

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 52.5%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Isaiah 50 & 51

Monday: Isaiah 52 & 53

Tuesday: Isaiah 54 & 55

Wednesday: Isaiah 56 & 57

Thursday: Isaiah 58 & 59

Friday: Isaiah 60

Saturday: Isaiah 61 & 62

Current # of email addresses in the group: 624

Happy Sabbath everyone. I hope your week went well and you enjoyed your Bible study. We continue this week in an intensive week of Isaiah study, which will bring us within about 4 chapters of the end of the book.

I was requested to include the hyperlinks to the scriptures within the UCG reading program. The links will take you Bible Gateway to read the scripture instead of looking them up. I hope that is helpful.

I hope each of you have a great week.

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:

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

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 82

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

Day 547 – SUNDAY: December 15th

Isaiah 50 & 51

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “God—that is, the preincarnate Jesus Christ (see [1 Corinthians 10:4](#) and our free booklet *Who Is God?*)—was *married* to the nation of Israel by covenant. [Isaiah 50:1](#), as commentaries generally agree, implies that He maintained this

relationship and did not issue a certificate of divorce to His people. "Though the Lord had put away Israel, as a husband might put away a wife, it was for only a short period of exile (see [Isaiah 54:5-7](#); [Isaiah 62:4](#)) and not permanently. Permanent exile would have required a certificate of divorce (see [Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Isaiah 50:1](#)). Yet this would seem to contradict [Jeremiah 3](#), where God stated that He did indeed issue a certificate of divorce. How do we resolve this?

In [Jeremiah 3](#), it is clear that God divorced the northern tribes of Israel (verse 8), but not the southern nation of Judah—the Jews. "No prophet suggested that God had completely broken His covenant; rather, they predicted God's faithfulness to a remnant who would return ([Micah 4:9, 10](#)). Your mother [in [Isaiah 50:1](#)] refers to Jerusalem, more specifically, the inhabitants of the preceding generation that had gone into exile" (*Nelson Study Bible*, same note). This is important to recognize. While God had divorced the northern Kingdom of Israel, he maintained His covenant with the "mother" of all Israel—Zion or Jerusalem, the center of His true worship and the faithful remnant it represented.

Indeed, even in [Jeremiah 3](#), God tells those of the northern tribes who would return to him that they would be considered joined to Zion and still married to Him (verse 14). God has never divorced all of Israel completely. He retained the Jews as the faithful remnant of Israel. Yet they ultimately proved unfaithful as well and He sent them into captivity in Babylon. But He still looked to a small minority of the Jews as the faithful remnant of Israel to whom He was still married. Thus, He brought a small group of Jews back to the Promised Land from Babylon. But these ultimately proved unfaithful as well, even murdering Him when He came in the flesh as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. So God finally raised up a spiritual people—His Church—still considered the faithful remnant of Israel (compare [Romans 11:5](#); [Galatians 6:16](#)), spiritual Jews

(see [Romans 2:25-29](#))—"Jew" being, as it was following the northern tribes' divorcement, a designation of the faithful remnant (compare [Hosea 11:12](#)).

Of course, it should be noted that the Old Covenant marriage between the preincarnate Christ and Israel did come to an end with Christ's death. This allows Him to remarry—but, amazingly, to remarry the same "woman" Israel, yet one in which she would be spiritually transformed as part of the terms of a new covenant (see [Romans 7:1-4](#); [Isaiah 54](#); [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)).

Returning to [Isaiah 50](#), notice the reference to creditors in verse 1—clearly an imaginary scenario since God cannot be indebted to anyone. "If the Lord had sold Israel to creditors (see [Exodus 21:7](#); 2 Kings 4:1; Nehemiah 5:5), He would not have any authority over their destiny. But the Israelites had sold *themselves* because of their own iniquities (see [Isaiah 42:23-25](#)). Therefore God as their Redeemer could buy them back (see [Isaiah 41:14](#); [Isaiah 52:3](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, same note, emphasis added).

Continuing on, while [Isaiah 50:4-9](#) may be describing some of Isaiah's own anguish in delivering his prophecies, it is more clearly part of the speech begun in verse 1. This means that it is still the Lord who is speaking. And it shows that He, the Creator of the universe, was going to come and be stricken across the back, have patches of His beard painfully yanked out, and be spat upon. These are things Jesus would suffer at the hands of human beings (verse 6; [Matthew 26:67](#); 27:30)—which He went through to redeem these very same people, indeed to redeem us all.

[Isaiah 50:10-11](#) exhorts Israel to trust in God and obey His Servant—again, referring to Christ. Verse 11 criticizes those who walk by the light of their own fire (relying on themselves) rather than by the true light—the Word of God, both living (Jesus Christ) and written (Scripture). Their

lives will end in punishment. From other passages we know that God will later bring them back to life to give them their only opportunity for salvation. (Request or download our free booklet [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy](#) for the scriptures that explain how God will invite even former rebels to salvation.) However, if they persist in rejecting Him even then, their lives will be ended permanently.

Awake to Righteousness

Chapter 51 begins with three requests for those who are God's people and know righteousness to "listen to Me" (verses 1, 4, 7). It ends with three commands for Jerusalem to "awake, awake" (verses 9, 17; 52:1). This ties in with Paul's admonition to the Church in [1 Corinthians 15:34](#): "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." Those who know God must live in accordance with His commands. Indeed, those who don't obey Him don't really know Him (see [1 John 2:4](#)).

In verse 1, Zion being dug from the hole of a pit is not a negative connotation. It simply denotes the same thing as the previous clause, being hewn from rock. The image is one of being quarried from a pit or mine as precious gems or metal. And the fact that the people of Israel are meant is clear from verse 2—those brought forth of Abraham and Sarah. At this time, the Church (spiritual Israel or Zion) is in mind here. Spiritually deriving from Abraham and Sarah ([Romans 4:11](#); [Galatians 3:29](#); Galatians 4:21-31), true Christians are the only ones who really know God's righteousness and have God's law in their hearts ([Isaiah 51:7](#)). But eventually, starting with the time of Christ's return, the rest of Israel (physical Israel) will become part of spiritual Israel—as will then the entire world.

