

Isaiah 40

Overview

As we noted when beginning the historical section, we have turned a major corner in the book. The geopolitical and historical focus of ch. 1-37 is on Israel's interaction with Assyria. The Northern Kingdom is overwhelmed and taken into captivity, but God delivers Judah by destroying the Assyrian invader. The focus of ch. 38-66 is on Judah's interaction with the next great middle eastern empire, Babylon. About a century after Isaiah, Babylon succeeds in subduing Judah, and the Southern Kingdom follows the North into captivity. But God again delivers his people, this time by the hand of the Persian king Cyrus, who conquers Babylon and sends her subject peoples back to their ancestral lands.

Since at least 1831,¹ a threefold division of chapters 40-66 has been discerned, consisting of nine chapters each (Figure 1). One mark of this division is the repeated refrain at the end of each section:

48:22 *There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.*

57:19-21 I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. 20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

66:23-24 And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. 24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

Modern scholars tend to prefer a twofold division, splitting the chapters either just before or just after ch. 55, mainly on the grounds that the powerful image of the Servant of the Lord spans chapters 41-53 but is absent from the later chapters, which emphasize rather the moral division within Israel between those who follow the Lord and those who do not. But we will use the threefold division as our working hypothesis:

- The refrain is a very powerful marker.
- The first nine chapters have two very strong distinct themes that are absent in the last two, mockery of man-made idols, and an insistence on the Lord's ability to predict the future.
- Themes characteristic of the later two sections are anticipated in the earlier ones.

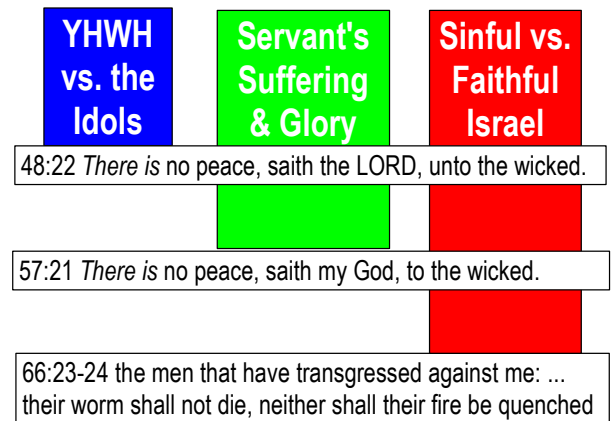


Figure 1: Structure of Isa 40-66

¹ Rückert, *Translation of the Hebrew Prophets*, cited by Delitzsch

Delitzsch suggests a distinctive theme for each section: “In each of the three parts, a different antithesis stands in the foreground.” We will adopt his themes as our working hypothesis. In fact, all three themes are present in the first section, and one gets peeled off in each of the following sections, as shown in the figure. This is an unusual rhetorical move. Usually an author establishes each theme individually and then brings them together.

The distinctive theme of each section is thus the one that is *not* found in the following sections, though it will be in the previous ones.

Let's survey each of these themes by looking at just a few of the many examples that we will encounter in our later exposition.

40-48, *The Impotent Idols*

Delitzsch summarizes the contrast in this section as “between Jehovah and the idols, and between Israel and the heathen. ... The first part sets forth the deliverance from Babylon, in which the prophecy of Jehovah is fulfilled, to the shame and overthrow of the idols and their worshipers.” The section is permeated by two arguments that show the impotence of idols. Neither is repeated in the following sections.

First, God mocks the idols and their worshipers because the idols are powerless, the creatures of men's hands. They cannot create anything, or even move themselves, but are dependent on their “worshipers” for their very existence. For examples, see 44:9-20 and 46:1-7.

Second, God can predict the future, something that the idols cannot do. See 41:21-23; 48:5-6 for this claim. The centerpiece of this demonstration is when God names Cyrus (44:28; 45:1) as the one who will conquer Babylon and return Israel to her home, 150 years before he comes onto the stage of history. This naming, and its obvious supernatural implications, is one of the main reasons that some “scholars” want to define a separate, later author for the second half of the book—yet this would invalidate the main argument that Isaiah is making!

