

Isaiah 51:9-52:12

Overview

This (misaligned) chapter is the center of ch. 49-57. A voice gives three calls to awaken, each ending with a response from the Lord. Then (vv. 11-12) Isaiah reflects on how wonderful this announcement is. These three announcements correspond to the three themes in the outer panels, in the same order in 51:9-52:6, and in inverse order in 52:7-12 (chart).

Each call and each response by the Lord has a different theme (chart):¹

Addressee	Call	Response	Relation to Outer Panels
Arm of the Lord	Impv: Deliver God's people Ind: You have done it before	The Lord will deliver his fearful people	Servant: described in 49:2 as weapons that the Arm of the Lord wields; "arm of the Lord" in 53:1 ²
Jerusalem	Impv: Stand up to hear your Lord Ind: God has caused you to suffer	The Lord will transfer her suffering to her oppressors	Mother Zion's suffering in 49:14; 50:1; 54:1-8
Zion	Impv: Rejoice and arise Ind: The Gentiles will no more oppress you	The Lord's motive: restore the reputation of his name	Lord's People: cf. Call to rejoicing in 51:3; 55:12.

The voice first calls on the arm of the Lord to rise up to deliver God's people, as it has in the past. Then it speaks in turn of the judgment that the city has suffered, and her joy when she is delivered.

Combining these themes suggests that the overall subject of these nine chapters is, "The Lord's people are to rejoice because the promised Servant will deliver Zion from her suffering."

Who is speaking in these verses? Who would cry out to rouse the militia, warn of the city's desolation, and call her to rejoice when she is delivered? Isaiah's summary in 52:8 gives a clue:

Isa 52:8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

The people would be accustomed to the role of the watchmen who patrolled the walls of an ancient city, especially during the night, to warn of attack or fire. Three times the watchman cries out, and three times the Lord comments on his call. With a little imagination, we can imagine that the Lord is walking by the side of the watchman, offering his reassurance and commentary as the watchman cries out his warnings.

Who is the watchman? It is natural to identify it with Isaiah or another of the prophets; during the captivity, Ezekiel explicitly sees himself in this role.

Eze 3:17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. (cf. 33:7).

We will study each of these three cries of the watchman over the coming weeks. For now, we should keep in mind that we have parallel responsibilities under the new covenant.

¹ In the original exposition, I contrasted the calls as imperative (1, 3) and indicative (2), but in fact all three have both elements.

² In the entire Bible, the phrase זרוע יהוה appears only in 51:9 and 53:1.

- As the watchman declares Judah's desolation, so we must declare to warn lost men and women of their condition. The NT gospel starts not with a proclamation of God's love, but with a reminder the people have sinned and need to repent.
- As the watchman cries out to the Lord to deliver, so we must pray for the Lord to undertake in bringing unbelievers to himself.
- As the watchman calls on Zion to rejoice in the Lord's salvation, so we must invite our hearers to joyfully receive the Lord's salvation.

9-16, Call to the Arm of the Lord to Fight

9-11, The Watchman's Call

9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD;--The first call is to the arm of the Lord, to come forth in battle. That arm wields the weapon described in 49:1-2, the Servant who is both sword and arrow. "Arm" זרוע is feminine, which governs the pronouns throughout this paragraph. The point of this call is to emphasize the strength of the Lord and his ability to overcome every foe.

The phrase "put on strength" (as a garment) appears only three places: here, the third cry, and Ps 93:1, which also mentions the Lord's power over the sea (a theme that is developed here).

awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.--Isaiah recalls that the arm of the Lord has been active before. "The ancient days" are the days of the fathers (chart):

Psa 44:1 We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what* work thou didst in their days, in **the times of old**.

When in the days of the Fathers did God exert his arm? The very first reference to the arm of the Lord is in Exodus:

Exo 6:6 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I *am* the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you **with a stretched out arm**, and with great judgments:

Exo 15:16 Fear and dread shall fall upon them; **by the greatness of thine arm** they shall be *as* still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, *which* thou hast purchased.

Isaiah now goes on to make specific the past mighty act that he has in mind, with two parallel questions, each beginning "Art thou not it?" The first describes God's victory over the dragon Rahab, the second his drying up of the sea.

Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?--Rahab (רהב, not to be confused with the name of the harlot of Jericho (רהב) comes from a root that describes pride and arrogance. This verse clearly recalls Ps 89 (chart):³

³ Ps 89 is attributed to "Ethan the Ezrahite." Ethan is named as one of David's singers, along with Heman and Asaph (1 Chr 15:19), and note that the previous Psalm is by Heman. So this Psalm would be of David's epoch, and known to Isaiah (*pace* Hengstenberg, who assigns it to the Babylonian period or later). Interestingly, if we accept Alexander's

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Psa 89:9, 10 Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.
10 Thou hast broken **Rahab** in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy **strong arm**.⁴

We have met Rahab before, in Isa 30:7, which we translated,

7 For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I called this one, “They are Sedentary **Rahab**.”

The Psalmist uses Rahab as a title for Egypt when anticipating the salvation of Gentile nations,

Psa 87:4 I will make mention of **Rahab** and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this *man* was born there.

The parallel with “dragon” is picked up by Ezekiel, who visualizes Pharaoh as a dragon, probably the Nile crocodile:

Eze 29:3 Speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I *am* against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great **dragon** that lieth in the midst of his **rivers**, which hath said, My river *is* mine own, and I have made *it* for myself.

The Lord “cut Rahab and wounded the dragon” when he brought the plagues upon Egypt at the time of the Exodus. The second exemplary question goes back to that same epoch:

10 *Art thou not it* which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?--This allusion is even more clearly tied to the Exodus, in particular, the dividing of the Red Sea.

So these two questions look at the humbling of Egypt (probably under the plagues), and the opening of the Red Sea. They amplify the allusion to the Exodus in “the arm of the Lord.” This passage, like many others in Isaiah, invokes the deliverance from Egypt as the pattern for God’s future deliverance. As we have often noted, this is a general principle of encouragement on which we can draw. God’s past care for us is the measure of his future provision.

Rom 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

If God worked so powerfully for their fathers in the ancient days, they can be sure of his future deliverance.

How is it that the arm of the Lord will work? I suggested in the introduction that each of these three cries corresponds to one of the three themes in the outer panels. The “arm of the Lord” is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible only in 53:1, in the servant song of the final panel:

identification of Ethan with Jeduthun (who is also named with Asaph and Heman, but never with Ethan), then all three of these musicians were also remembered as seers (2 Chr 29:30; 1 Chr 25:5; 2 Chr 35:15).

4 Ethan may draw the association of Rahab with the sea from Job 26:12, “He divideth the **sea** with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through **Rahab**.” Job set in the patriarchal period, with no reference to later events of Israelite history (such as the Exodus). So Job is probably alluding to the primal myth that views creation as the death of a cosmic monster, of which Tiamat is an example. But the reference to God’s arm shows that Ethan has already applied the image to the Exodus, and that is clearly the use to which Isaiah puts it. In the biblical view, God’s arm is always associated with redemption. Creation is his finger-work (Ps 8:3).

