

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF

ISAIAH

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE
GOSPEL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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FR. MITCH PACWA, SJ

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Commentary on the Book of Isaiah: An In-Depth Look at the Gosepl of the Old Testament © 2023 Fr. Mitch Pacwa, SJ

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INTRODUCTION

The scroll of Isaiah is the longest of all the prophets' works and is the second longest book of the Bible. (Psalms is more than twice the length.) Its importance for communities of faith was recognized very early, as evidenced by more copies of the Isaiah scroll being found among the Dead Sea Scrolls than any other book, and it is the second most cited Old Testament book in the New Testament (sixty-three citations; Psalms has sixty-seven). When Saint Jerome penned his famous line, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ," he wrote it in his introduction on Isaiah, which he saw as the Gospel in Old Testament form. Isaiah appears prominently throughout the lectionary, but especially during Advent and Holy Week. The book of Isaiah is also the main source for the Office of Readings during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Because Israel and the Christian Church treasure the book of Isaiah, as seen by its influence on her liturgical calendar, it should be studied well.

The reader of the Hebrew text does notice a variety of writing styles in various sections of the book. The historian of the ancient world recognizes that some sections of the book refer to events in the mid through late eighth century BC, while other parts contain historical references to the 540s BC, and still others assume a situation in the late sixth or early fifth century. Traditionally, the mention of late historical references was understood as Isaiah's ability to foresee the future, though that does not explain either the change in style, vocabulary, nor forms of speech that also appear in those sections. Scholars sought explanations for these anomalies.

Amazing advances in Old Testament studies took place in the nineteenth century AD as various Europeans took interest in the ruins of the ancient world that they discovered in their territorial or mercantile empires. The science of archaeology was born, and tremendous advances in its methods

continued to be made through to the present. Among these advances was the work of ingenious pioneers in translating ancient languages. Jean-François Champollion was the first, learning to translate Egyptian hieroglyphs. Soon afterwards, others cracked the codes of ancient Persian and Akkadian (Assyrian and Babylonian) cuneiform, while still more scholars learned to read Ugaritic, Eblaite, and other languages. Tens of thousands of clay tablets, papyri, and wall inscriptions were discovered and translated, offering the world an understanding of languages that had been forgotten and unread for thousands of years. Ancient historical and religious documents became available to help modern people study the Bible with new insights. Scholars learned more about the meaning of Hebrew words by comparing them to cognate words in other Semitic languages used throughout the region. Ancient historical records gave new insights into the ancient Near Eastern situations with which Israel was dealing. Scholars noticed patterns in the forms of speech found in the ancient documents, helping them see the forms of speech that the Bible used in an international culture. Some theories proved to be unfounded after research advanced, but many remain critical for understanding the ancient history and biblical texts better—therefore helping our faith.

Among these theories, one sound theory accepted by scholars states that Isaiah was composed by six authors in at least five different periods. This theory is based on the differences of style and historical data. The six authors are as follows:

- Proto-Isaiah (First Isaiah) in the eighth century, generally including chapters 1 through 23, 28 through 33, with historical narratives from 2 Kings added in chapters 36 through 39.
- Isaiah 36–39 is historical material taken from 2 Kings, which was finished being written and edited by 560 BC, since the last event mentioned was the release of King Jehoiachin from a Babylonian prison, which occurred in 561 BC.
- Deutero-Isaiah (Second Isaiah), written in the late 540s BC in Babylon, includes chapters 40 through 55.
- Isaiah Apocalypse, including chapters 24 through 27, was probably written in the sixth century.

- Isaiah 34–35, could have been written in the sixth or even fifth century BC.
- Trito-Isaiah (Third Isaiah), including chapters 56 through 66, was written in the late sixth or even early fifth century BC.

Regarding this theory, why did different prophets from different periods add their prophetic words to the already existing Isaiah scroll? Why did they not simply use their own names for each of their writings? Two complementary explanations can be offered. One, the modern value of taking credit for your own work was not particularly high in ancient times. It was commonly considered more valuable to associate oneself with an already well-known person and share in his fame or add to it. An example is in 1 and 2 Samuel, which begins with material about that famous prophet but includes much more about Saul and David, and then includes other prophets within books named for Samuel. Samuel inspired the writing but the book was completed decades after his death.