49-57, *The Promised Servant*

Delitzsch's contrast: “in the *second* part, chapters 49-57, the contrast between the present suffering of the Servant of Jehovah and His future glory. ... the second part [sets forth] the way of the Servant of Jehovah through deep humiliation to exaltation and glory, which is at the same time the exaltation of Israel to the height of its world-wide calling.”

The Servant of the Lord is indeed introduced in the first section.

- It is almost entirely of the nation: 41:8, 9; 42:19-20; 44:1, 2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20
- The one exception is 42:1-4, quoted in Mat 12:17ff of the Lord Jesus

But in 49-57, the servant becomes the suffering redeemer: 49:1-9 (Israel, yet Israel's redeemer); 50:10; 52:13-53:12; 55:3-5 (though not called “servant,” clearly the same character). In 48:15-16, the speech of the Lord transitions into that of one sent by him, who is best understood as the servant of ch. 49, so this servant is not only human (Israel), but also divine.

58-66, *The Moral Imperative*

This section exhibits Delitzsch's third contrast: “in the *third* part, chapters 58-66, the contrast observable in the heart of Israel itself, between the hypocrites, the depraved, the rebellious, on the one side, and the faithful, the mourning, the persecuted, on the other. ... the third part [sets forth] the indispensable conditions of participation in the future redemption and glory.”

The theme of this section really has four components:

1. condemnation of the people's sin;
2. invitation to repentance;
3. coming deliverer;
4. promised glory.

Here is an initial survey of these themes (to be refined as we work through the chapters):

Sin	Repentance	Deliverer	Glory
58:1-5	6-7		8-9a
	9b-10a		10b-12
	13		14
59:1-8	9-15a	15b-20	59:21-60: 1-22
		61:1-3	61:4-62:12
		63:1-14	
	63:15-64:12		
65:1-7			65:9-10
65:11-16			17:25
66:1-4	5	15	6-22

Again, these themes are found in the two previous sections (in the first section, 43:22-44:5; 48:1-8; in the second section, 50:1; 56:1-12; 57:3-11). And in fact, this theme of moral responsibility and consequences is really the point of the repeated refrain, “there is no peace to the wicked.” But in the third it comes to its fullest expression. Ch. 59-60 offer a clear example of all four elements.

Synthesis

One benefit of surveying the overall structure of a section like this is that we can put together the argument of the whole section in a single sentence. Think of how these elements, the refrain and the three major themes, fit together.

- The first theme establishes God's uniqueness and sovereign power. He alone is the sovereign Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, the one who controls the course of history so that he

can tell the end from the beginning. The fundamental fact of our world is that there is a God who has created the heavens and the earth.

- The third theme tells us that this God holds us accountable for our conduct, It places us under the judgment of God's law. The sober refrain reminds us that we cannot escape his judgment.
- The second theme bridges the gap between an all-powerful, sovereign God and his sinful people. His servant is one with his people, but at the same time able to redeem them by taking their sins upon himself.

In a nutshell, these three themes are the main points of the gospel message that we proclaim each week downtown. God exists and is all-powerful; we have broken his law and come under his condemnation; Christ Jesus is the only answer to our problem. Here, in a single sentence, is the message of Isa 40-66: the promised Servant of the Lord (49-57) delivers his sinful people from the judgment that they face (58-66) from the sovereign God of creation and history (40-48).

1-11, The Message and Messengers of Peace

This section is a preface not only to 40-48 but also to the entire second half. It has two parts, each beginning with a command to deliver a message (1-2, 9) (Table 1). In the first case, the messenger is not identified, but the audience is Jerusalem. In the second case, the messenger is Jerusalem, and the audience is the cities of Judah. We will see further parallels between these sections as we proceed.

	40:1-8	40:9-11
Charge	1-2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her	9 O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah,
Message	vv. 3-8	vv. 10-11

Table 1: Alternation in 40:1-11

1-8, The Heavenly Voices

The first group of messengers are disembodied voices. When God commands a message to go out, it must go out, and if there is no messenger available, a voice happens.