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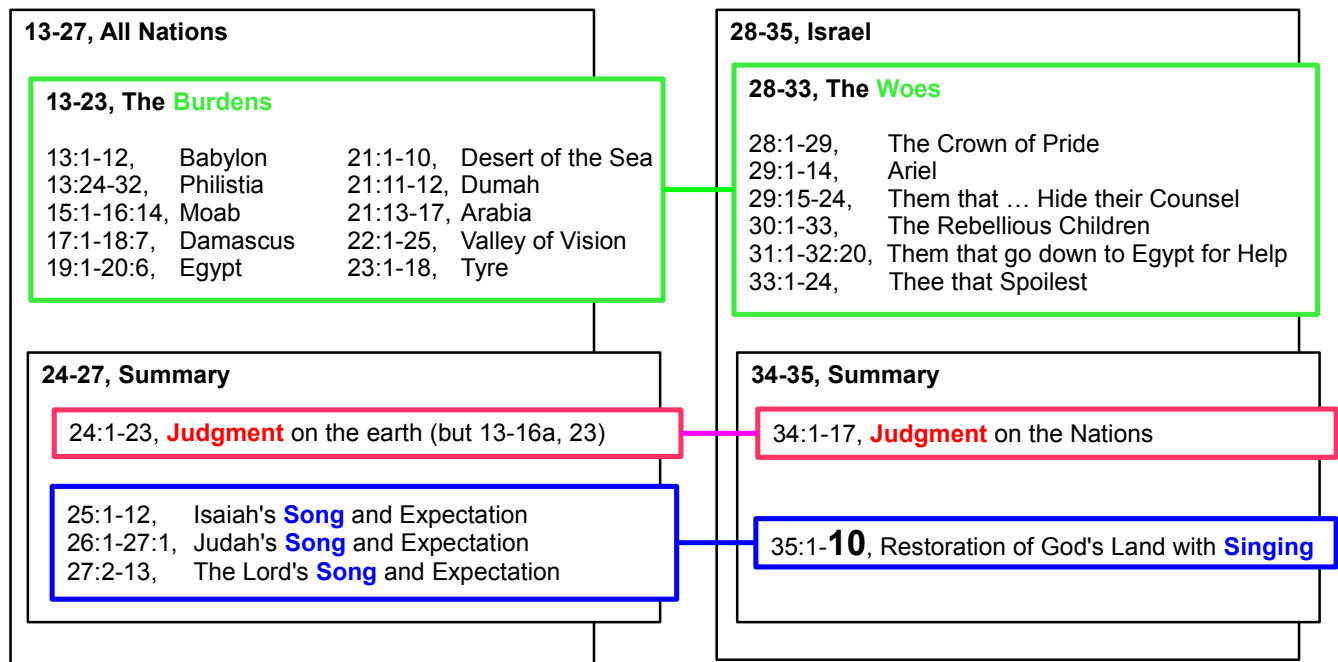
Isa 53:1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

Its warlike imagery also recalls the description of the Servant as the Lord's sword and arrows, which would be wielded by the arm of the Lord, in the first panel:

Isa 49:2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

So the cry to the arm of the Lord is answered by the sending of the Servant.

11 Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.--This verse is an exact quotation of 35:10. This very deliberate link carries along with it the place of the verse in the argument of the first half of the book. (See chart on ch. 13-35)



35:10 is the last verse of the oracular section of the first half, before the historical chapters 36-39. Chapters 13-35 are centered around two great themes: the judgment of the nations (including Israel) in Burdens (13-23) and Woes (28-33), and the joyful singing when God restores his people. 35:10 is the culmination of the promise of God's restoration of his land, and Isaiah brings all that context to mind by repeating that climactic verse here.

(Set to music: <http://www.hymnal.net/hymn.php/h/1341>)

12-16, The Lord's Response

The paragraph change is marked by a change in addressee, from the arm of the Lord to the people. They are described with three different second person pronouns, each emphasizing a different perspective on the nation (chart).

- The first reference is 2mp, which emphasizes the nation as a mass of individuals.⁵
- Then he moves to 2fs, recalling Mother Zion.
- Finally he settles on the 2ms that throughout these chapters is an indicator of the Servant.

The response falls into two parts, each reinforced with allusions to other chapters of this book (chart).

In the first part (12-14), the addressee is fearful (v. 13), characteristic of the bottom half of the hourglass. The Lord offers tender comfort, alluding to ch. 40 and the historical preface (38-39).

In the second part (15-16), the Lord promises the forceful intervention that has been requested, alluding to things we have seen in ch. 49-51. V. 16 returns to the imagery of 42:9 that recalls the Messiah. He also anticipates the theme of the new heavens and new earth that will come into focus later in the book.

12-14, Comfort from Isa 38-40

Later (v. 16), he will provide the forceful intervention that has been requested, but he begins with a word of comfort. He addresses not only the threat posed by the enemy without, but also the fear that his people experience within. See chart for summary of allusions.

12 I, even I, am he that comforteth you [mp]:--The speaker is the Lord, as v. 15 shows. The watchman has called on him to intervene, and this is his response.

In conveying this message, Isaiah is obeying the charge of 40:1, 2,

1-2 **Comfort ye, comfort ye** my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

The use of the plural pronoun emphasizes that he is attentive to the pain felt by each individual, again a theme from ch. 40.

40:11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.

who art thou [fs], that thou [fs] shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;--In delivering this comfort, he shifts to 2fs pronouns, recalling Mother Zion. Yes, she is under attack. But the adversary is only human. His words take us back to the description of people as grass in ch. 40:

6-8 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh *is* **grass**, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field: 7 The **grass** withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* **grass**. 8 The **grass** withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

Whenever we are tempted to fear, we need to remember that our adversaries are only human, and will pass away.

5 He could not move directly to the 2fs of 12b, referring to the city, without confusion with the 2fs pronouns in the previous vv, referring to the arm of the Lord.

13 And forgettest [ms] the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth;--Fear is inappropriate, not only because our adversary is only grass, but also because our defender is the creator. Again, we hear echoes of ch. 40, not only in the phrases describing the Lord's action, but also in the suggestion that Israel ought to have remembered these things.

21-22 **Have ye not known?** have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the **foundations of the earth**? 22 *It is* he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that **stretcheth out the heavens** as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?--In the care of such a defender, why should we fear?

The 2ms pronouns here are usually used in Isa 40-66 of the Servant, and in fact v. 16 will take us back to the Messianic servant. Here the focus is on the lower half of the hourglass, the nation as failed servant.

14 The captive exile bowed one hasteneth that he may be is quickly loosed, and that he should shall not die in the pit, nor that shall his bread should fail.--Our version renders this verse as a desperate hope by a captive, but it is most naturally read as a promise. Because the Lord is more powerful than Israel's adversaries, he will deliver his captives.

The reference to the pit recalls Hezekiah's prayer after his deliverance from illness:

38:17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul *delivered it* from **the pit of corruption**: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

15-16, Power to Overcome the Enemy

Now the Lord's word of comfort moves to a more direct response to the watchman's cry, and the allusions move to more recent passages (in chapters 49-51) and those yet to come (chart).

15 But For⁶ I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared:--The watchman based his request on the drying up of the Red Sea (v. 10). Now the Lord replies, "Yes, I did that. You are right to remember that victory."

The LORD of hosts is his name.--The third person reference is probably an aside from Isaiah. He reminds us of the armies ("hosts") whom the Lord commands.

We noted that "the arm of the Lord" is what wields the Lord's sword and arrows, used as metaphor for the Servant in 49:2. The next verse moves from Israel the Servant to Messiah the Servant. The watchman asked the arm of the Lord to act. The Lord responds by sending his Servant. These two clauses recall 49:2, which in turn goes back to 11:4, and they form the basis for a series of NT descriptions of our Lord.

Early in Isaiah's Messianic vision, in 11:4, he prophesied,

he shall smite the earth with the **rod of his mouth**, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay

6 The adversative sense for the *waw*, while possible, is hardly necessary. LXX renders it as giving the reason, *οτι*.

the wicked.

The Messiah's very words are his weapon. The rod becomes a sword in 49:2, when the Servant reports his commissioning:

he hath made my **mouth like a sharp sword**; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me

Now the Lord recalls this event:

16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand,-- By putting his words in the Servant's mouth, the Lord prepares him to be the sword that his arm will wield. The NT draws on this imagery:

Heb 4:12 For the **word of God** is quick, and powerful, and **sharper than any twoedged sword**,

Rev 1:16 and out of his **mouth went a sharp twoedged sword**:

Rev 2:12-16 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath **the sharp sword** with two edges; ... 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with **the sword of my mouth**.