A second explanation is more theoretical, though it is plausible. Isaiah had disciples who were taught by him: “Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples” (8:16). In 8:18 he mentions his “children,” which naturally refers to his son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and any other children born to him and his wife. However, this may well have been extended to his disciples, since disciples of the prophets are elsewhere known as the “sons of the prophets” (see 1 Kgs 20:35; 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1) as well as “bands of prophets” (1 Sm 10:10–12; 19:20). These groups, who even addressed their prophetic leader as “father” (1 Kgs 2:12; 13:14), were the ones who wrote down the stories of their prophetic leader. Notice that in both cases of being addressed as “father,” the prophet Elijah was about to ascend to heaven or Elisha was about to die, indicating that neither of them could have written that last episode of life.

Furthermore, these followers’ similar writing styles indicate that they probably wrote all their stories about their leaders, most likely after their death. The existence of such schools that wrote about their founding prophet posthumously makes it possible that Isaiah’s disciples continued his legacy, not only transcribing his prophecies while he lived, but also supporting subsequent prophets who arose from their midst in later

periods of history to address the new situations of Israel's history with a word from the Lord. Catholics can understand the existence of an ongoing Isaiah school along the lines of the Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, and other orders who are inspired by their founders to continue a community with a distinctive quality or charism that can be traced back to the founder. Isaiah's prophetic charism may well have inspired a group of disciples that continued on for centuries, parallel to movements like the Pharisees or various Catholic religious orders. In this way, we can understand the rise of Isaianic prophets even into the fifth century with Trito-Isaiah.

This theory of different levels and periods of composition is useful in guiding the reader to interpret Isaiah's text within its historical context. The oracles make more sense within the dynamics of each historical period, and their meaning and its application illuminates the texts for the modern reader.

This last point is extremely important in understanding how to make such ancient texts relevant for today. The first step in interpreting Scripture is to understand the text in its own proper context—linguistically, historically, and culturally. From understanding the situation of the ancient writers and audiences, modern people can see into the cultural and historical differences and recognize the common humanity we share. Seeing that the texts come from a variety of ancient human struggles with sin, social disorder, and historical and natural forces, the modern reader can see the similarities to modern problems and situations. Just as Isaiah and other writers approached life with faith in God, so also can the modern reader come to understand the sensitive application of the principles of faith to present-day problems.

Such an approach avoids the path of both atheists and literalists, who tend to read the biblical text through a modern lens. Certainly, a contemporary outlook can be strong, but if you are not as nearsighted about issues of faith as many modern people are, the extra strong lens may actually distort the picture. (Try looking at the world through the glasses of a highly nearsighted person; it gives you a headache unless you are just as nearsighted.) Modern atheists get angry with the Bible because

they expect the ancients to have modern sensibilities: Why did not God teach Israel more physics, biology, et cetera? Why did God permit animal sacrifices or slavery? On the other hand, some biblical literalists build a career on seeing today's headlines in Bible prophecy: the Bible must be talking about my period of history, so I will make the prophetic oracles about Russia, the United States, England, and other nations that did not exist in ancient times. Both atheists and literalists may win adherents for a while, but history tends to leave them both in the dust, while the deeper meaning of Scripture continues to nourish the Church through the millennia. Such nourishment will be the goal of this book.

Lesson 1

ISAIAH 1-2

The call of the Prophet Isaiah in chapter 6 might seem out of place to many readers. As a result, some want to re-edit the text by placing this call narrative at the beginning. However, another way to make sense of the first six chapters is to see chapters 1 through 5 as Isaiah's first stage of prophetic ministry during the reign of King Uzziah (769–743 BC), followed by the vision in the Temple in chapter 6 that reaffirms an earlier call for the new situation in Judah that arises after the death of King Uzziah in 743 and the reign of Jotham (743–735 BC). This will be the approach we take here.

Uzziah, also known as Azariah, became king in 769 BC at age sixteen, when his father, Amaziah, died. Uzziah, like his father, “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord,” and his reign was a time of prosperity and military strength, as seen in the reconquest of Edom (see 2 Kgs 14:10; 15:1–6). During his reign, Amos began his prophetic ministry, around 760 BC, Hosea started his ministry around 750 BC, and according to tradition, Rome was founded in 753 BC. However, around 750 BC, Uzziah became a leper at age thirty-five (see 2 Kgs 15:5). His son Jotham became his co-regent, performing the actual duties of government, since Uzziah was confined to his room because of the uncleanness of the leprosy.

