when? The chapter apparently has a dual application that is parallel to other prophecies of this section. On one level, it can be seen as Cyrus' conquest of Babylon and its later destruction under one of Cyrus' successors, Xerxes. Yet the primary application of the prophecy appears to be for the end time—the "daughter" of Babylon referring mainly to a future Babylon. Indeed, the parallels with the fall of end-time Babylon in Revelation 17-18 are unmistakable.

God uses Babylon as an instrument to refine Israel and His saints, but He does not hold Babylon guiltless in the face of its ruthless treatment

of them and its vain confidence in its supremacy and security (verses 6-7). The arrogance and pride of this daughter in verses 8-9 are stated again in Revelation 18:7-8. The remainder of Isaiah 47 deals with this fall and the sins that bring it about.

God's punishment will come partly, He says to the daughter of Babylon, "because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments" (verses 9). God strongly condemns all idolatry and demonic practices (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). However, the latter part of Isaiah 47:9 could perhaps be translated, as in the New International Version, to say that God's punishment will come "in spite of the multitude of your sorceries...." This ties in well with the next verse: "For you have trusted in your wickedness." The adherents of this system are trusting in sorceries and enchantments in two ways—to give them supernatural protection and to give them "wisdom" and "knowledge" to guide them and to predict the future (verse 10). In verse 12, God is saying, in a sense, "Now see if your enchantments and sorceries will do you any good!"

The symbolism here in Isaiah 47 goes back to the very beginnings of the city of Babylon or Babel. Babel and its empire were founded by Nimrod, a rebel against God (Genesis 10:8-12). Based on the evidence of secular history, it is apparent that he and his wife Semiramis were the originators of idolatry in the post-Flood world, evidently resurrecting a number of false concepts present before the Flood yet adding their own embellishments. They thereby set themselves up as the greatest human enemies of God's true servants. Incredibly, they are the fountainhead of much of the idolatry in the world today (yet still mere agents of the true author of idolatry, Satan the Devil).

Upon the death of Nimrod, Semiramis did not want to "sit as a widow" but desired to continue as "queen" and adored "lady" over the kingdoms of Nimrod's empire forever (compare Isaiah 47:5, 7-8; Revelation 18:7). So she concocted a fable wherein she miraculously

became pregnant without having sexual relations—bearing her child Tammuz by a supposed "virgin birth" and claiming that he was the reincarnation of Nimrod. Her son was therefore deemed to be her husband. She promoted him as the "savior" of the ancient world. In reality, Semiramis was not a "virgin daughter" at all (compare Isaiah 47:1) but a great harlot, prostituting herself to the various kings of the empire to buy their aid in keeping her in power (compare Revelation 17:1-6).

Yet it should be noted that the denunciations in the various scriptures cited in the previous paragraph are not primarily aimed at Semiramis herself, but at a false Babylonian system to arise of which she served as a type. It is the same system we saw referred to as Tyre and the "virgin daughter of Sidon" in Isaiah 23—also typified by the pagan Phoenician queen Jezebel. And this refers, first and foremost, to a pagan false Christianity portrayed in Revelation 17—"Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth" (verse 5)—the roots of which may be traced largely to the Babylonian Samaritans of apostolic days and the idolatry of ancient Babylon before that. This type of Christianity was to eventually gain preeminent political power, which first happened when it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Through the Middle Ages, it dominated the Holy Roman Empire. And even today, it wields enormous authority and influence.

Interestingly, this "woman," while claiming to be the wife of Christ, is actually the wife of a false, idolatrous concept of Christ that originated in Babylonian paganism, as well as the adulterous partner of the "beast" of Revelation 17. Indeed, she is really married to the Babylonian savior figure. Yet the false gods of Babylon are going to be destroyed at Christ's return, as implied in Isaiah 46. Thus, the fallen woman will indeed be a widow. The children of this "mother of harlots and abominations"—that is, her other idolatrous creations and the false

churches sprung from her—will also be destroyed (see Revelation 17:5, 16).