In stark contrast to this instruction for us to look to Abraham and Sarah, most of modern Christianity goes to great lengths to separate its theology from the Old Testament. In doing so, it breaks the continuity

that exists throughout Scripture and loses much spiritual understanding. Here, we see that Christians ought to look for and learn from that unbroken continuity, which runs seamlessly from the Old Testament through the New. The roots of true Christianity spring from the Old Testament.

In verse 3, Zion is to be comforted with the fact that it will be a paradise like the Garden of Eden (see also [Ezekiel 36:35](#))—as indeed the whole world will become under the rule of Jesus Christ, with God's holy "mountain," or kingdom, of Zion growing to fill the whole earth (compare [Isaiah 11:6-9](#); [Daniel 2:35](#)). In verses 4-6, "the heavens and earth of the material universe are contrasted with God's salvation and righteousness. The material is impermanent and will 'vanish like smoke.' God's salvation will remain forever. How vital to anchor our hopes in salvation than anything in this passing world" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on [Isaiah 51:4-6](#))—see also [2 Peter 3:10-13](#) and [Hebrews 12:25-29](#).

Directly *tied* to salvation here is God's righteousness. But what *is* righteousness? King David defined it as obedience to all of God's commandments ([Psalm 119:172](#)). And that is certainly the implication here in Isaiah: "...you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law..." ([Isaiah 51:7](#)). Many today, even many who profess Christianity, want to do away with God's law—to abolish it. Yet God says, "My righteousness [i.e., His law] will *not* be abolished" (verse 6). Indeed, God's law defines His way of life—the way of love. And while many things will pass away, love never will ([1 Corinthians 13](#)). Only those who ultimately choose to live by God's perfect law of love will experience salvation from eternal death to enjoy eternal life with Him forever.

Of course, obedience to God's law of love should never be construed as some stern duty. True, godly love is an expression of outflowing concern that comes from the heart. It includes devotion and loyalty to

God and deep care for others as the focus of our deepest emotions. The New Testament instruction about the New Covenant reveals that God wants our hearts to be in the covenant and the covenant to be in our hearts. He wants to be a Father to us and for us to be His children in a loving family relationship.

Verses 9-11 of [Isaiah 51](#) show that God will deliver His people as He delivered Israel from Egypt in ancient times. Rahab here is a reference to Egypt (see 30:7). The name signifies "fierceness, insolence, pride" ("Rahab," *Smith's Bible Dictionary*). Egypt is called a "serpent" in the King James Version and a "dragon" in the Revised Standard Version. It is the same Hebrew word *tanniyn* (Strong's No. 8577) used for the pharaoh of Egypt in [Ezekiel 29:3](#), there translated "monster" in the NKJV). "The imagery [of [Ezekiel 29](#)] pictures a crocodile" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 4-5). Indeed, the protector god of Egypt was the crocodile god Sobek—whose name in Egyptian meant "rager" (Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, 1993, p. 240, "Sobek."), of which *rahab* seems a reasonable Hebrew equivalent.

God delivered Israel from Egyptian captivity in ancient times. He later, as promised through Isaiah, delivered the Jews from Babylonian captivity. And in the end, God will deliver Israel and Judah from an end-time Assyro-Babylonian captivity. The punishment on His people will come to an end (51:22). Humbled, they will at last be ready to repent and "awake to righteousness." Then it will be time for Israel's *enemies* to suffer affliction for their evil in turn (verse 23)—until they too are ultimately brought to repentance.

It should be recognized that the deliverance from Babylon spoken of here and in the next chapter, while literal as mentioned, is also figurative of the deliverance from sin that Christians now have in Christ. In one sense, God has rescued believers from spiritual Egypt and Babylon—sin and this world. But in another sense, this is an ongoing process, as we overcome throughout life with His help. Finally, in an

ultimate sense, deliverance and salvation will come when Christ's followers are glorified at His return. In fact, even the terrible trial and suffering mentioned in this section will befall a number of people in God's Church (compare [Revelation 12:17](#); [Revelation 3:14-19](#)). God's message to all of us: "Be zealous and repent" (verse 19). Indeed, "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin." [END]

Day 548 – MONDAY: December 16th

Isaiah 52 & 53

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Chapter 52 begins by describing Zion or Jerusalem in a state of bondage and captivity from which it is to be freed and then exalted. The statement in verse 2 to "arise and sit down" is not a contradiction. She is to rise from the dust and sit on a throne. As the New International Version phrases it: "Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem." Once again, we should notice the parallel between national Israel's physical deliverance and spiritual Israel's salvation—which physical Israel will eventually experience as well, following *its* conversion into spiritual Israel.

God allowed His people to be taken captive in ancient times and will do so again at the end. But the gentile captors do not understand themselves to be agents of God's punishment. In fact, they glory in their power and terribly abuse God's people, saying such things as "So where is their God?" (see [Psalm 115:2](#)). In this way, God's name is continually blasphemed throughout the duration of His people's captivity ([Isaiah 52:5](#)). God will make Himself known to all nations through His awesome deliverance of His people.

The apostle Paul quotes verse 7, mentioning what is written there about how beautiful the feet are of those who preach the gospel, or good news, of salvation ([Romans 10:15](#)). This concept is addressed as well by the prophet Nahum ([Nahum 1:15](#)). And in [Ephesians 6:15](#), Paul

explains that our feet are to be clothed "with the preparation of the gospel of peace," which is what makes them beautiful—a poetic expression for the fact that good news (the gospel) is being brought by the feet of the bearer. By extension, we could view this as applying to whatever means is used to transmit such information (today including an automobile conveying a minister to deliver a sermon, a postal delivery truck bringing a magazine proclaiming God's truth, a radio station carrying a program on which the good news of God's Kingdom is announced, etc.).