Though Uzziah was assessed as a good king at a prosperous time, he neglected to remove the “high places” where the people offered illicit sacrifices and incense, primarily to Canaanite gods. The people were not wholehearted in their faith or in their moral lives, so Isaiah speaks against them in chapter 1 with a number of oracles of judgment that indict them for their sins.

1:1

¹The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

This verse is called a “superscription” because it comes at the beginning of the book. The sole family identification is Isaiah’s father, Amoz, which appears in other verses (see Is 2:1; 13:1; 20:2; 37:2, 21 = 2 Kgs 19:2, 20; Is 38:1 = 2 Kgs 20:1; 2 Chr 26:22; 32:32; 32:20). Amoz means “strength,” while Isaiah means “the Lord will save.” The Bible mentions nothing about Amoz except his son the prophet, but a late and unverifiable Jewish tradition claims he was the brother of King Uzziah (Sota 10b).

The other important information is the list of kings: Uzziah (769–743), Jotham’s co-regency with Uzziah (750–743) and sole reign (743–735), Ahaz (735–715), and Hezekiah (715–687). Hezekiah’s twelve-year-old son, Manasseh, appears to have been appointed co-regent in 697, but he is not mentioned in Isaiah 1, leading to the conclusion that Isaiah finished prophesying by that time. In fact, no prophetic activity occurs during Manasseh’s fifty-five year reign, perhaps because he thoroughly persecuted the prophets during the most wicked reign in Israel’s history.

—— **Isaiah 1:2–3** ——

The first verses use a law court accusation and a father’s lament over his child’s ignorant disobedience to communicate the Lord’s initial displeasure with his people.

1:2

²Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken:
“Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.

The form here is a legal summons, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,” in the style of Deuteronomy 32:1: “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.” The indictment is that the Lord has raised Israel like his own sons, “but they have rebelled against me.” Though Israel is recognized as God’s children, the text avoids calling

the Lord their father, perhaps to maintain the distinction between the Lord and Israel. Israel's sonship was based on the Lord calling Israel from Egypt (see Ex 4:22; Hos 11:1; Jer 3:19) and not on some type of physical generation. Many of the ancient peoples thought that they were physical descendants of their gods, but Israel thought of itself as one people among many, all of whom traced themselves to the first parents created by God rather than physically generated by Him.

1:3

³The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand."

The form of speech here changes to a lament over Israel's lack of understanding since the people are not as intelligent as an ox or ass, who at least know their owner. Israel does not know her Lord. When Saint Francis of Assisi made the first Christmas crèche in a cave with real people and animals, he added the ox and ass to display them recognizing their Master's crib, even though the Gospels do not mention them. This was his way to indicate that people who have faith in Jesus Christ can undo Isaiah's rebuke from this verse.

— Isaiah 1:4–9 —

This is a "woe" oracle that begins with the Hebrew word "hoy," translated here as "Ah." Woe was expressed in particular to someone who was about to die or suffer greatly and it assumed that the object of the woe was already doomed. Apart from its use at a burial (see 1 Kgs 13:30), it is found only in prophetic books, but most frequently in Isaiah, to indicate the inevitability of the doom and devastation that the person or nation was about to receive (see Is 1:24; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1, 5; 16:4; 17:12; 18:1; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; 45:9, 10; 55:1—twenty-two out of forty-nine uses in the Old Testament). This particular "woe" has several parts:

1:4

⁴Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

Woe to the disobedient people who have been punished greatly for their sin and corruption, especially that of forsaking the Lord.

First, the address of the “woe” is to a sinful nation that was born of sinners. They will not experience mere disaster as innocent victims but will be punished for sins. Their corrupt deeds are identified with forsaking the Lord and despising the Holy One. These willful acts of turning away from the Lord are the root of their other sins, which is why they are mentioned first.

1:5–6

⁵Why will you still be smitten, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. ⁶From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they are not pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil.

These verses describe the thorough punishment they have received from head to foot by beginning with a rhetorical question: why do you continue to rebel after such a beating? No one soothes the wounds, and the nation continues to suffer. The sensible reaction would be to repent by returning to the Lord.

1:7–8

⁷Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens. ⁸And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

This is a description of the fate of the nation that results from their chastisement. The description of “burned” cities, enemy armies in the land, and Jerusalem remaining alone like a “booth” or “lodge” in a vineyard or field fits the situation of 701 BC when the Assyrian army of Sennacherib did precisely these things. The reason people set up little huts in fields and vineyards was to protect the crops from being eaten by animals at harvest time.