Babylon, it should be noted, is also the term used to represent the political and economic system that is dominated by this great false religion centered at Rome—as Revelation 18 implies. The name is also used for the city of Rome itself. The Roman-Babylonian system will experience its apex of power just before the return of Christ. But its end-time manifestation will fall with a great fall. Its "merchants" or commercial brokers and partners will be dismayed (verses 9-16; Isaiah 47:15). For in a very short time period, end-time Babylon will be destroyed—burnt with fire (verse 9, 14; Revelation 17:16; 18:9, 18).

Revelation 18:24 states that all the blood of the prophets and saints is found in her. Indeed, a trail of blood can be followed in the history of this religion. Through Babylon's fall, God will at last avenge His people for all the torment they have experienced at the hands of this evil system (verse 20). More information about this false religious system can be found in Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons*, 1916. While we would not endorse everything in this particular source, it is a thoroughly researched and well-documented publication—providing a great amount of detail supporting its thesis.

You should also request or download our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built* to better understand the origin and development of the great counterfeit Christianity. The booklet will point you to places in the New Testament that mention the beginnings of this merger of paganism with biblical teachings, which most people now accept as Christianity. The booklet will also provide you with the means to identify God's true Church today, which Jesus promised would never die out (Matthew 16:18).” [END]

Day 545 – FRIDAY: December 13th

Isaiah 48

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Regarding this chapter, one source explains: 'The overall mood of comfort is abandoned for a moment, for accusation. Israel has stubbornly resisted God, and pursued idols. This treachery forced God to defend His name by sending Israel into a 'furnace of affliction' (48:1-11). Yet all this is a backdrop for grace. God presents Himself anew (vv. 12-16), expresses His yearnings for Israel (vv. 17-19), and dramatically announces the good news of coming redemption (vv. 20-22)' (Bible Reader's Companion, chap. summary of Isaiah 48-49).

God says one of the reasons for telling Israel, and all of mankind, what would befall them is so they could not successfully argue that their idols caused their fate (verses 3-5). "It was not enough that Israel stubbornly refused to respond to God. They tended to credit His works to other gods (cf. Jer. 44:15-19). Spiritual blindness persists, and today we may credit gracious acts of God in our own lives to luck or to our own genius or hard work. How important to sense God's hand in our lives, to be responsive to Him, and to acknowledge His works for us" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on Isaiah 48:5).

Of course, one way to be sure of God's involvement in world affairs is to study the prophecies of His Word. Here in Isaiah, God says He is giving Israel new prophecies, ones they have not heard before, and ones they have not anticipated (verses 6-7). Indeed, as we have seen, a dominant Chaldean Babylon features prominently in Isaiah's prophecies (see verses 14, 20), and yet Assyria was the dominant power at the time he preached.

There are strong messianic themes in the chapter. God identifies Himself as the One who was born as Jesus the Messiah (compare verse 12 with Revelation 1:17 and verse 13 of Isaiah 48 with Hebrews 1:8-12). And notice verses 14-15 of Isaiah 48. After God asks, "Who among them [your idols] has declared these things?," He then states, "The Lord loves him; He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, and His arm shall be against the Chaldeans.... I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper." But who is "him"? The New International Version renders the first part of this as "The Lord's chosen ally [because allies are elsewhere referred to as "lovers" in Scripture] will carry out his purpose against Babylon..." Thus, it is likely a reference, once again, to Cyrus on one level. But, as already explained, Cyrus was a forerunner of the ultimate Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will overthrow end-time Babylon at His second coming. And this is the primary reference here. Indeed, in verse 16, the pronoun changes from Him to "Me"—showing Jesus directly speaking as having been sent by the Father through the Holy Spirit.

God laments the Israelites' past disregard of Him and His commandments. Verse 8 reveals that God was displeased with Israel right from the start ("from the womb")—before they even left Egypt. Yet He preserved them—clearly not because of great righteousness on Israel's part. Rather, it was because of His promise to Abraham, His prophecies, His promise of delivery and to show His great power and His great mercy to all nations—all of which had to do with preserving His name, His own reputation. "For My name's sake...", God explains (verse 9). Indeed, in interceding for Israel, Moses made this the basis for His plea (see Exodus 32:11-14; Numbers 14:13-19).