1-2, The Charge

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,--Who is this “ye” who is commanded to comfort Jerusalem? Isaiah hears two voices respond in obedience to the summons. They are presented with participial clauses, as though they suddenly forced themselves on the prophet's consciousness

- v. 3, “a voice crying, ...”
- v. 6, “a voice saying, ...”

The second voice is naturally understood as prompting the first one to continue its message.

that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.--There are two things for us to understand in these three clauses: the meaning of the individual clauses, and the role of the conjunction translated “that” and

“for.”

Let's begin with the three clauses themselves.

her warfare is accomplished—The period of time that she is to be trodden down by the nations has come to an end.

her iniquity is pardoned—The cause for those years of suffering has been removed.

she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins—Parallels to this mode of expression suggest two possible interpretations. “Double” may refer to the intensity of Israel's punishment:

Jer 16:18 And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin **double**; because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable things.

Rev 18:6 Reward her even as she rewarded you, and **double** unto her **double** according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her **double**.

Or it may mean that she has received blessing that more than compensates for her suffering:

Job 42:10-12 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job **twice** as much as he had before.

Isa 61:7 For your shame ye shall have **double**; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the **double**: everlasting joy shall be unto them.

Zec 9:12 Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render **double** unto thee;

I prefer the latter, for three reasons:

- The only attested meaning earlier than Isaiah is that of Job, which envisions double blessing.
- Isaiah himself clearly uses the double blessing image in 61:7.
- In the context, the other two clauses both emphasize the change in her fortunes, not the intensity of her suffering.

So the meaning of the third clause is that God has replaced the sin with blessing that more than compensates for the chastisement she has suffered.

The past tenses of the three verbs are examples of “prophetic perfects.” Certainly, at the time Isaiah writes, these statements are not true, but the second half of Isaiah often looks backward to God's past judgment and restoration, just as the first half of the book generally looks forward. This verse introduces this temporal point of view. Isaiah is promising a time when Israel's trials are over, and God is now comforting his people.

Now we consider the three conjunctions. The words translated “that” and “for” are the same, the particle כִּי. Like Greek οτι, it can mark either the reason for the main clause (“for,” in the third clause here), or the content of speech (“that,” in the first two). The parallelism suggests that (contrary to the KJV) it should be understood the same way in all three clauses. But which way?

The Lord's command in vv. 1-2 is followed by the obedient voices, whose message does not follow this

outline. So in the immediate context, we should prefer the explanatory meaning, כִּי = “for.”

Thus, with the interpretation כִּי = “for.” God commands the voices to bring a message of comfort because the time of Israel's suffering is over, and he has now decreed blessing for her.

But Isaiah may be playing with the ambiguity in the Hebrew participle. It has long been noted (in the 19th century by H.A. Hahn, cited by Keil, and in the 20th by Young) that, understood as a summary of content (כִּי = “that”), these three clauses summarize the three main sections of 40-66 (Table 2).

- her warfare is accomplished [40-48: the idols of Babylon are defeated, and the nation delivered from captivity],
- her iniquity is pardoned [49-57: through the work of the Servant of the Lord]:
- she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins [58-66: the glory of the future kingdom].

40-48	YHWH vs. Idols	Warfare is accomplished
49-57	Servant's Suffering & Glory	Iniquity is Pardoned
58-66	Sinful vs. Faithful Israel	Received double for all her sins

Table 2: 40:2 as outline of ch. 40-66

3-8, The Message

Vv. 3-5 and 6-8 are an abc-abc alternation.

- Both begin (a) with “a voice” plus a participle, “crying” or “saying.”
- Both end (c) with assurance of the source of the message, “the mouth of the Lord,” “the word of our God.”
- In the middle (b) is the message.

Charge		1-2 Cry to Jerusalem	
Response	Agent	3a “a voice crying ...”	6a “a voice saying ...”
	Message	3b Command 4-5a Statement	6b-8a Statement
	Source	5b “the mouth of the Lord”	8b “the word of our God”

Table 3: Alternation in 40:3-5, 6-8

The two voices differ in their messages. The first proclaims the joyful advent of the Lord, while the second anticipates fiery judgment.