Rev 19:15 And out of his **mouth** goeth a **sharp sword**, that with it he should smite the nations:

This metaphor reminds us of the power of speech, particularly God's speech. By it he made the earth (Gen 1), and by it he will judge the wicked. These promises put the lie to the childhood ditty,

Sticks and stones may break my bones,
But names will never hurt me.

But in fact, there is nothing more painful, more cutting, more devastating, than a harsh word. The human body can recover from amazing physical harm, but the impact of a harsh word can endure for a lifetime. This is true of human abuse; how much more when the judge, in righteous wrath, sets loose the sword of his mouth against sinners?

Yet the power of the Servant's words works both ways. Recall 50:4,

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to *him that is weary*:

His word can comfort and heal those who are in need.

In a few months, our studies in James will bring us to chapter 3, where we will reflect on the tremendous power of language. We, in our sin, more often harm than heal with our words. We should let our Lord's example remind us of the tremendous power that he has given to us in making us creatures of language.

that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth,--Unlike the allusion to the past creation in v. 13, this reference looks forward to the future, and probably anticipates the promise of the new heavens and new earth that we will see in the third section of Isa 40-66:

Isa 65:17 For, behold, I create **new heavens and a new earth**: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

Isa 66:22 For as **the new heavens and the new earth**, which I will make, shall remain before

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me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

Like the teaching about the Servant's verbal sword, this promise is also repeated in the NT:

2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for **new heavens and a new earth**, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Rev 21:1-5 And I saw a **new heaven and a new earth**: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

God has armed the Servant so that he can destroy God's enemies in preparation for the new creation. As Peter reminds us, that creation will be characterized by "righteousness," a state of affairs that the Servant is uniquely qualified to institute.

Note that the heavens will be "planted." Isaiah's usual expression (most recently in v. 13) is that God "stretches out" the heavens (chart):⁷

Isa 40:22 *It is* he ... that **stretcheth out** the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

Isa 42:5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and **stretched them out**; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it;

Isa 44:24 ... I *am* the LORD that maketh all *things*; that **stretcheth forth** the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;

Isa 45:12 I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, *even* my hands, have **stretched out** the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.

Isa 51:13 And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath **stretched forth** the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; ...

The contrast has striking, and some commentators emend the text of our verse to match these others. But the change is important (chart). In the present creation, the heavens are stretched out far above our heads, inaccessible to us. Moses uses it as an example of an inaccessible location:

Deu 30:11 For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off. 12 *It is* not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

Agur asks,

Pro 30:4 Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?

And our Savior himself claims,

Joh 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.

But in the new creation, heaven is no longer inaccessible. It is firmly planted in the earth. Heaven and earth are now connected. Recall John's full vision, where he recalls the "new heaven and new earth"

⁷ Other references to this idiom are later than Isaiah (Jer 10:12; 32:17; 51:15; Zech 12:1). Ps 104 is undated, but comes later in the Psalter, and Hengstenberg assigns it to the Babylonian captivity. If so, it would also be borrowing from Isaiah. The verbs differ by only one consonant (נָטַח "stretch" vs. נָטַע "plant").

vocabulary:

Rev 21:1-3 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.

The “planting” of heaven is not a scribal error, but a precious promise of the time when, through our Savior’s work, heaven and earth are connected, and God once again walks among his people as in Eden.

and say unto Zion, *Thou art my people.*--Here we see the Servant’s speech serving to comfort, as in 50:4. This declaration also looks to the future:

Isa 60:14 The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

It also recalls the prophecy of Isaiah’s contemporary Hosea, in 1:6-2:1.

Hos 1:8-2:1 she conceived, and bare a son. 9 Then said *God*, Call his name **Loammi**: for ye ***are not my people, and I will not be your God.***

The judgment of Babylon reflects the current state of the nation, Lo-Ammi (not my people). But Hosea goes on to promise,

10 ... it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people, *there* it shall be said unto them, *Ye are* the sons of the living God. ... 2:1 Say ye unto your brethren, **Ammi [my people]**; ...

17-23, Call to Jerusalem to Mourn

The second person pronouns are feminine singular throughout. The watchman describes the terrible judgment that has fallen on Zion’s sons, while the Lord’s response promises their deliverance.

17-20, The Watchman’s Call

The second call picks up once again the matriarchal language of the image of Mother Zion in 49:14-26 and 54:1-17. The pronouns and verbs are feminine throughout, picturing Jerusalem as a woman.

This call announces Jerusalem’s sad condition. The Lord’s arm has fallen upon her. She is a drunken slut in the street.

17 Awake [2fs], awake, stand up, O Jerusalem,--In the first and last proclamations, the addressee is told to “put on strength.” Jerusalem is told to “stand up,” because she is prostrate on the ground. The watchman’s sober task is to confront her with her condition, which is the reason that she is lying on the ground. We can envision a courtroom, in which the defendant is asked to rise to hear the verdict.

Jerusalem must respectfully hear the Lord's declaration of her judgment. This is the only imperative in this call; most of it consists of the description of her condition.

which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury;--This paragraph begins and ends with a reference to God's agency in Jerusalem's misery. Her misfortune is no accident. It is God's deliberate judgment on her (chart).

thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out.--She is lying in a drunken stupor from the wrath of God poured out on her. Once again Isaiah draws on imagery from the time of David and Solomon (chart):

Job 21:20 His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall **drink of the wrath of the Almighty.**

Psa 11:6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be **the portion of their cup.**

Psa 60:3 Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast **made us to drink the wine of astonishment.**

Psa 75:8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a **cup**, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the **dregs** thereof, all the **wicked** of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.

We saw the same imagery in the first half of the book, where Isaiah foretells the blindness of Jerusalem's prophets and seers:

Isa 29:9-10 Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: **they are drunken**, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. 10 For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.

Wine is presented as an image of the seductiveness of sin and judgment. Initially, sin is attractive, but it draws people inevitably into a disgraceful state, just as the initial pleasure of wine leads to shameful drunkenness. The drunkard, crazed by alcohol, sucks on the bitter dregs to satisfy his thirst. The sinner is so overcome by his lust that he clasps the judgment of God to his bosom.

The point of the metaphor is that what God gives them is not just the final judgment for their sin, but the withdrawal of his protection from the temptations that draw them deeper into sin. Several passages point in this direction (chart).

Israel in the desert experienced this dynamic, when they demanded flesh to eat instead of manna. Num 11 records how God miraculously provided flesh for them:

Num 11:4 ... and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? ... 16 And the LORD said unto Moses, ... 18 ... say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: ... 31 And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let *them* fall by the camp,

Yet this apparent gift was only the prelude to disaster, just as a cup of wine can lead to drunkenness.

33 And while the flesh *was* yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.

The Psalmist describes the event poignantly:

Psa 106:15 And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

Another example, even more terrifying, comes from 1 Samuel. The narrator describes the sin of Eli's sons, and the reproof that their father gives them, and then states,

1Sa 2:25 Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would [רָפָה "desired to, was pleased to"] slay them.

We cannot blame God for their sin. That stems from their own fallen condition. But the Lord could have intervened to bring their attention to the words of their father. He allowed them to continue in their wilful disobedience, because his ultimate purpose was to destroy them.

Perhaps the most detailed presentation of this insight is in Rom 1, which presents the effect of God's wrath as allowing people to slip more and more into uncontrolled behavior that violates his law. The cup he puts into their hands is initially sweet and attractive.