In Isaiah 48:18, God says how much better for the Israelites it would have been if they had obeyed Him. In verse 19, the statement that they would have been as the sand does not mean that Israel has never had great numbers. It is referring to the fact that so many of Israel's great

numbers will have perished in the coming Great Tribulation. "His" name being cut off and destroyed in the same verse refers to the destruction of Jacob's descendants that will have taken place because of national disobedience.

In verse 20, God gives a responsibility to His servants to proclaim a message to the ends of the earth. Indeed, it is a responsibility His Church of the end time is to be carrying out still, telling people to come out of Babylon (as representative of this sinful world) and announcing the good news of how God through Christ will redeem His people and deliver them from captivity with miraculous help to a joyful life of peace and freedom. Remembering God's mighty acts of the past should inspire complete faith (verse 21)—a vital key to this way of peace. But in the last verse, the chapter soberly warns that there is no peace for the wicked, a fact repeated in Isaiah 57:21. Once delivered from its past evil ways, Israel must not go back to those former ways. The same applies to us.” [END]

Day 546 – SATURDAY: December 14th

Isaiah 49

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “The Lord's Servant here steps forward. "The 'law of double reference' may apply in interpreting this prophetic passage, which may point in part to Cyrus, but certainly [and more directly] describes the mission of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Christ was called to His mission and named long before His birth (Isaiah 49:1). His first efforts were unrewarded (v. 4), but He is destined to bring Israel back to God (v. 5) and bring salvation to all peoples (v. 6). Although despised, He will ultimately be honored by all (v. 7)” (Bible Reader's Companion, note on chap. 49).

The chapter thus begins as a prophetic quote from Jesus Christ, describing elements and allusions to His work (verses 1-7). In verse 3,

He is referred to as "Israel." Jesus was an Israelite, of course. He purchased Israel with His blood. He is the King of Israel, and a king, in the Scriptures, is often equated with the nation he rules. Moreover, Israel means "Prevailer With God," and Jesus is the quintessential Prevailer with God. But also, God intends the nation of Israel to ultimately assist Christ in setting an example of righteousness for the whole world. They have failed at this in the past. But once the Israelites have themselves learned true righteousness through Christ, they too will collectively become God's servant—represented by Christ their King—and a light, a beacon, for other nations to follow.

The Church of God now serves as a forerunner in this, being the spiritual Israel of God (compare Galatians 6:16). When Paul and Barnabas first arrived in Antioch of Pisidia, they preached in the synagogue, but drew the attention of the gentiles as well. This caused the Jews to be filled with envy and they attempted to discredit Paul. The two apostles responded by saying that the Lord had commanded them to be a light to the gentiles, quoting Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47) as the passage where they found this command (compare Acts 13:14-52).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 and then goes on to state that, for them at least, the "acceptable time" and "day of salvation" was "now" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Some attempt to use these verses to argue that now is the only day of salvation. But they do not say that. Indeed, the New Revised Standard Version translates both verses as stating that now is "AN acceptable time" and "A day of salvation." Indeed, God is not drawing the whole world to salvation at this time. (To learn more on this subject, see the article "Twist of Fate" and "The Last Great Day: Eternal Life Offered to All," God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind, pp. 46-51).

Still, "the acceptable time" could perhaps be a reasonable translation—if it has the same sense as "the acceptable year of the Lord" in Isaiah 61:2, a reference to the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is the time

of God's judgment on the nations and His redemption and salvation of Israel. Yet Peter related a prophecy of the end-time Day of the Lord as having an application to the beginning of the New Testament era in Acts 2:14-21—Christians being spiritual forerunners of Israel's future salvation. Perhaps Paul was indicating something similar in 2 Corinthians 6—that for Christians it is as if the time of God's intervention is already here, as indeed it is on a personal level. There is more on this in the highlights for Isaiah 63.

Isaiah 49:10 speaks of God's ultimate deliverance. Just before the seventh seal of the book of Revelation is opened, one of the 24 elders before God's throne in heaven describes a group of people as having come out of the Great Tribulation, finding deliverance at last. He uses the words of Isaiah 49:10 in doing so (Revelation 7:16-17).

The remainder of Isaiah 49 deals mainly with the return from captivity of Israel and Judah following the return of Jesus Christ. In verse 11, we see the image of the road and highway of chapter 40—here plural, as the return from exile is from more than one place and, considering highway in its figurative sense, relations will need to be developed between many nations.