We first analyze the passage as Isaiah gives it, then consider its relation to John the Baptist in the New Testament. This order reflects an important biblical principle: later revelation must pass the test of what comes first. God teaches this principle through Isaiah:

Isa 8:20 **To the law and to the testimony:** if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.

And our Lord himself invited his hearers to judge his claims by the OT. To the Jewish leaders, he said,

Joh 5:39 **Search² the scriptures;** for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and **they are they which testify of me.**

Compare his words to the the disciples after his resurrection:

Luk 24:25-27 Then he said unto them, **O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:** 26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his

² The verb is imperative in the Majority Text, though indicative in the Egyptian tradition.

glory? 27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And Paul summarized his ministry to Agrippa,

Act 26:22-23 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, **saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:** 23 That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

It is common practice to read one's presuppositions back into the text. People with a creedal orientation read the Bible through their creed, and Christians read the OT through the NT. This is just as bad as when Mormons read the Bible through the Book of Mormon, or Muslims through the Koran. The books of the Bible were written in a specific order. Each new revelation was anticipated and validated by what came before. So we should start by reading each portion on its own grounds, and then moving to the later interpretation. Often, when we start with a fresh reading of the older texts, we will find that the later ones have a rather different meaning than we at first assumed.

Isaiah's Oracle

3-5, Message of God's Approach

3 The voice of him that crieth crying,--The Hebrew accents and parallelism suggest that "in the wilderness" modifies "prepare," not "crying." The LXX omits the parallel "in the desert," opening the door to take "in the wilderness" with "crying," as we are used to reading it. But the word order, even in Greek, permits the Hebrew syntax.

In the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.--The voice commands the preparation "in the wilderness" of "the way of the Lord."

Isaiah often talks about a highway in the desert:

11:16 And there shall be an **highway** for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

19:23 In that day shall there be a **highway** out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians.

35:6, 8 In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert ... 8 And an **highway** shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

43:19-20 Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? **I will even make a way** in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. 20 The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.

49:11 And **I will make all my mountains a way**, and my **highways** shall be exalted [for the exiles to return]

There are two important differences between these verses and the one we are considering.

1. These other highways are for the exiles, and Gentile converts with them, to return to Zion through the deserts that surround it. But the highway in 40:3 is for the Lord to return to his people.
2. The Lord prepares the highway for the people (43:19; 49:11), but here the people are commanded to make preparation (v. 2 “speak ... to Jerusalem”).

There are other passages in Isaiah where the people prepare the way for the Lord to come:

62:10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye **the way of the people**; Cast [ye] up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. 11 Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, **Behold, thy salvation cometh**; behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him³. 12 And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken. 63:1 **Who is this that cometh from Edom,**

57:14 And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of **the way of my people**. 15 **For** thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; **I dwell** in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Proper understanding of “the way of the people” must take into account the only other OT instance⁴ of this phrase, also in Isaiah:

8:11 For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in **the way of this people**,

As often when the genitive of דרך is a person (see notes), the reference is to their ethical conduct. Thus in these passages, the exhortation is for the people to prepare themselves spiritually for the Lord's coming. Note in particular the explanatory כי “for” in 57:15.

Based on these parallels, the imperative in 40:3b is a command to spiritual preparation for the coming of the Lord. The “way of the people” is corrupt. If the Lord finds them walking contrary to his word when he arrives, he will judge them. They must “prepare the way of the Lord” by repentance, to receive the one who dwells “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:--It is tempting at first to see this as a continuation of 3b. After all, a “highway” is a road that has been straightened out and leveled to make it easy for people to travel. Is this perhaps just a metaphor for the moral change demanded in v. 3?

Perhaps. But note the shift from imperative (command) to indicative. v. 4 is the first of a series of statements, one after another, continuing through v. 5. What is promised includes not only geographical changes, but also the universal revelation of the glory of the Lord.

The idea that the Lord's coming will bring topological change is found elsewhere in the OT. Isaiah

³ Quoted from 40:10

⁴ In דרך בתעמי in Jer 4:11, דרך is used as a preposition.

appears to be the original witness to these events, and we have seen this theme already:

2:2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and **shall be exalted above the hills**; and all nations shall flow unto it.