Rom 1:24-32 Wherefore **God also gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: ... 26 ... **God gave them up** unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over** to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

The first level of his wrath is not to judge their sin, but to abandon them to their sin. This behavior, in turn, ensures his final judgment.

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

When God places the cup of his wrath into peoples' hands, it may taste sweet and indulgent at the outset, but he makes them drink the whole thing, all the way down to the dregs of his punishment.

This dynamic is no doubt behind Matt 6:13, when our Savior teaches us to pray, "lead us not into temptation." We need his protection from the stimuli to sin that surround us daily. Beware the temptation to toy with sin, resolved to stop at the line between lust and disobedience. We must "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14). Sin starts sweet.

- God's judgment does not begin only after people sin. He gives them over to the lusts that will lead them into sin, and thus to his final judgment. He places the cup in their hands, and then forces them to drink it to the dregs.
- Similarly, God's salvation is not just from the penalty of sin, but from the whole process of lust and self-gratification that leads to sin. He causes us to walk in his statutes, and do them. We

should treasure that aspect of his care and deliverance.

18 *There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up.*--A drunken parent might have a child to pull her out of the gutter and bring her home, but Jerusalem's children are gone.

19 *These two things are come unto thee;*--The "two things" are apparently the two objects of her complaint in 49:14 and 21, loss of her husband and loss of her children.⁸ It's interesting that the same two disasters are proclaimed upon Babylon in 47:9,

Isa 47:9 But these two *things* shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood:

who shall be sorry for thee?--With no husband and no children, there is no one to pity her.

desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword:--The first two describe the fate of a city under attack, while the second two describe the fate of her people.

by whom⁹ shall I comfort thee?--The watchman is at a loss to know what to do for one in such a desperate state as Jerusalem. No human has any comfort for one in such a state. That comfort can come, ironically, only from the one who has brought this judgment upon her:

Isa 49:13 the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

Isa 51:3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places;

Isa 51:12 I, *even I, am* he that comforteth you:

20 *Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net:*--All their strength is useless; they are trapped like a hunted animal. "Wild bull" is a rare word, appearing only elsewhere in Deut 14:5 of a clean animal, where the ancient versions understand it of an antelope or gazelle, the kind of animal that one could hunt with a net. Imagine a small deer that has struggled against the net, and finally lies exhausted, gasping for air, completely helpless.

they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God.--Why has this come upon them? Because of the Lord's wrath.

21-23, *The Lord's Response*

The watchman summons this derelict to stand and acknowledge her sad condition. When the Lord speaks, he acknowledges her condition.

21 *Therefore hear [fs] now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine:*--Here is an express allusion to 29:9, and reminder that he is using a metaphor. The wine is sin; drunkenness is being given over to one's lusts; the dregs are God's wrath. The Lord does not deny the watchman's diagnosis. Jerusalem is drunken and morally depraved. But there is more to be said.

22 *Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people,*--The

⁸ Attempts by various commentators to find two things in the immediate context are unsatisfying. This solution leverages the broader structural integrity of the section.

⁹ Or "how," as ׁ is used in Ruth 3:16 and perhaps Amos 7:2, 5; see HALOT item 7.

Hebrew expression עמו יריב contains an interesting ambiguity. The direct object of יריב can refer either to the one against whom a suit is being brought (chart):

Isa 49:25 I will contend with him that contendeth with thee

or to a defenseless person on whose behalf the defender is bringing suit:

Isa 1:17 plead for the widow

Both senses are active here. From the beginning of the book, the Lord has been bringing suit against his people. Ch. 1 follows a repeated pattern of accusation before cosmic witnesses, which Isaiah's contemporary Micah (ch. 6) explicitly calls a יריב. At the same time, we have heard repeatedly that when the Lord is finished chastising his people, he will turn his hand against their enemies:

Isa 49:25-26 for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.
26 And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine:

The Lord who has chastised Israel is also the one who will vindicate her.

Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again:--Recall our analysis of the wine metaphor. The "cup" that God gives to those who rebel against him is not just the final judgment, but abandonment to their lusts along the way. Conversely, when he bestows his favor on his people, he delivers them not just from judgment, but from the intoxicating grip of sin that leads to that judgment. His salvation is not just from the final punishment, but from the manner of life that leads to that punishment.

23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.--The description of Israel's humiliation recalls God's pronouncement concerning Assyria in ch. 10.

Isa 10:5-6 O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. 6 I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and **to tread them down like the mire of the streets.**

God allowed Assyria to trample the northern kingdom as though they were dirt. The treatment of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar would have been similar.

But now the Lord promises Israel that he will restore her from her degraded condition, and bring upon her adversaries the dishonor that she has experienced. We have seen this image of God's vengeance before, in 3:10 ("they [the wicked] shall eat the fruit of their own doings"); 10:5-19; 30:29-31; 34:8; 49:25. It is God's prerogative to chastise his people, but woe to those who are his instruments. He who touches us, touches the apple of God's eye (Zech 2:8), and God will surely bring upon them all that they have brought upon us, and more.

2Th 1:6 *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

52:1-6, Call to Zion to Rejoice

1-2, The Watchman's Call

The third call moves back from declaration to imperative, echoing the challenges that close each of the side panels.

Once more, the theme of the watchman's cry corresponds to elements in the outer panels (charts), this time to promises of joy and rejoicing in the sections that describe the Lord and his people:

51:3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; **joy and gladness** shall be found therein, **thanksgiving**, and the **voice of melody**.

55:12 For ye shall go out with **joy**, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into **singing**, and all the trees of the field shall **clap their hands**.

The cry is structured chiasmically (chart).

- The verb moods mark out three broad sections: imperative in 1a and 2, indicative in 1b, which is at the center, and thus the focus.
- This structure is reinforced by the chiasm in "Zion" and "Jerusalem."

52:1 Awake [f], awake;--In the third cry, the watchman begins by exhorting the city to retake her previously position of honor.

put on thy strength, O Zion;--In the first cry, the watchman urged the arm of the Lord to "put on strength." The verb literally means to put on a garment. Now restored Zion is to do the same thing.

put on thy beautiful garments;--The captive's rags, the drunkard's soiled robe, are now replaced with beautiful garments.

O Jerusalem, the holy city;--The only previous use of the phrase "the holy city" in the entire Bible is in 48:2, where it describes the sanctimonious claim of the people (chart):

48:2 For they call themselves of **the holy city**, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel;

At that time, it was a false claim, as Isaiah goes on to point out:

48:1 [they] swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, **but not in truth, nor in righteousness**.

Isa 48:4 I knew that thou *art* obstinate, and thy neck *is* an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

Isa 48:8 Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time *that* thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

But now the watchman recognizes the city as truly holy.¹⁰

¹⁰ The combination of "put on strength" and "the holy city" recalls Ps 93:

Psa 93:1-5 The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is **clothed with strength**, *wherewith* he hath

for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.--Its true holiness will protect it from the defilement of pagan invaders, the very ones whom God sent against it because of her hypocritical false claim to holiness.

Note how the invaders are described. Their distinctive feature is not their violence or rapacity, but their uncleanness. The real disaster is not that Judah suffers, but that God's holy city is defiled. Throughout Scripture, God's whole concern is for his name and his honor. In ourselves, we are only dust; we are precious to him because we bear his name, and when we suffer, it is his honor that he is primarily concerned to remedy.

Some might think this a harsh view of God, but in fact it is a tremendously comforting one, for his care of me does not depend on some whimsical interest in my comfort, but in his self-interest in advancing his own reputation.

2 Shake thyself from the dust;--Throughout the OT, the dustheap is where the poor and the mourner sit. Think of Job, on his pile of ashes.

arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem:--Arise from the ground, and sit upon a throne.