God led the apostle Paul to draw upon the prophecies of Isaiah because they still directly apply to the life of a Christian, as well as provide an outline of the events yet to unfold in the history of mankind. Again, we see continuing evidence that the Old Testament, and not just the New, is for Christians.

The command to be "clean" and to depart and separate ourselves from that which is unclean ([Isaiah 52:11](#)) is referred to by Paul in [2 Corinthians 6:17](#). It is a theme echoed in the book of Revelation as well—to come out of Babylon, as a type of that which is unclean ([Revelation 18:2, 4](#)). God says moreover that those who bear His "vessels" are to be clean. This appears to refer to priestly duties. God told Moses to tell Aaron and his sons: "Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence: I am the Lord" ([Leviticus 22:1-3](#)). The priests thus had to remain ritually clean to carry out their duties. Yet this was merely symbolic of the spiritual purity God requires of His spiritual priesthood, His Church (see [1 Peter 2:5, 9](#)).

The Suffering Servant

Beginning with [Isaiah 52:13](#), we have a section giving some of the remarkable prophecies of the Messiah's sufferings and other aspects of His life at His coming—that is, His *first* coming. We have seen that God will redeem His people (verse 2). And now He tells us how. While ultimate deliverance would come by a miraculous force of awesome power (at the Messiah's *second* coming), redemption would *first* come through a great sacrifice out of the depth of unfathomable humility. The Lord—the Creator of mankind, Jesus Christ (see [Ephesians 3:9](#))—would come in the flesh and die for the sins of those He created. God the Father would thus give His only begotten Son for redemption of the whole world ([John 3:16](#)). It is truly mind-boggling to contemplate.

"Amidst a declaration of the Lord's coming salvation (see 52:7-12; 54:1-10), Isaiah [through God's inspiration] places a portrait of the Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12).... Three other passages in Isaiah focus on the Servant and [the four] are called the 'Servant Songs' (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9). The first song celebrates the Servant as the One who will establish justice for all (42:4). The second highlights the deliverance that the Servant will provide. He will restore Israel and become a 'light to the Gentiles.' The third emphasizes the God-given wisdom of the Servant. All this culminates in the description of the suffering and death of the Servant in ch. 53, the final 'Servant Song'" ("INDepth: The Suffering Servant," *Nelson Study Bible*, sidebar on [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#)).

Many of the Jews looked for the triumphant Christ to come and save them from their enemies, but they did not recognize the true Messiah when He came to save us first from our sins. Even now, all too many who adhere to at least the form of biblical Christianity look more to the triumphant coming of Christ to give them victory and rulership over the world and fail to grasp the critical importance of eliminating the unclean elements from their lives first. Many, sadly, will find themselves on the outside in that day (see [Matthew 7:21-23](#); 25:1-

13)—until they have learned to recognize the meaning of Christ's first coming in their lives.

Because of the conflicts with the Jews over Jesus being the Messiah, it is not surprising that the New Testament writers quote quite a bit from this section of Isaiah.

In discussing his ministry to the gentiles, Paul cites [Isaiah 52:15](#) to show that Christ was fulfilling this prophecy through him in preaching to those who had not yet heard the gospel ([Romans 15:21](#)). Right after Paul cites the passage about preaching the gospel mentioned above (10:15; [Isaiah 52:7](#)), he quotes from this same section of Isaiah, asking, "Who has believed our report?" ([Romans 10:16](#); [Isaiah 53:1](#)). John also quotes this verse in Isaiah as being fulfilled by Jesus when the Jews of His day did not believe in Him.

The apostles Matthew and Peter quoted [Isaiah 53:4-6](#), which deals with Jesus taking our sins on Himself (see [Matthew 8:17](#); [1 Peter 2:24-25](#)). Peter also quoted from verse 9 of [Isaiah 53](#) in the same place ([1 Peter 2:22](#)). In [Isaiah 53:4](#), some margins correctly state that an alternate translation of the Hebrew word for "grief" is "sickness," and an alternate translation for "sorrows" is "pains." Indeed, the New Testament quotes the verse: "He himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" ([Matthew 8:17](#)). Here, then, is an important foundation for divine healing—that Christ's physical suffering, together with His death, was to not only pay for our sins, but also to take upon Himself the suffering of our diseases and injuries. (For more on this subject, compare [Matthew 8:16-17](#); [1 Peter 2:21-25](#); [1 Corinthians 11:29-30](#); [James 5:14-15](#); [Psalm 103:1-3](#).)

When Philip was sent by God to talk with the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert south of Jerusalem, the man was reading a passage from Isaiah that he asked Philip to explain to him ([Acts 8:26-35](#)). The specific section he was reading was verses 7-8 of [Isaiah 53](#).

In verse 12, "poured out His soul [physical life] unto death" refers to His dying from blood loss, "for the life of the flesh is in the blood" ([Leviticus 17:11](#)).

Jesus, when preparing to leave the upper room where He kept His last Passover with His disciples before His death, quoted [Isaiah 53:12](#) about being numbered with transgressors as a verse He needed to fulfill, and a reason to take swords with them ([Luke 22:35-38](#)). Mark cites the crucifixion between two thieves as actually fulfilling this prophecy ([Mark 15:28](#)).

It is sobering to read this passage, particularly when we see that Jesus was to be beaten into terrible disfigurement ([Isaiah 52:14](#)). Having inspired Isaiah to write this prophecy, Jesus, in the moments before His arrest on the night of the Passover, was fully aware of the suffering that lay ahead of Him. Yet through it all, He remained cognizant of His mission—and dedicated to it. He remained the ultimate, giving Servant of His Father. And indeed, He came to serve us too, to the point of suffering indescribable betrayal and agony and finally dying in our place. Let us all accept the justification His death has made available to us (53:11). But, realizing that it is our sins that necessitated His death, let us leave our sinful ways behind with Him in His death—and come *out* of sin through the power of His resurrected life (compare [Romans 5:9-10](#); [Galatians 2:20](#)).” [END]

Day 549 – TUESDAY: December 17th

Isaiah 54 & 55

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Paul uses verse 1 of [Isaiah 54](#) in his allegory of Sarah and Hagar ([Galatians 4:22-31](#)). The barren woman, he says, is like Sarah with the prophecies given her about having many descendants. According to Paul, she represents the New Covenant marriage, to which no children were yet spiritually born—referred to by

Paul as "Jerusalem above, the mother of us all." This New Covenant is actually mentioned in [Isaiah 54](#), as will be explained in a moment.