In verse 12, we see where the exiles return from. First from the north and west—meaning northwest, as Hebrew has no specific word for this direction. And also from the land of Sinim. "Sinim was a district on the southern frontier of ancient Egypt" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 12). Also, the Latin Vulgate translates the word as *Australi*, meaning "south." There are perhaps two indications here. One is that Israel is returning from their captivity in Central Europe (modern Assyria), which is northwest of the Promised Land (not northeast as ancient Assyria was) and from Egypt and other African lands to the south (compare Isaiah 11:11).

Yet some will be returning from beyond Central Europe and Egypt. The word translated "coastlands" in Isaiah 49:1 is rendered "islands" in the earlier King James Version. Jeremiah 31:10 gives this as "isles afar off," clearly related to those coming "from afar" in Isaiah 49:12. The isles northwest of Jerusalem and even of Europe are the British Isles. Some will be returning from here. And there are important isles in the south of the world too, one being a continent actually called Australia. Some will be returning from there as well. (To learn more about the Israelite identity of these nations, download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.) Indeed, besides the lands of their captivity, some Israelites will be returning from islands and coastlands all over the world—the places to which the descendants of Israel have spread abroad and colonized.

Verses 20-21 are rather interesting. God had prophesied that the Israelites would be great colonizers (see Genesis 28:14; 49:22). Notice Isaiah 49:20: "The children you will have, after you have lost the others..." This is referring to new children born during the coming reign of Jesus Christ—after Israel has lost many of its people in the Great Tribulation, which will befall it just before He returns. These new children "will say again in your ears..."—indicating that it is a repetition of an earlier occurrence. And they say, "The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell." Indeed, Israel's burgeoning population in the Promised Land under the reign of Christ will necessitate they be given other lands to dwell in. And indeed, at that time, "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6).

But again notice that this is a repetition of something that occurred sometime in the past. When? Not apparently while Israel dwelt in the Promised Land in ancient times—for they did not then expand abroad in significant numbers. It seems to refer to something that occurred much later, when the "isles" of the northwest in which many of the

Israelites settled—the British Isles—became too cramped for their growing numbers, making it necessary to expand and colonize abroad. British historian Colin Cross states: "One of the unexplained mysteries of social history is the explosion in the size of the population of Great Britain between 1750 and 1850. For generations the British population had been static, or rising only slightly. Then in the space of a century it almost trebled—from 7.7 million in 1750 to 20.7 million in 1850. Why it happened is unknown.... It must just be recorded that human reproduction and vitality follows unpredictable patterns.... Britain was a dynamic country and one of the marks of its dynamism was the population explosion" (The Fall of the British Empire, 1918-1968, 1968, p. 155).

On a lesser scale, other nations of northwest Europe—also of Israelite descent—experienced a population increase and some spreading abroad as well. But by far the greatest growth in population and territorial expansion was experienced by the birthright tribes of Joseph—today the United States and British-descended peoples (again, see our booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). From the small homeland of the British Isles, the people went forth and colonized the North American continent, Australia, New Zealand, parts of South Africa and numerous islands and territories besides. The timing of this was rather significant, fitting exactly in the period in which God decreed that the birthright blessings of national greatness would eventually be bestowed on His people (see the article "Birthright Blessings Delayed for 2,520 Years").

Given all this, we can see what God apparently means in Isaiah 49:20. Here it is quoted with further explanation in brackets. To Israel God says: "The children you will have [increasing population of the land of Israel during the millennial reign of Christ], after you have lost the others [great numbers of people in the terrible tribulation just before Christ's return], will say again in your ears [as the people of Britain and

other Israelite lands did when their populations increased and they needed to expand in colonial times], 'The place [the land of Israel in the Middle East] is too small for me; give me a place [other areas to expand to] where I may dwell.'"

How wonderful that though the Israelites will be severely cut down in population just prior to Christ's return, they will again expand and grow during His peaceful reign—perhaps eventually even recolonizing and repopulating many of the lands they have inhabited in this age (rebuilding the old ruins and waste places that many of these areas will have become following the great wars and massive population deportations of the end time)." [END]