The action in these two clauses is the inverse of what is imposed on Babylon:

Isa 47:1 Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: *there is* no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans:

loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.--She has been bound in captivity, but she will now be set free.

3-6, The Lord's Response

This section is chiasmic, ABBA (chart). In the center, the Lord describes two facets of the disaster:

- Social (the suffering of his people)
- Spiritual (the dishonor to his name)

The outer members offer the remedies for each of these.

3, Social Remedy

3 For thus saith the LORD, Ye [mp] ~~have sold yourselves~~ were sold for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money.--Both the captivity and the restoration are presented as commercial transactions.

girded himself: the world also is established, that it cannot be moved. 2 Thy throne *is* established of old: thou *art* from everlasting. 3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. 4 The LORD on high *is* mightier than the noise of many waters, *yea, than* the mighty waves of the sea. 5 Thy testimonies are very sure: **holiness becometh thine house**, O LORD, for ever.

The expression "put on strength" appears only in Ps 93 and these two times in Isaiah. This Psalm is undated, and most of the Psalms in the fourth book are later than David, but might still have been known to Isaiah, who was himself 300 years after David. Note how that Psalm combines the ideas of the Lord's strength, the conquering of the sea (a key motif in the first cry), and the holiness of the temple.

The first clause is passive, not reflexive. “You were sold for nothing.” The Lord appears to be alluding to the words of the Psalmist (chart),

Psa 44:12 Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price.

This Psalm is perhaps the most depressed in the Psalter. The Psalmist looks back to God’s past deliverances, and mourns that God does not intervene in the nation’s present distress. In Isaiah, the focus is on oppression and captivity by foreign powers (vv. 4-5). God didn’t even enrich himself by giving Israel to Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. The motive for their captivities is not to enrich God, but to chastise them for their sin, a point that Jeremiah makes a century later, as the disaster approaches:

Jer 15:13 Thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price, and that for all thy sins, even in all thy borders.

But the restoration will be equally gratuitous. The verb “redeem” גאל is the one that emphasizes the close relation between redeemer and the one delivered. (The other verb, פדה, emphasizes the price paid, and would clearly be inappropriate here.) The allusion here is to the prophecy about Cyrus:

Isa 45:13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.

When God’s people finally turn to him, they do not need to pay anything to be set free. The Lord will repeat this picture in 55:1,2,

Isa 55:1-2 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

They are not redeemed for money, but God does pay something to deliver them. He destroys whole nations in order to set them free.

Isa 43:3-4 For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

All nations belong to him, and he will experience loss in order to deliver them. But the human agent of their deliverance will not be motivated by money, which means that there is nothing they can do in their own power to escape this fate. Their deliverance is entirely of God’s free grace.

There is a strong parallel here to our salvation. No one is enriched by our bondage to Satan; God gives us over to it because of our sin. And no amount of money could deliver us from that bondage. Our salvation is all of God’s free grace. But what a price he has paid to procure that salvation!

4 For thus saith the Lord GOD,--Now we turn to a more detailed statement of the two facets of the disaster: social and spiritual.

4-5a, Social Disaster

The first recalls three separate rounds of oppression by foreign powers, with a summary statement.

My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there;--He begins with the years of slavery in Egypt.

and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.--Next, he moves to the time of Hezekiah. We have contemplated the anguish of Judah as the enemy moved through their land, right up to the gates of the capital.

5 Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought?--The third disaster is the Babylonian captivity. The expression “What have I here?” means “What am I doing here?” It’s how the Lord addresses Elijah in the cave in 1 Kings 19:9, 13, and also Shebnah in 22:16, who as a foreigner, with no right to build a sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Lord, envisioning Israel in Babylon, declares, “This isn’t my place. There’s no reason for my people to be here.”

they that rule over them ~~make them to~~ howl, saith the LORD;--The final phrase “saith the Lord” יהוה נאם marks this as a summary statement of the social disaster. “Howl” always refers to a cry of pain or anguish, and the statement is best translated to refer to the agony of the nation’s rulers when their dominion is taken away. One has only to think of the tragedy of Zedekiah, when Nebuchadnezzar slew his sons before his eyes and then blinded him so that he would live to the end of his days with that horrible image in his mind (2 Kings 25:7).

5b, Spiritual Disaster

and my name continually every day is blasphemed.--Note the disjunctive clause, with the temporal modifier preceding the predication. This is the second objection, the offense against God himself.

The expression, “to blaspheme **נאם** God’s name,” appears elsewhere only¹¹ in Ps 74, a Psalm of Asaph, David’s seer.

Psa 74:10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?

Psa 74:18 Remember this, *that* the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and *that* the foolish people have blasphemed thy name.

Asaph’s prophetic psalm anticipates the entire series of affronts to the temple that lie ahead of him: the Babylonian destruction in 586 BC, the defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC, and the destruction by Titus in AD 70. God promised Israel through Moses that he would appoint a place for his name to dwell:

Deu 12:10-11 But *when* ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and *when* he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; 11 Then there shall be **a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there**; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:

The place of sacrifice moved from time to time, with the tabernacle, but when Solomon dedicated the

¹¹ A related expression, “to profane **הלל** God’s name,” appears frequently in Exod 20 and 36 with reference to the exile of the people, but this expression appears to be restricted to affronts to the sanctuary.

temple, he prayed,

1Ki 8:29 That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, *even* toward the place of which thou hast said, **My name shall be there**: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.

When Israel's enemies defile and destroy the temple, they are not only abusing the people, but insulting the God whose people they are.

6, Spiritual Remedy

The remedy for this second objection now follows, in three statements that offer a crescendo of meaning (chart).

6 Therefore my people shall know my name:--At first glance this seems superficial. It has been 700 years since Sinai. Don't they know God's name? Don't they know lots of names for him?

There is an interesting parallel to this verse in Exod 6:3, where God appears to Moses at the burning bush, and says to him,

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by *the name of* God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.

In fact, the name YHWH *was* known to the patriarchs. Like his ancestors in the days of Seth and Enos (Gen 4:26), Abraham is frequently said to "call upon the name of the Lord," that is, make proclamation of the name of the Lord (Gen 12:8; 13:4), he swears by the Lord (14:22), and prays to him in this name (15:2, 8). Sarah knows it (16:2, 5), the Lord speaks it to Hagar (16:11), the angels reveal it to Lot (19:13), who then speaks it to his daughters (19:14), and so forth.

They knew the name, but only as a label, not as a description. YHWH is God's personal, covenant name. He made many promises to the patriarchs, about possessing the land of Canaan and being a blessing to all nations, but fulfilled none of them. It wasn't until the Exodus that the nation he had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob emerged, and his people could really know him as YHWH.

In the same way, during the Babylonian captivity, the people may know the divine name, but certainly don't experience God as their covenant protector. Like widow Zion in the metaphor, they feel that their heavenly bridegroom has forsaken them. Now God looks ahead to the end of that captivity, and makes essentially the same promise that he did to Moses at the end of the earlier captivity: to reveal himself as the covenant God, who delivers his people.

therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak:--The second thing they will know is that God reveals himself. He is not just acting in the background, like the "man behind the curtain" in the wizard of Oz. He speaks to his people, explains his actions, and invites them to enter into fellowship with him. This is a greater promise than simply performing his covenant promises.

behold, it is I.--This third statement is very remarkable, and is the strongest of the three. To understand this, we must survey its use in the OT. The underlying Hebrew expression יהוה appears in two very different constructions (chart).

In one construction, it introduces a whole statement:

Gen 48:4 Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee

The point in this kind of statement is, “Look, I (and not someone else) is the one who does XYZ.” This kind of boast is particularly appropriate to God, and so it is perhaps not surprising that of 155 instances of this construction in the OT, 146 are on the lips of the Lord, and only 9 are spoken by people.