The "married woman" signified the Old Covenant marriage that already was—physical Israel with its millions of children. This was parallel to Hagar, who bore a son to Abraham while Sarah was yet barren. Yet the child of Hagar was produced apart from faith. God promised that Sarah, though barren, would produce a child through whom His promised blessings would come. The Church will give birth to its children at the return of Jesus Christ. And eventually, as more and more become part of, and are eventually born of, the New Covenant, the children of the woman who was barren will eventually outnumber those of her rival who are those born of the flesh in ancient Israel. For people of all nations will be made part of spiritual Israel.

Isaiah himself goes on to say that the physical Israelites will no longer be forsaken in their marriage to God, will be accepted of God and will grow to fill the earth—when they, too, are joined to Him and brought forth according to the New Covenant (verses 4-8), which will be accomplished through the Holy Spirit, as we learn in chapter 55. Indeed, in verses 2-3 of [Isaiah 54](#) we see reference to Israel's expansion, earlier prophesied in [Genesis 28:14](#). Yet, while physical on one level, the subject of the previous verse in Isaiah seems to make it primarily a reference to the expansion of *spiritual* Israel, the family of God—parallel to Christ's assurance that in His Father's house are many dwellings (see [John 14:2](#)).

Verses 11-12 of [Isaiah 54](#) are reminiscent of the description of the New Jerusalem recorded by the apostle John in [Revelation 21:18-21](#). The eternal dwelling of the Church of God, the wife of Christ (see [Ephesians 5:22-33](#)), the New Jerusalem is itself referred to as the bride ([Revelation 21:9-10](#))—again showing "Jerusalem above" to be synonymous with the Church.

The New Covenant is specifically mentioned in [Isaiah 54:10](#), where God calls it "My covenant of peace" and relates it to His mercy. "This expression is also found in Ezek. 34:25-31. It is linked with the New Covenant of [Jer. 31](#), for its benefits become possible only after the Messiah forgives the sins of God's people and makes them righteous. Some of the benefits overlap: God will Himself teach the people, and they will be established in righteousness (cf. [Jer. 31:31-34](#)). Yet the focus of this covenant [here] is on security. God throws a protective covering over His people so that they will be safe" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on [Isaiah 54:10](#)). In verse 9, God equates the surety of His covenant of peace with Israel to that of His covenant with Noah that He would never again flood the whole earth (see [Genesis 9:8-17](#)).

In [John 6:45](#), Jesus referred to [Isaiah 54:13](#), showing that when the Father decides to teach someone His way, they will understand Jesus' role in His plan of salvation. And eventually, all will be taught that way. The last verse in [Isaiah 54](#) gives us a most important factor in this regard. God explains that the righteousness of His servants comes not from themselves but from Him. It is God who draws us to Himself. It is He who actually grants us repentance. It is He who then forgives us and imputes us as righteous through the atoning blood of Christ. It is He who then lives in us through the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to actually live in righteousness—that is, in obedience to His law. Of course, this does require our participation. If we ultimately refuse God's work in us, then He will not redeem us.

"Come to the Waters"

Chapter 55 begins with the analogy cited by Jesus in the New Testament of the water of life—the Holy Spirit (see [John 4:10-14](#); 7:37-38; [Revelation 21:6](#); 22:1, 17). This ties back to earlier references in Isaiah, such as 12:3 and 44:3. We are told to buy even though we have no money. It is a totally free gift—albeit a gift with conditions. God requires only true repentance accompanied by faith and then baptism (see [Acts 2:38](#); [Hebrews 11:6](#)). Of course, what many do not

understand is that repentance is more than just being sorry for past sins. It also involves a lifelong commitment to obeying God.

"Wine and milk [in [Isaiah 55:1](#)] are symbols of complete satisfaction (v. 2). Not only does God's salvation supply what is necessary for life, but it also provides what brings joy" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1). As Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" ([John 10:10](#))—meaning now and on into eternity beyond. "Abundance" is directly mentioned in verse 2 of [Isaiah 55](#). Notice also that the invitation to "eat" and "delight" in abundance can be likened to a banquet. Jesus gave parables that picture salvation as partaking of a banquet (see [Matthew 8:11](#); [Luke 14:15-24](#)). [Isaiah 55:2](#) mentions the bread analogy used by Jesus as well (see [John 6:48-58](#)).

Verse 3 of [Isaiah 55](#) mentions the "sure mercies of David." Paul explained in his speech at Antioch of Pisidia in [Acts 13:34](#) that this referred to Jesus being raised from the dead, and he goes on to cite [Psalm 16](#) of David, which is full of many promises of future inheritance, blessings and pleasures. These "sure mercies" are also described here as an "everlasting covenant" that God is willing to make with all who "thirst" and come to God. And David was a witness of these promises ([Isaiah 55:4](#)). Indeed, there may also be a reference here to the Davidic covenant itself—wherein God promised David an eternal offspring, throne and kingdom. This, of course, is ultimately fulfilled in Christ—who was destined to inherit the throne of David. Yet this promise is for us as well—since Jesus said that His followers would share His throne with Him (see [Revelation 3:21](#); compare [Romans 8:17](#)).