1:9

⁹If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

A concluding verse that recognizes a glimmer of hope: at least there are survivors of God's chastisement in Israel. Sodom and Gomorrah, who were unable to produce even ten righteous people to save it from God's wrath, were completely destroyed without any survivors except the foreigner, Lot and his two daughters.

—— **Isaiah 1:10–17** ——

The form here is a prophetic instruction on sacrifice which criticizes the detestable worship in Jerusalem that is divorced from moral behavior.

1:10

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

The summons to listen to God's instruction begins with a strong criticism of the people's moral character. Isaiah identifies the rulers as belonging to Sodom and the people as belonging to Gomorrah, the two cities doomed to destruction in Genesis 19:24–29. In Deuteronomy, any person, family, or tribe that turns away from the Lord to serve other gods will be punished like Sodom and Gomorrah (see Dt 29:18–28; 32:32–33), and Isaiah uses those cities as classic examples of evil places that deserve punishment (see 1:9, 10; 3:9; 13:19), as Scripture does elsewhere (see Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ez 16:46, 48, 49, 53, 55, 56; Am 4:11; Zep 2:9; Mt 10:15; 11:23–24; Lk 10:12; 17:29; Rom 9:29, quoting Is 1:9; 2 Pt 2:5–6; Jude 7; Rv 11:8).

1:11–12

¹¹“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. ¹²“When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts?

The Lord's message begins with rhetorical questions about the people's sacrifices not being necessary for the Lord. This contrasts with various pagan beliefs that the gods ate the sacrifices set before them for nourishment. For instance, in the Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, the gods cry out to Marduk, the chief god who had defeated and killed Tiamat, the grandmother of all gods, "Who will feed us now?" He then cut her corpse in two, the long way, made the earth from the bottom half and the sky from the top, killed her monster ally Kingu, mixed his blood with the earth, and fashioned human beings as the slaves of the gods to feed them. When the first humans offered a sacrifice, the gods gathered around the smoke "like flies" (*Enuma Elish*, Tablets II, IV, VI, especially lines 1–40, 70–80). Isaiah's message about the Lord not needing animal sacrifice is present in Psalms 50:8–15, where the Lord says, also with a rhetorical question: "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" Isaiah asks who "requires" the "trampling" of his courts with animals, assuming the answer to be "no one."

1:13–15

¹³Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

The Lord then commands the people not to bring "vain offerings," celebrate assemblies on Sabbath, new moon, and feasts, or even stretch out their hands in simple prayer and supplication because these weary Him as abominations. He will not listen or see their religious practices. Of course, since the Law of Moses commands sacrifices of different kinds in Leviticus, the people would be confused. However, the Lord makes His reasons clear: "iniquity and solemn assembly" are incompatible with each other, as is indicated by the very structure of the Law of Moses. The commandments begin with faith in God—only one God may be worshiped and His name

may not be taken in vain—and then move to duties to fellow humans, from parents to neighbors and spouses. Many other moral laws are laid out (see Ex 20–23), and the people were required to accept these solemnly (see Ex 24:3) before offering a sacrifice that ratified the covenant in the blood of bulls (see Ex 24:5–8). Only after accepting the moral laws did the Lord reveal the laws of worship (see Ex 25–31, 35–40; Lv 1–17), after which moral laws are re-stated (see Lv 18–22), followed by liturgical laws again (see Lv 23–27). The very structure of Israelite legislation shows that the moral law sets the condition for the exercise of the liturgical laws; both must be integrated with each other. Therefore, in Isaiah 1:13, the Lord will not endure “iniquity” with their worship or, in 1:15, listen to hands lifted in prayer if they are full of the blood of murder.

1:16–17

¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

The logical conclusion from this criticism is the following command to make themselves morally clean and cease to do evil. In particular, the population must seek justice for the poor, the orphans, and widows, who were the most defenseless members of society. This is the precondition for worship, much as sacramental confession is a precondition for Catholics to receive Holy Communion at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

— Isaiah 1:18–20 —

The Lord sets before the people two kinds of options and admonishes them to make basic choices.