The other construction simply says, “Here am I.” This is much less common, occurring only 23x in the OT. Only four of them are spoken by God, all in Isaiah. The other 19 are all spoken by people, and with three exceptions, the statement is one in which a subordinate makes himself available to a superior. For example,

Gen 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, *here I am*.

Gen 27:1 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, *here am I*.

1Sa 3:4 the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am I*. (so 5x in this chapter)

When a human uses this expression to speak to an inferior person, it indicates something unusual about the circumstances. (See Notes.) So it is very unusual for God to address his people in this way. It is an expression of condescension, of his offering himself to serve his people, rather than the other way around. They will know his name, not just as the high and lofty God, but as a loving father who would do anything for his beloved children.

7-12, Reflection on the Calls

Note the reference, in chiasmic order to the calls, of Zion, Jerusalem, and the arm of the Lord (chart).

The paragraph has three parts, each concluded with a reason “for” (chart). The first is indicative, while the second and third are imperative. First we see the news arriving in Jerusalem that the Jews are returning from Babylon. Then the city is commanded to rejoice in anticipation of the return of her people, and finally the people themselves are directed to return.

7-8, The News Arrives

Isaiah depicts the arrival of the news by runner, coming over the mountains to bring good news to the anxious watchmen on the city wall. This section recalls the third “awake,” with its summons to rejoice.

We’ll first analyze this passage in its own right, then look at the context of the imagery of v. 7 more broadly throughout the Bible.

Direct Exposition

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation;--First we see the runner approach. His eagerness suggests good news, but only at the end can we hear the message:

that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!--The news is that Zion's god is king. During the period of the Babylonian captivity, this was subject to question, as we saw in the insistence throughout ch. 40-48 that God was in fact greater than the Babylonian gods, whose armies had conquered his city. Now that the people are released to return to Jerusalem, God's reign is vindicated.

8 The voice of thy watchmen! They shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing:--The final part of the picture is the joyful cry of the watchmen at the appearance of the runner.

Now we learn just what the watchmen see. We can understand it better if we start with the second clause.

the LORD shall bring again Zion—The Lord will bring the population back to the city. His personal role is spelled out in v. 12: he will both lead the procession, and provide protection at the back.

for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.--To "see eye to eye" is an allusion to Num 14:14, the only other place this expression appears:¹²

Num 14:14 the inhabitants ... have heard that thou LORD *art* among this people, that thou LORD art seen **face to face**, and *that* thy cloud standeth over them, and *that* thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

As so often in these chapters, the Exodus is the template for the return from Babylon. God himself went before them then, and when the refugees now arrive from Babylon, the watchmen will find themselves experiencing the same direct confrontation with God that was Israel's portion in the Exodus, seeing him eye to eye.

We ought not to miss the bold anthropomorphism in this promise (chart). The watchmen see a runner approaching from afar. He comes closer, bring good news of deliverance, and the victorious reign of God. Yet as he draws up to the city, they realize that they are face to face with none other than the Lord himself.

Broader Biblical Context

This promise is quoted by later biblical writers in both the OT and NT, and itself may allude to an earlier episode in the Bible. Let's consider each of these connections (chart). First, consider possible roots in 2 Sam 18.

Roots in 2 Sam 18

We must remember that in ancient times, other than prearranged signals by fire, smoke, or banner (Isa 13:2), a message could travel no faster than a man could run. We could go seek out other sources to tell us about runners,¹³ but there's a good example of this in 2 Sam 18:19ff, when Ahimaaz and Cushite bring news of Absalom's death to David. In general, the Bible captures enough details of life in ancient times

12 The words עין בעין also appear in Deut 19:21, but with very different meaning, in the *lex talionis*, "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot"

13 The classic example is the Athenian herald Pheidippides, who purportedly in 490 BC ran the 40 km from Marathon to Athens to report the Greek triumph over the Persians, having previously run 150 miles in two days to summon help from Sparta. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pheidippides>

that a thorough knowledge of its narratives can often take the place of a Bible dictionary. It is self-interpreting. In this case, there may be reason to think that Isaiah actually has this episode in mind.

Note in the story in Samuel (chart):

- Both Ahimaaz and Cushie run. That is the fastest way to carry information. Over a long distance, a man can outrun even a horse.
- The story is permeated with the word “tidings,” either the verb בָּשַׂר twice translated in Isaiah “bring good tidings,” or the related noun בְּשׂוּרָה.
- The messengers take two different routes. Ahimaaz comes by way of the plain of Jordan, while Cushie apparently follows a more direct but mountainous route, and arrives shortly later.
- The watchman on the city wall in Mahanaim sees the runners approach.
- The two runners bear different messages.
 - Ahimaaz reports that the threat to David’s throne has been overcome. The emphasis is on David’s place as king. This message brings joy.
 - Cushie reports vengeance on David’s enemies. The emphasis is on Absalom’s death. This message, by the runner from the mountains, brings grief.

Note the parallels with Isaiah:

7 ... him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good,--
The task of the herald is to bring good tidings, a verb that permeates the Samuel story.

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet—Isaiah has in mind a runner bringing this news.
that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!--Compare Ahimaaz’s message:

2Sa 18:28 Blessed *be* the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against **my lord the king**.

Absalom sought to take the throne away from David, but God has restored the throne to its rightful incumbent. So in Isaiah, Babylon’s usurpation of God’s rule over his people is at an end.

8 The voice of thy watchmen! They shall lift up the voice; ~~with the voice~~ together shall they sing:--As in 2 Sam 18:24, 25, the first ones to see the runner approaching are the watchmen upon the city wall.

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings—If Isaiah does have the history of 2 Sam 18 in mind, the reference to the mountains is particularly poignant.

Two runners carried the news of the battle to David. Cushie, who started earlier, arrived later, because “Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain.” Apparently Cushie took a direct route over the mountains north of the Jabbok. See chart for a comparison of possible routes (speculative, because we do not know the location of the site of the battle, the wood of Ephraim). In this particular scenario, Cushie’s route, though shorter (7 mi rather than 9.3), would be more difficult (particularly with thick forests along the way), and Ahimaaz arrived first.

Ahimaaz and Cushie bring very different messages.

2Sa 18:28 And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed *be* the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.

Ahimaaz gives praise to God for the outcome. Cushie focuses attention on the destruction of the enemies:

2Sa 18:31-33 And, behold, Cushie came; and Cushie said, [Good] tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.

When David asks about Absalom, Cushie continues (v. 32)

The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man *is*. 33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

In 2 Sam 18, the feet that ran “upon the mountains” brought a bitter ending to the earlier good news that came by the more efficient route. But when the news arrives that the Jews are being sent back to Jerusalem, successive reports will not bring any disappointment. The messenger who runs upon the mountains will bring the same report as the one who comes by the plain: unmitigated good tidings.

Branches in Nah 1:15 (chart)

The book of Nahum is “the burden of Nineveh” (1:1). Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire. Nahum predicts its fall in 612 BC to a coalition of Media and Babylon, marking the end of the empire that exiled the northern kingdom and tormented the southern.

Nahum mentions the past fall of Thebes (called No or No-Amon in the Bible):

Nah 3:8 Art thou better than No-Amon [AV “populous No”], that was situate among the rivers, *that had* the waters round about it, whose rampart *was* the sea, *and* her wall *was* from the sea? 9 Ethiopia and Egypt *were* her strength, and *it was* infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers. 10 Yet *was* she carried away, she went into captivity:

Thebes fell to Ashurbanipal of Assyria in 663 BC, so Nahum prophesies between then and 612 BC (the fall of Nineveh). He thus would be perhaps 50 years later than Isaiah.

Nahum quotes Isaiah’s expression in the context of a prophecy about an individual, a “wicked counsellor,” introduced in v. 11 and then at the end of v. 15. The messenger upon the mountain announces the fall of this individual.