[Isaiah 55](#) goes on to say that even the wicked may seek and find God if they forsake their wrong way and "return" to Him—the Old Testament term for repent. God says He will have mercy, immediately followed by a statement that His thoughts and ways are higher than *our* thoughts and ways. In its note on verses 6-7, *The Bible Reader's*

Companion states: "It is in the free pardon that God offers the wicked that the sharpest difference between God's thoughts and our thoughts are seen. We feel anger and outrage and call for revenge. God feels compassion and love and extends mercy. Thus God's word is gentle and life-giving; in Isaiah's analogy, like the gentle rain that waters the earth and causes life to spring up. What a warm and wonderful view of God (v. 10)."

The chapter ends with God's people leaving their exile. Again, this should be understood as having multiple applications: the Jews leaving Babylonian captivity; Israel and Judah leaving their end-time captivity; spiritual Israel receiving its deliverance through Christ today; the ultimate deliverance of spiritual Israel in its glorification at Christ's return; the spiritual deliverance of physical Israel and all mankind when they are joined to spiritual Israel through Christ; and finally their ultimate deliverance when they are glorified as well. Commentators explain this chapter as being the last one addressed to the people in captivity. The remaining chapters of Isaiah are claimed by many to be addressed to a post-exilic audience." [END]

Day 550 – WEDNESDAY: December 18th

Isaiah 56 & 57

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "From chapter 56 on, the book of Isaiah is believed by many commentators to be addressing the Jews who had returned to the Promised Land following the Babylonian captivity—around 150 years or more from when Isaiah preached. Of course, some of Isaiah's prophecies in this section were probably meant, at least in some sense, for those of His day. And some were likely also addressed to people who lived much later—even people of the end time.

Chapter 56 begins with an exhortation to "keep justice, and do righteousness" (verse 1)—a major theme in the book of Isaiah. Verse 2

says the man who does this is blessed. And then a real problem is presented for those who believe that God's Sabbath was just for Israel and only for Old Testament times.

Isaiah quotes God in describing the importance of not defiling the Sabbath, which God gave as a sign identifying Him and His people ([Exodus 31:13-17](#)). This theme is further elaborated on in the following verses, regarding eunuchs and foreigners. "The eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant" ([Isaiah 56:4](#)) are to receive a great reward, being brought within God's walls. This is significant because, under the Old Covenant, eunuchs were not allowed to "enter the assembly of the Lord" ([Deuteronomy 23:1](#)). Thus, the prophecy in Isaiah mainly looked forward to New Covenant times—and, of all things, the Sabbath is singled out as important to keep. Ironically, many today mistakenly contend that the Sabbath is the *only* one of the Ten Commandments no longer in force under the New Covenant.

So, too, the foreigner "who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant" ([Isaiah 56:6](#)), was promised to be brought into God's house—His temple. [Deuteronomy 23](#) listed certain foreigners who were not allowed to enter the assembly of the Lord. Yet in Isaiah God says His temple is to be "a house of prayer for *all* nations" (verse 7), and He lets Israel know that there will be others gathered together besides Israelites. Again, this clearly looked forward to New Covenant times, when salvation would be offered to the gentiles. And again, the Sabbath is made an important focus. It is clear from the verses above, and from [Isaiah 58:13-14](#), that keeping the Sabbath is an important part of what is expected of *all* those with whom God is working. Christ Himself explained that the Sabbath was made for *man*—i.e., all mankind—and not just for the Jews ([Mark 2:27-28](#)).

(For more on this important weekly Holy Day, request or download our free booklet [Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest](#).)

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus entered the temple and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers. In doing so, He stated that the temple was to be a house of prayer, not merchandise, and cited [Isaiah 56:7](#) (see [Matthew 21:13](#); [Mark 11:17](#); [Luke 19:46](#))

Sorceress, Adulterer and Harlot

According to its note on [Isaiah 56:9-12](#), *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* states: "Dumb dogs, sleeping dogs, greedy dogs... characterize the spiritual leaders (*watchmen*; cf. Ezk. 3:17), while shepherds is an OT term for rulers [although it could signify spiritual leaders as well]. The sequence is instructive: spiritually, to have no vision (v. 10a; cf. 1 Sa. 3:1) is to have no message (v. 10b) and to drift into escapism (v. 10c) and self-pleasing (v. 11a); meanwhile the civil leadership (vv. 11b, 12) will improve on this example with stronger excess and blither optimism."

[Isaiah 57:1-2](#) shows that the death of God's true followers is often misinterpreted. Probably some see it as evidence that they were misled. Yet it is not always the wicked who die prematurely. The righteous may also die early—because of God's mercy, in order to spare them from hardship that they might otherwise have to experience. This is not to say that they could not endure the evil—it is just that they don't need to for their personal character development, and so God chooses to shelter them in the grave, where they unconsciously await the resurrection.

Of verses 1-13 the same commentary just quoted states: "The watchmen have relaxed (56:9-12), and evil has duly flooded in. The times could well be those of Manasseh, Hezekiah's apostate son, whose persecution of the innocent (2 Ki. 21:16) would accord with v. 1, and whose burning of his own son (2 Ki. 21:6) matches the revival of Molech-worship here (vv. 5b, 9)." Of course, these aspects of Manasseh's reign transpired after the death of Hezekiah himself, which

puts it beyond the date of Isaiah's actual preaching ([Isaiah 1:1](#))—thus still requiring divine foresight.

It is sad, in light of all that we've read concerning Israel's wonderful future, to again read of the awful apostasy of God's people—viewed by Him as an adulterous wife. Even today, the descendants of these same Israelites are rife with paganism and idolatry. While children are not literally sacrificed as they once were (verse 5), the unborn are murdered, aborted in a terrible holocaust at the altar of convenience and personal freedom. And living children are still offered over to the evil ways of our society from a young age—setting *them* on the *path* of death instead of God's *right path of life*.