1:18

¹⁸“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

The Lord invites the people to “reason together,” as in a dialogue or even a courtroom setting. First, the people need to recognize that their sins

are like scarlet or crimson. These red colors are chosen to imply that the sins are like shedding blood and discolor the clothing of the perpetrator. However, the Lord can transform the sins into a whiteness like snow or wool. Such a promise shows the power of the Lord's forgiveness in the soul of the sinner.

1:19–20

¹⁹If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;
²⁰But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for
 the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Here the Lord lays out a fundamental moral decision for Israel: obey God and eat the fruit of the land; rebel against God and be eaten by the sword. This stark decision is similar to that which Moses offered, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life” (Dt 30:19).

— Isaiah 1:21–31 —

The Hebrew meter of this section is recognized as a lament or funeral dirge for the dead. However, the content sets a choice before Jerusalem to accept the Lord's punishment for sin as a purification that will return the city to its heritage of righteousness or stay the immoral course and be destroyed.

1:21–23

²¹How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. ²²Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. ²³Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Every one loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them.

A rebuke against Jerusalem that contrasts a faithful and righteous past with the present sinful state of society (v. 21). The backward change to immorality is compared to silver that reverts to the dross that had once been removed by smelting or to watered down wine that maintains some of the color but not the flavor (v. 22). Then the specific moral problems

are identified as coming from the political leaders. They are thieves who seek bribes rather than defend the weak members of society—the widows and the fatherless children. Use of raw power for self-aggrandizement is the corruption the Lord laments in Israel (v. 23).

1:24–25

²⁴Therefore the LORD says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: “Ah, I will vent my wrath on my enemies, and avenge myself on my foes. ²⁵I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy.

On account of such unrighteousness, the Lord threatens punishment in order to purify the city as smelting removes dross from pure metal or lye removes stains from clothing. These verses recognize that purification is possible and the Lord will accomplish it, even if it is a painful process to the recipients.

1:26

²⁶And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.”

Since the princes, who were the main candidates for judging legal cases, are the primary perpetrators, they will be the ones who are purified and restored to moral rectitude, thereby allowing the city to be restored to its original righteous and faithful standing, as in the lament of verse 21.

1:27–28

²⁷Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness. ²⁸But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed together, and those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

The Lord lays out the basic choice for justice and righteousness by repenting or to continue rebelling and forsaking the Lord until complete destruction takes place. This is not addressed directly to anyone but is stated as a basic principle for sinners and rebels to choose. These verses simply make it clear that the stakes are very high.

1:29–31

²⁹For you shall be ashamed of the oaks in which you delighted; and you shall blush for the gardens which you have chosen. ³⁰For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden without water. ³¹And the strong shall become tow, and his work a spark, and both of them shall burn together, with none to quench them.

This section is a threat of vengeance because the people have changed their commitment to the Lord to a worship of the Canaanite gods. Those nature deities were worshiped under the oak trees and in gardens, often with orgiastic rites. The Lord will destroy those rebels and sinners because they have forsaken the Lord. As a result, they will be ashamed of the oaks under which they held their pro-Baal orgies.

Verses 30–31 present images of destruction because the choice to turn away from the Lord to other deities is inherently self-destructive. The wicked deeds of the unfaithful people are like sparks that catch the trees on fire. Even though the Baal worshipers seem to be as strong as oaks, they will be destroyed by the flames that their wickedness sparks.

—— **Isaiah 2:1–5** ——

This promise for a Jerusalem renewed as the religious center of the whole world also appears in Micah 4:1–5, nearly word for word. Micah came from Moresheth, a small town west of Jerusalem. As one expects from the prophets, Micah criticizes both Jerusalem and Samaria. Micah is partial to small towns. Scholars remain quite divided on which prophet actually composed this text and which borrowed it, but the heading in Isaiah explicitly ascribes it to him, while Micah makes no such claim to authorship, thereby pushing the argument in Isaiah's favor.

2:1

¹The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

The heading identifies Isaiah son of Amoz as the author, giving the attribution a formal quality. This word is directed to Jerusalem and Judah.

2:2–3

²It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it ³and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The first and decisive promise is that Zion, the mountain on which the house of the Lord—that is, the Temple—is located, will rise above all the mountains of the world. At present, even the Mount of Olives is higher than the Temple, which provides the best view of the site today. The miraculous rising of the Temple Mount will attract all the nations, much as the light of Israel will attract the nations who live in darkness to come to Jerusalem in Isaiah 60.