Nah 1:11 There is *one* come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a **wicked** counsellor. ... 14 And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, *that* no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile. 15 **Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings**, that publisheth **peace!** O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the **wicked** shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.

Who is this “wicked counselor”? The description would fit Sennacherib in ch. 36-37, or his lieutenant Rabshakeh. But Sennacherib died about 681 BC, before Nahum wrote, and no later Assyrian king figures prominently in the biblical history.

A clue may lie in the word for “wicked,” בלעל. This term appears 27 times in the OT, mostly in expressions like “men of Belial” or “sons of “Belial.” The exact sense is not clear from within the OT, but its one use in the NT is revealing (chart):

2Co 6:14-16 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with **Belial**? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?

Belial is the spiritual opposite of our Lord, that is, the anti-Christ.¹⁴ This meaning certainly fits throughout the OT. The very first reference to the “sons of Belial” in the OT is to people who promote idolatry:

Deu 13:13 *Certain* men, the children of **Belial**, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, ...

Throughout history God has allowed various human tyrants to fall under Satan’s sway, and several of them are used throughout Scripture types of the great Antichrist to come.¹⁵ Nahum, contemplating the Assyrian tyrants who decimated Israel and threatened Judah, sees in them a picture of the coming Antichrist. But he also hears the Lord’s promise to destroy him, and send a messenger upon the mountains to report to Judah that “the Wicked One ... is utterly cut off.”

Isaiah, foreseeing the fall of Babylon and the return of the Jews to their land, tells of the coming of a messenger of good news. Nahum extends the promise to the news of the fall of the coming Satanic tyrant. Let’s now follow the expression into the NT.

Branches in the NT

The NT quotes the passage in four places. The first two apply the promise to the coming of the Lord Jesus, while the last two extend it to include other believers (chart).

The Lord Jesus as the Evangelist of Peace

Two texts present the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment of this promise of the herald of good news.¹⁶

First, Peter quotes the verse in preaching to Cornelius:

Act 10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, **preaching peace** by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

“Preaching” is εὐαγγελίζομαι, which the LXX uses to translate “bring good tidings” in Isa 52:7. Peter recalls the promise from Isaiah, of a herald who will come preaching a message of peace, and sees the

14 Common in the Qumran documents and the Greek pseudepigrapha, Belial names Satan or one of his representatives.

15 See notes for further discussion.

16 See Gill on Rom 10:15 for citations from Jewish sages identifying this text with the Messiah.

fulfillment in the Messiah.

Why does Peter add, “He is Lord of all”? He may appreciate the bold statement we observed: that as the watchmen gaze at the approaching herald, they suddenly realize that they are seeing the Lord eye to eye. It is in the Lord Jesus that we learn how one who proclaims, “Thy God reigns,” himself deserves the title of “Lord.” Peter puts it this way: God sent Jesus, who is himself Lord.

Paul uses the verse the same way in Eph 2:17.

Eph 2:17 [Christ] came and **preached peace** to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Isaiah’s promise is not exhausted in the good news from Babylon. It points to the Messiah, the one who delivers his people from spiritual Babylon and defeats the Antichrist. But there is more.

Believers as the Evangelists of Peace

At the end of Ephesians, Paul describes how believers should arm themselves for spiritual warfare. He teaches,

Eph 6:15 [Have] your **feet** shod with the preparation of the **gospel of peace**;

If the Lord Jesus is the messenger of peace, his followers, as his body, should carry on that work. Their feet become his feet in carrying the good news of peace.¹⁷

Paul continues this theme in Rom 10, marking it by a slight change in the verse (chart). In discussing the lost condition of the Jews, he anticipates a series of objections.

14-15a How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent?

The Gentile mission was aggressive. The Jew might object that their unbelief was due to lack of attention. In response, Paul quotes our verse:

15b as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of **them** that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Paul believed that the Lord Jesus is the messenger, the preacher *par excellence* whom God has sent to the Jews. That alone would answer the objections. A preacher was sent, and they rejected him. But Paul goes beyond that. He changes the participle “him that brings good tidings” from singular to plural, “them that bring good tidings.” Messiah the Servant has become the church the Servant, leaving Israel even more without excuse. Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, went “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

So who is the messenger upon the mountains? The prophetic vision extends beyond the runners from Babylon to the one who defeats spiritual Babylon and the Antichrist, the promised Messiah. But as we have so often seen, his work becomes ours. The messenger becomes a host of messengers, who are to carry the good news to all nations.

¹⁷ This usage is consistent with the other pieces of armor that Ephesians 6 recommends to us, a uniform that Isaiah assigns first to the Messiah in 59:17.

9-10, The City Rejoices

The second paragraph picks up the second and first “awake, awake” sections.

9 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem:--“Waste places” חרבות refers to ruins, the rubble left from the conquest. This is a literal description of what the second “awake” depicted figuratively as Jerusalem lying drunken in the gutter. After her long mourning, the city is to rejoice.

The reason is given in two couplets, describing the effect of the Lord’s actions, first on his people, and then on the Gentile observers. This two-fold emphasis takes us back to the first “awake, awake” section, and reflects the same contrast we saw in 51:9-16 (chart). The watchman calls for the arm of the Lord to awaken to deliver the people; the Lord responds first by promising comfort (51:12-14), then by assuring the exercise of his power (vv. 15-16).

for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.--The first promise is of comfort to his people Israel.

10 The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations;--The second promise differs in both substance and in scope.

- The substance is warfare rather than comfort. The watchman cried for God’s arm awaken, and the Lord here takes off his coat and rolls up his sleeves for battle.
- The scope extends beyond Jerusalem, to include “all nations.”

and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.--The Gentiles will be witnesses to God’s salvation, as he brings Israel back.

11-12, The People Return

The third paragraph commands the people to leave Babylon and her defilements behind.

11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence,--The watchman’s cries “awake, awake” now become the command “depart, depart.” When the time of judgment is over and Cyrus allows the Jews to return, they are supposed to do just that.

Many of them had trouble obeying this command. We have recently been meditating on Esther, whose family remained in Mesopotamia. Seventy years is long enough for people to get married, build homes, have children and grandchildren, learn the local language and customs, and put down roots. Some captives had become so comfortable in their captivity that they refused freedom when finally it was granted.

And those who did depart faced another temptation:

touch no unclean thing;--Rachel, leaving her father’s house to return to Canaan with Jacob, brought along some souvenirs, a few idols tucked into the camel’s furniture. Some of Jews returning from Babylon may have faced a similar temptation. They must leave this behind. The rest of the verse gives the reason:

go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.--When they returned,

it was with a mission. Cyrus sent them back to rebuild the temple (chart):

Ezra 1:2-3 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. 3 Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem.

In support of that mission,

Ezra 1:7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the **vessels of the house of the LORD**, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; 8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Israel on its way out of bondage is a holy people, with a holy mission: to worship the Lord. They must go back, not stay in Babylon; and they must leave behind her defilements.

This exhortation echoes down to us through the NT (chart). In discussing Belial, we read Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. He concludes that exhortation,

2Co 6:17 Wherefore **come out from among them**, and **be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and **touch not the unclean thing**; and I will receive you,

As Israel was released from her physical bondage in Babylon, so we have been set free from the power of Satan. We have no business remaining in spiritual bondage. We are to be separate, and to leave behind the defiling customs of those with whom we were previously in bondage.

In the Revelation that when Babylon the Great is revealed, this command is repeated.

Rev 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, **Come out of her**, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

We have been set free to build a holy temple unto the Lord. We bear vessels with which to offer sacrifice to him. We must not allow ourselves to be defiled.