Then notice verse 8: "Behind the doors and their posts you have set up your remembrance." The verse goes on to show this to be pagan. In [Deuteronomy 6](#), God said of His instructions, "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (verse 9). Many took this literally. *The Bible Reader's Companion* explains: "The religious Jew attached small tubes containing bits of Scripture to his doorpost. Isaiah complains that while these symbols of piety are present, behind your doors there are pagan symbols. It's what's inside our homes, and our hearts, that counts" (note on [Isaiah 57:8](#)). Even today, many claim to follow the Bible—yet they set up pagan symbols such as Christmas trees right in their living rooms. Indeed, this is the norm in modern Christendom.

Verses 7-9 portray an adulterous wife seductively seeking lovers. The "king" of verse 9 could refer to the pagan god Molech (meaning "king"). Equated with the Roman god Saturn, his birthday was observed at the winter solstice with child sacrifice and evergreen trees (such as in verse 5). Indeed, in many respects, while the great false Christianity of this world claims to worship Jesus Christ, they are actually worshiping the wrong king, the false savior of the Babylonian mysteries—the sun god Baal or Molech. (It should perhaps be mentioned that some

commentaries suggest that "king" in this verse could also indicate a foreign ruler the Israelites appeal to for aid rather than God. This happened in ancient times, and it appears from prophecy that it will happen again in the end time—this last time with the ruler of the European "Beast" power foretold elsewhere in Scripture, who will himself be directly tied to the false worship system already mentioned.)

The remainder of the chapter contrasts the fear and punishment of the wicked with the peace and reward of the righteous. Yes, even despite Israel's idolatrous rebellion, God in His unbounded mercy looks to the future redemption He has planned. Verse 15 is a comforting passage. God is "high and lofty," yet He dwells with us as we pursue our mundane affairs here below. God will be as intimately involved in our lives as we allow Him to be. This contrasts with the way pagan gods were depicted in some ancient cultures—as distant from the people: "Epicurean philosophy [in Greece] depicted the gods on Mount Olympus...in detached unconcern for the world" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 15).

Paul cites verse 19 about preaching peace as applying to Jesus ([Ephesians 2:17](#)). And the chapter ends with the same words that ended chapter 48: There is no peace for the wicked." [END]

Day 551 – THURSDAY: December 19th

Isaiah 58 & 59

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Chapter 58 begins with a command from God that Isaiah—indeed, all of God's messengers—cry out a warning of His people's need to repent of their sins. The proclamation of this message of repentance is compared to the blowing of a trumpet, which is loud and clear—and often a signal of impending calamity (verse 1; compare [Ezekiel 33](#)).

Verse 2 of [Isaiah 58](#) is more understandable in the New International Version: "For day after day they seek me out; they *seem* eager to know my ways, *as if* they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God" (emphasis added). Yet it was all a pretense. All of their rituals and displays of religion were just that—rituals and displays. Their heart was not one of truly and sincerely serving God.

Starting in verse 3, God gives the example of fasting. While supposedly honoring God through self-denial of food and drink, the same people were dealing wrongfully with others and even using fasting itself for selfish advantage—as a show of their own righteousness and to criticize and deal heavy-handedly with those who didn't fast as they did (verses 3-4). Worse still, they viewed their fasting as a way to force God to hear and help them (verse 4). God would not—and will not now or ever—accept such fasting (see [Luke 18:9-14](#)).

Fasting is supposed to help us draw close to God—to make us more mindful of the need of His constant provision for us. It is to be an exercise of genuine *humility*—not one of exalting ourselves over others with penance and self-righteous displays of our supposed piety. Indeed, fasting should involve not only our relationship to God, but also our relationship with our fellow man. We are to seek an attitude of giving, service and esteeming others highly, with the goal of ceasing from malicious talk and finger pointing ([Isaiah 58:9](#); compare [James 3:8-10](#)). God says this is especially true with our "own flesh" ([Isaiah 58:7](#); compare [1 Timothy 5:8](#))—which may indicate our close relatives but could mean our community or nation or even the entire human race, since we are all one family. Overall, this passage emphasizes that fasting should indicate our willingness for self-sacrifice for others, not self-exaltation.

Because of religious hypocrisy among God's people, both physical and spiritual Israel, a time of darkness and drought is coming, as can be

discerned from [Isaiah 58:10-11](#) (God here warns of such a time, telling His people the attitude they need to have to be preserved through it). Indeed, from other prophecies about coming droughts and national calamities, it is clear that many of His people will be *forced* to "fast" in the future—that is, they will suffer hunger and thirst because there will be very little to eat and drink. They will be *forced* into humility—but this will be a *genuine* humility. Then they will cry out to God, and He will answer (as in verse 9). He will rescue His people—giving them drink and nourishment, signifying both physical and spiritual sustenance. Indeed, the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon them and its fruit will flow out from them—they themselves being like springs of water. (Here and in other passages, God is, in a sense, basically telling us to draw close to Him in fasting with genuine humility now—so that we are not forced to do so in the difficult times ahead.)

The prophecy of verse 12 about rebuilding the waste places is primarily for the last days. Yet, while literal, it also indicates a ministry of spiritual reconciliation and restoration.

Continuing on, it is interesting that in a last-days context we should find a command to properly observe God's Sabbath (verses 13-14). This is yet another blow to those who argue that the Sabbath is abolished in Christ. Indeed, we can see here another instance of the religious hypocrisy that this section of the book of Isaiah is denouncing. And as with the other matters Isaiah brings out, this denunciation was not only for the people of his day. In fact, it is primarily for our time now. In the modern nations of Israel today, there is a great deal of religious observance supposedly done in God's honor. But they don't observe the *only* day of the week God actually commanded people to keep—the seventh-day Sabbath. Furthermore, even many who do keep the Sabbath—Jews and various seventh-day observing Christian organizations—often fail to properly observe it. They either overly ritualize it into a burden or look for loopholes to get around keeping it

as God intended it to be kept. (We might note that even fewer give proper attention to God's *annual* Sabbaths, listed in [Leviticus 23](#) and commanded in various other passages).