However, the physical change of the mountain will not be the main attraction. Rather, the nations will come so that the Lord “may teach us his ways.” They will recognize the superiority of His wisdom, laws, and word, and they will want to “walk in his paths.” Since the great majority of the people who read the Old Testament over the past centuries have been Christians of Gentile origin, this prophecy is already being fulfilled.

2:4

⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

After the nations arrive in Jerusalem, the Lord will judge them as He does Israel. The effect of His judgment will be to turn their weapons of war into farming tools that produce nourishment rather than shed blood. Without weapons, they will cease training for war and produce prosperity.

2:5

⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

This verse is the prophet’s exhortation to Israel to walk in the Lord’s light so that they might be worthy to be that city to which the nations come

for the word of the Lord and instruction. If the residents do not walk in the Lord's ways, then the nations who stream toward Zion may take Israel's place.

— **Isaiah 2:6–22** —

A lament (2:6–9) and a threat (2:10–19) and judgment (2:20–22) against the people for occultism and idolatry.

2:6–9

⁶For thou hast rejected thy people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with foreigners. ⁷Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. ⁸Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. ⁹So man is humbled, and men are brought low—forgive them not!

Here Isaiah addresses the Lord directly with a lament over the people's numerous religious sins.

The sin of consulting “diviners” and “soothsayers” was strongly condemned as an abomination in Deuteronomy 18:9–11. In fact, Deuteronomy 18:9 specifically warns that when Israel enters Canaan they are not to “learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations,” but here Isaiah says they have learned them from various different nations.

The warning against having an abundance of silver, gold, horses, and chariots in Deuteronomy 17:14–17 is addressed to the future kings of Israel, but here Isaiah claims that the whole land is full of such luxuries (horses were for the rich, while average farmers might have a donkey or ox). The excavations at Megiddo (an ancient city in Northern Israel) contain the ruins of multiple horse stables and evidence for many luxury items. Such was likely the case for other cities as well.

The criticism of making idols is standard throughout the histories of Israel (Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles) and the prophets. Many examples

of bronze and clay idols have been excavated from Jerusalem and other towns and cities in Israel.

Isaiah's conclusion is that these sins bring down the perpetrators to a low estate, and therefore he petitions the Lord not to forgive them. Presumably, he wants them to pay for their crimes.

2:10–19

¹⁰Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty. ¹¹The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. ¹²For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high; ¹³against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; ¹⁴against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills; ¹⁵against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; ¹⁶against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. ¹⁷And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. ¹⁸And the idols shall utterly pass away. ¹⁹And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

The preceding lament over sin prepares for this present threat against the day of the Lord on which all will be punished.

He begins with a command to hide from the Lord's terror and glory, which are two sides of the same coin, on the day of the Lord. Those who are righteous will see the Lord's glory; the same manifestation will terrorize the unrepentant sinner. The command to hide is similar to the warning of Revelation 6:15–17, where "the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?" (Rv 6:17).

The day will humble sinful, arrogant human beings. Only the Lord will be exalted on His day of judgment, and sinners will be cast down.

The day of the Lord will certainly exalt His majesty, but it will bring down all the mighty people and objects of this world, from mountains, cedars, and oaks to humanly manufactured towers, walls, and ships. However, as in verse 11, the main point will be the humbling of human

“haughtiness” and “pride” while the Lord alone is exalted. How else can this be? The infinite Lord God will simply be seen for the majesty that He is, while people, who cannot be seen from the window of a passing jet airplane, will be shown for their own smallness from the perspective of almighty divine infinity.

As in verse 10, people will futilely attempt to hide in the caves and the ground from the “terror of the Lord and from the glory of his majesty,” but they will not be able to. He rises to terrify the earth with His truthful and just judgment, and the sinners can only try to hide from Him.

2:20–22

²⁰In that day men will cast forth their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, ²¹to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. ²²Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

At the point of the final judgment, all people who see the Lord’s majesty and glory will realize that their silver and gold idols are worse than useless, so they will toss them to the moles and bats that live in darkness under the ground or in caves. Again, they will try to hide from His terror and majesty, but they will fail to do so.

The prophet concludes with a petition for the Lord to turn away from the awful judgment of insignificant man. He is not worth the trouble. However, this petition seems weak and pale in the face of the vivid description of the coming judgment on the Day of the Lord. One does not have the impression that this petition will avail. God is too concerned with human sin to simply let it slide into obscurity.