12 For ye shall not go out with haste,--This is in contrast with the exodus from Egypt. (chart)

Exo 12:33, 39 And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land **in haste**; for they said, We *be* all dead *men*.

nor go by flight:--They were not to fear enemies on the way. The journey from Babylon back across the fertile crescent would have been risky by human standards. When Ezra returned, he was aware of this danger

Ezr 8:22-23 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against **the enemy in the way**: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God *is* upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath *is* against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

He obeys Isaiah's instruction, and recognizes the principle that Isaiah sets forth:

for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward.--We might more naturally spell the last word, “rearward,” the “ward” or guard at the “rear” of the procession. As in the first Exodus, the Lord promises to go both before and behind them.

Exo 14:19 And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them:

God will encompass them “behind and before” (Ps 139:5), protecting them from danger.

Notes

Divine הני

The use of this form absolutely with God as subject is unusual. Here’s a tabulation. The bottom line is that the absolute הני is almost always addressed by an inferior to a superior. One prominent exception is Abraham’s tender comment to his son in Gen 22:7, which may be the prototype for God’s equally tender words to his people the three times in Isaiah (52:6; 58:9; 65:1) that he says this to them.

Divine subject, introducing clause (“Behold, I <predicate>”) 143x

Gen 6:17; 9:9; 48:4; Ex 8:17 (ET 21); 9:18; 10:4; 14:17; 16:4; 17:6; 34:11; Num 25:12; 2 Sam 12:11; 1 Ki 11:31; 14:10; 16:3; 20:13; 21:21; 2 Ki 19:7; 20:5; 21:12; 22:16, 20; 2 Chr 34:24, 28; Isa 13:17; 28:16; 29:14; 37:7; 38:5, 8; 43:19; 65:17, 18; 66:12; Jer 1:15; 2:35; 5:14, 15; 6:21; 8:17; 9:6 (ET 7), 14 (ET 15); 10:18; 11:11, 22; 12:14; 13:13; 16:9, 16, 21; 19:3, 15; 20:4; 21:4, 8, 13; 23:2, 15, 30, 31, 32; 25:9; 28:16; 29:17, 21, 32; 30:10, 18; 31:8; 32:3, 28, 37; 33:6; 34:2, 17, 22; 35:17; 39:16; 43:10; 44:11, 26, 27, 30; 45:5; 46:25, 27; 49:5, 35; 50:18, 31; 51:1, 25, 36; Ezek 4:16; 5:8; 6:3; 13:8, 20; 16:37; 21:3, 8; 22:19; 23:22, 28; 24:16, 21; 25:4, 7, 9, 16; 26:3, 7; 28:7, 22; 29:3, 8, 10, 19; 30:22; 34:10, 17; 35:3; 36:6, 9; 38:3; 39:1; Hos 2:8; Joel 2:19; 4:7; Amos 6:14; 7:8; Mic 2:3; Nah 2:14; 3:5; Hab 1:6; Zep 3:19; Zec 2:13, 14; 3:8, 9; 8:7; Mal 2:3; 3:1

Divine subject, absolutely 4x

Isa 52:6; 58:9; 65:1 (2x)

Divine, irregular 3x (predications, but with waw)

Jer 23:39; Ezek 34:11, 20

Human subject, introducing clause (9)

Gen 41:17; Num 24:14; 1 Sam 14:7, 43; 25:19; Jer 26:14; 40:10; 42:4; Dan 8:19 (angel)

Human subject, absolutely (with direction in rank) 19x of which only 3 are downward, with special meaning.

Gen 22:1, 11, Abraham to God or Angel (up)

22:7, Abraham to Isaac (down; shows how crushed Abraham is)

27:1, Esau to Isaac (up)

27:18, Isaac to Jacob (down; shows manipulation of Isaac by Jacob's deception)

31:11, Jacob to Angel (up)

37:13, Joseph to Jacob (up)

46:2, Jacob to God (up)

Ex 3:4, Moses to God (up)

1 Sam 3:4, 5, 6, 8, 16 Samuel to Eli (up)

12:3, Samuel to People (down; he is offering himself for the people's review)

22:12, Ahimelech to Saul (up)

2 Sam 1:7, soldier to Saul (up)

15:26, David to God (up)

Isa 6:8, Isaiah to God (up)

Feet on the Mountains

Highlights show links tying Rom to Isaiah rather than Nahum. It includes “beautiful” and “good,” which Nahum does not, and misses the references to the mountains and the separate word for the message of peace, both of which are in Nahum. But note Paul's plural!

Isa 52:7 **ὡς ὄρα ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρέων** ὡς πόδες εὐαγγελιζομένου **ἀκοήν** εἰρήνης ὡς εὐαγγελιζόμενος **ἀγαθά** ὅτι ἀκουστήν ποιήσω τὴν σωτηρίαν σου λέγων Σιων βασιλεύσει σου ὁ θεός

Nah 2:1 ἰδοὺ **ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη** οἱ πόδες εὐαγγελιζομένου καὶ **ἀπαγγέλλοντος** εἰρήνην

Rom 10:15 **Ὡς ὠραῖοι** οἱ πόδες τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων εἰρήνην, τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων τὰ **ἀγαθά**.

The Evil Counselor of Nah 1:11

The description is apt for the behavior of Sennacherib in ch. 36-37. But his death is about 681 BC, while Nahum wrote after the fall of Thebes in 663 BC, and sees the fall of this figure in the future (v. 14).

Assyrian kings after Sennacherib do not figure prominently in Judah's history, at least from the perspective of the biblical authors (see timeline). The only real candidate is Ashurbanipal, whose annals mention Manasseh king of Judah in the context of his campaign against Egypt in 663 (ANET p. 294b,c,

Isaiah 51:9-52:12

and the sacred historians do not mention him. He is probably the one whose captains are responsible for Manasseh’s deportation in 2 Chr 33:11 (cf. ANET p. 294d, 295a, where “all the kings” would reasonably refer to the list earlier in the text that includes Manasseh). But far from being viewed as villains, those responsible for Manasseh’s deportation are seen simply as the Lord’s implements of chastisement.

More likely, Nahum 1:11 is an early example of the Bible’s view of historical tyrants as foreshadowings of the great eschatological antichrist. The most mature expression of this is the vision in Rev 13:1 of the beast with seven heads. In 17:7-11, these heads are interpreted as successive powers (v. 10 “five are fallen, and one is, *and* the other is not yet come”), which invites alignment with Daniel’s revelation about four great kingdoms (2:31-45; 7:1-7, 17). Daniel identifies the first of his kingdoms with Babylon (2:38), and it is usual to identify the successive ones with the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. John writes during the time of the sixth head, the Roman era, which would be Daniel’s fourth. Therefore John extends Daniel’s series with one later, and two before Babylon, most likely Egypt and Assyria (who were both history when Daniel wrote).

Historically, various of these empires have served as the template for Antichrist. Thus

- Daniel 11:2-39 recounts the Selucid wars in the Greek period, in which Antiochus IV was so prominent, as an anticipation of the Antichrist in vv. 40ff “at the time of the end.”
- Our Lord in the Olivet Discourse cites Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem as emblematic of Antichrist’s offenses.
- Rev 15-16 use the motifs of Israel in Egypt and the plagues to anticipate the time of Antichrist, taking us back to Egypt, which is probably the first of the seven heads.

Each of these empires was in its turn the custodian and exemplar of the spirit of Antichrist, the notion that a man can claim the prerogatives of deity over other men and enforce it by totalitarian government. In this sense, Nahum can write to the current representative of this trend that the “wicked counsellor” will “come out of thee.” The whole series of empires is the pipeline through which the principle of antichrist is refined and sharpened until it finally emerges at the end of the age.

Here is my reconstructed timeline of the relevant people and events (original slide in Nahum folder):