We examine the scriptures commonly used to argue against Christian observance of the Sabbath, as well as God's plain instructions throughout Scripture about keeping it, in our booklet [Sunset to Sunset—God's Sabbath Rest](#). For the same type of information on the annual Sabbaths, see our booklet [God's Holy Day Plan—Hope for All Mankind](#). Both of these free booklets can be downloaded or requested as a hardcopy.

According to verse 13 of [Isaiah 58](#), we aren't to be doing our own pleasure on God's Holy Day—or, perhaps better stated, doing as we please. In giving the Sabbath command, God said we are to rest and cease from our work—be it your occupation or occupational concerns (with the exception of God's ministry, compare [Matthew 12:5](#)), personal business, housework (besides minor meal preparation and light tidying such as making the bed) or any exhausting activity (except in emergencies). But there is more to it than resting from work. Indeed, while God gives us the Sabbath as a time that can be used to get extra physical rest, this doesn't mean sleep the day away or while it away on "doing nothing" or on personal pursuits. Rather than emphasizing what one should *not* do on the Sabbath, often there needs to be more focus on what *to* do, such as "honor Him" (verse 13) and *doing good*, as Jesus Christ emphasized and exemplified during His earthly ministry.

The Sabbath is a day we must treat with reverence—as holy time. And that doesn't just mean the period during which we attend worship services in accordance with God's command ([Leviticus 23:3](#)). For the entire seventh day, we must—as [Isaiah 58:13](#) explains—stop pursuing our "own ways" (the things we normally do), seeking our "own pleasure" (just doing what we want) and speaking our "own words" (everyday things we talk about that don't involve God). This involves

actually regulating the way we *think* on this day, since "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" ([Matthew 12:34](#)). We must focus our *minds* on God throughout His Sabbath.

This doesn't preclude doing any enjoyable things on the Sabbath since we are to find "delight" in it. But whatever we do, God must be an intrinsic part of it. The Sabbath is not a personal holiday. It is a day to meet with, and spend time with, our Creator. It is a day for Christ-centered family togetherness and spiritual fellowship. Again, God's Sabbath is not to be a rigid burden. Indeed, as surprising as it may seem, Adam and Eve's wedding night was on the Sabbath. The Sabbath should be regarded as a joyous blessing, a rest from ordinary daily pursuits providing spiritual and mental rejuvenation.

Yet we must be careful in our use of the waking hours we have on this weekly Holy Day. The problem comes when people start making allowances for this and that and this and that—until the Sabbath is gone and very little time has been devoted to God. The Sabbath should be a time of extra prayer, extra Bible study, extra meditation on God's teachings, and extra discussion with family and fellow believers about God and His truth. In its note on [Isaiah 58:13-14](#), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* quotes from another commentator: "These verses describe the strictness and the gladness of the sabbath-keeping God desires.... The sabbath should express first of all our love of God (though both the foregoing passage and the sabbath practice of Jesus insist that it must overflow to man). It will mean self-forgetfulness...and the self-discipline of rising above the trivial."

Other scriptures explain a little more about Sabbath observance (e.g., [Mark 3:4](#); [Luke 13:15-16](#); 14:1-6). God does not dictate precise terms, yet the attitude of an individual is revealed in the care He takes in striving to serve and please God by obeying the instructions He has provided. Of course, all that God commands us is for our good. Indeed, the Sabbath is for our benefit. Only when we develop a lifestyle of

observing it as God instructs will He grant us the wonderful blessings of [Isaiah 58](#):

"Your Iniquities Have Separated You From Your God"

Chapter 59 is a continuation of a catalog of Israel's national and individual sins (in addition to those already described in chapters 57-58). It is sin that cuts people off from God and leaves them groping in confusion and darkness (59:1-2). When Paul cited a string of statements from the Psalms regarding the wickedness of man ([Romans 3:10-18](#)), he also included a passage from Isaiah, taken from 59:7-8.

The New Bible Commentary: Revised states in its note on verse 15: "Perhaps the most revealing touch [of how bad things are] is the victimizing of the decent man, the only one out of step. It is a worse breakdown than that of Am[os] 5:13 [see verses 12-15]; i.e., not only public justice has warped, but public opinion with it."

In the midst of this evil, God finds no one to intercede and "wonders" at it (see verse 16). "The Lord's concern is even sharper than our versions suggest. *Wondered* should be 'was appalled,' as at 63:5" (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verse 16). So God Himself will intervene, symbolically putting on the spiritual armor Paul elaborates on in [Ephesians 6:10-17](#) ([Isaiah 59:16-17](#)). We will see a description of this taking place in [Isaiah 63:1-6](#), which foretells the righteous war Jesus Christ will make at His return (see [Revelation 19:11](#)). Paul says Israel will eventually be saved ([Romans 11:26](#)), citing [Isaiah 59:20](#) to support his statement.

"At v. 19 they [the Israelites] are introduced as making an ample confession of their sins, and deploring their wretched state in consequence of them. On this act of humiliation a promise is given that God, in His mercy and zeal for His people, will rescue them from this miserable condition; that the Redeemer will come like a mighty Hero to

deliver them; He will destroy His enemies, convert both Jews [i.e., Israelites] and Gentiles to himself, and give them a new covenant, and a law which shall never be abolished" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*, note on chap. 59).

In verse 21, the New King James Version and some other modern translations refer to God's Spirit as a "who." But the word should be "that," as it is in the earlier King James Version and in the New Revised Standard Version. To learn more on this subject, download or request our free booklet [Who Is God?](#) [END]

Day 552 – FRIDAY: December 20th

Isaiah 60

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Chapter 60 focuses on the glory of Zion to come. It begins and ends with allusions to the light that will come—the light being God Himself, and His glory (verses 1-3, 19-20).

Several of these verses were cited by John in the book of Revelation as he described the New Jerusalem of the final age. Yet the millennial Jerusalem, prior to the New Jerusalem, will experience a limited measure of this glory. The gates will not be shut, so that the wealth or glory and honor of the nations can be brought in (verse 11; [Revelation 21:25-26](#)). There will no longer be a need for the sun to give light, and the light of God will continue day and night (verse 19)—true of the millennial Jerusalem ([Zechariah 14:7](#)) and the New Jerusalem ([Revelation 21:23](#); 22:5).

And those who have afflicted the city and its people, or at least the descendants of the guilty, will come and bow down at the feet of its inhabitants ([Isaiah 60:14](#)). Several passages in this chapter and elsewhere in the Bible describe people flowing to Jerusalem and generously bringing fine gifts. God's purpose for this seems twofold—for the humbling of those who in the past have been hostile to physical

and spiritual Israel, and for the building and beautification of Jerusalem and God's temple.

While the bowing down by others may occur in a limited sense toward the human Israelites of the millennial age, it will occur in a much more profound way toward the truly converted Christians of this age who will be the glorified inhabitants of the Holy City. Jesus said they will even be worshiped, showing that they will have been elevated to divine existence ([Revelation 3:9](#); compare 19:10; 22:8-9)." [END]

Day 553 – SATURDAY: December 21st

Isaiah 61 & 62

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Chapter 61 begins with 'the song of the Lord's anointed. Although the term 'the Servant of the Lord' is absent from this song...it seems artificial to make the 'me' of v. 1 a new speaker" (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-4). Indeed, God was speaking in [Isaiah 60:22](#). And He is still speaking in the next verse, 61:1. Yet He mentions another here as God. This makes sense only when we understand that God the Father and Jesus Christ are *both* God (see our free booklet [Who Is God?](#) to learn more).

When Jesus was visiting the synagogue of Nazareth, He read from the scroll of Isaiah ([Luke 4:18-19](#)). The passage He read was the beginning of chapter 61. This passage—concerning the proclamation of liberty, release and time of acceptance—is also reminiscent of the year of jubilee ([Leviticus 25:9-13](#)). Indeed, this ties back to the "acceptable time" of [Isaiah 49](#). There it was referred to as the "day of salvation." [Isaiah 61:2](#) says, "acceptable *year* of the Lord, and the *day* of vengeance of our God." [Isaiah 34:8](#) says, "the *day* of the Lord's vengeance, the *year* of recompense for the cause of Zion." [Isaiah 63:4](#) says, "the *day* of vengeance...and the *year* of My redeemed." A

day in this usage represents a year—apparently the final year before Christ's return.

But the Day of the Lord can have a broader application. In one sense, it represents all of future eternity from the time of God's intervention. In another sense, it can even be seen to have started with the New Testament era for the Church—the forerunners in God's plan of spiritual redemption. Indeed, as mentioned in the highlights for [Isaiah 49](#), Peter related a prophecy of the "last days" and "Day of the Lord" to the Church's beginning in his day (see [Acts 2:14-21](#)). Indeed, the seven-day week is thought by many to represent 7,000 years in God's plan for mankind (each day representing a thousand years, compare [2 Peter 3:8](#))—thus, 6,000 of man's history followed by a seventh 1,000-year period (a millennial Sabbath day, compare [Hebrews 3-4](#)). In such a plan, anything beyond the midway point—as apostolic times were—would be the "last days" (though "last days" is normally a clear reference to the period much closer to Christ's second coming).

In quoting [Isaiah 61:1-2](#) in [Luke 4](#), Jesus explained that He came in fulfillment of this prophecy. Included in what He quoted was the part about the acceptable year of the Lord—but He did *not* quote the next phrase regarding the day of vengeance. This perhaps indicates that, while the Day of the Lord was actually in the future, it would have a measure of advance fulfillment for some in His day (just as Peter indicated in [Acts 2](#) regarding another end-time prophecy)—that is, the liberty and acceptance of redemption would begin for some in Christ's day. But the vengeance-on-the-nations aspect of the Day of the Lord was not to come in any sense in His human lifetime. It was completely for the future. He would fulfill it at His return to earth in power and glory.

The remainder of [Isaiah 61](#) speaks of a future time of renewal, both physical and spiritual. God hates "robbery and iniquity" (verse 8, NIV)—"robbery for burnt offering" (NKJV) apparently being a mistranslation

(see also *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 8). But He loves judgment and truth (same verse). He will clothe the city in righteousness (verse 10; see also [Revelation 21:2](#))—clothing in Scripture often representing spiritual condition. And righteousness and praise will spring forth (verse 11).

Isaiah, and by extension God, will not rest in continuing the warning until righteousness has been established (62:1-2, 6-7, 10-11). At that time Jerusalem will no longer be called "Forsaken" and "Desolate" but *Hephzibah* ("My Delight Is in Her") and *Beulah* ("Married"). Hephzibah was "the name of Hezekiah's wife [[2 Kings 21:1](#)], a type of Jerusalem, as Hezekiah was of Messiah (ch. 32:1)" (*JFB Commentary*, note on [Isaiah 62:4](#)).

God is seen as married to Jerusalem and its land—although it should be understood that physical Jerusalem is also symbolic of the spiritual Zion, the Church, the bride of Christ. Yet all of Israel and Judah are to eventually come into the same covenant marriage with Him—their God (see [1 Corinthians 10:4](#)). There seems to be some confusion in the metaphor in verse 5, where Jerusalem is told, "So shall your sons marry you." The *JFB Commentary* explains: "Rather, changing the [vowel] points, which are of no authority *in Hebrew* [since they were not part of the original Hebrew text], [the phrase "your sons" should actually be translated] 'thy builder' or 'restorer,' i.e., God; for in the parallel clause, and in vs. 4, God is implied as being 'married' to her; whereas her 'sons' could hardly be said to marry their mother; and in ch. 49:18 they are said to be her bridal ornaments, not her husband" (note on 62:5). The *NIV Study Bible's* note on the same verse also states that "the Hebrew for 'sons' could be read as 'Builder.'"

God will at last not only deliver His people, but establish them forever."
[END]