Recall from our study of Isa 2 that currently Jerusalem is not “exalted above the hills,” but is dominated by the Mount of Olives.

13:13 Therefore I will shake the heavens, and **the earth shall remove out of her place**, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

Micah, Isaiah's contemporary, anticipates similar events:

Mic 1:3-4 For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. 4 And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.

Nahum proclaims judgment on Nineveh, and thus antedates the fall of Assyria. He writes,

Nah 1:5-6 The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. 6 Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

Habakkuk, around the same time, foresees:

Hab 3:6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

After the return from captivity, Haggai and Zechariah continue to anticipate cataclysms when the Lord comes.

Hag 2:6-7 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it *is* a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry *land*; 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come:

Zech 14:1-11 gives the most detailed vision of these coming changes, and with so much geographical detail that denying its physical reality is extremely difficult.

It seems best to conclude that while 3b is describing the spiritual preparation that the people must undergo before the Lord's return, v. 4 describes the physical changes that will take place when he does come, changes anticipated already in ch. 2 and 13, and echoed through the later prophets.

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,--These cataclysmic changes will make the Lord's creative power and unique glory evident.

and all flesh shall see it together:--Today, believers can say with John (1:14), “we beheld his glory,” but most of the earth has not. In fact, Paul describes the ability to see God's glory in the present age as the result of a special gift of God:

2Co 4:3-6 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this

world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament anticipates a time when the knowledge of the Lord will be universal. We can trace this theme back to David, who at the end of his psalm for Solomon (72), wrote,

Psa 72:18-20 Blessed *be* the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.
19 And blessed *be* his glorious name for ever: and **let the whole earth be filled *with* his glory.**

Isaiah⁵ has already told us that in the coming Messianic age,

11:9 the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

By God's grace, the gospel has gone out into all the world, but it would be a mistake to think that worldwide evangelism fulfills this promise. Our Lord associates this universal knowledge with his second advent:

Mat 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect. 25 Behold, I have told you before. 26 Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, *he is* in the secret chambers; believe *it* not. 27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

And John, writing well after our Lord's ascension, says,

Rev 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.--Lest there should be any uncertainty about this promise, the voice reminds us that this is the very Word of God.

6-8, Message of Universal Judgment

At this point the voice pauses, but another voice exhorts it to continue. This second panel, like the first, begins with a voice and ends with an appeal to the certainty of God's word.

6 The a voice said saying, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?--The people have been commanded to prepare their hearts for the Lord's coming, and told of the power and glory that he will manifest. There is a missing link between these two that needs to be made clear.

All flesh is grass,--The phrase "all flesh" is a mark of the story of Noah. Seven out of 27 instances in the OT are in Gen 6-9. It's well to remember the first instance of this expression:

Gen 6:12 God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for **all flesh** had corrupted his way upon the earth.

Here, the expression is changed just a little. In this place alone in the OT, the expression is, "all the

⁵ Probably quoted by Hab 2:15

flesh.” The article in this case reminds us that we have just heard of “all flesh,” in 40:5. When the Lord comes, “all flesh” will see his glory. That same “all flesh” is nothing more than a field of dry grass.

In the land of the Bible, the grass is one of the most striking evidences of the change of season. Compare the two images of Hazor in Figure 2, one in April after the winter rains, the other in October after the hot dry summer.

and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:--Flesh is nothing better than grass. Its beauty is temporary, like a wildflower. When the hot summer sun comes, the flower is parched and dies.

because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it:--In the case of Isaiah's image, the grass is mankind, and the hot sun is the spirit of the Lord. His coming is a time of judgment for those who have not prepared their hearts.

surely the people is grass.--Just so we don't miss the point, Isaiah repeats the theme of the metaphor. The grass stands for the people. They have no hope before the coming Lord.

8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.--Here is the ultimate value proposition for sinners. You are just grass before almighty God. He promises to come, parch you, and burn you up. Nothing can stand against his word. Your only hope is to repent and submit to him.



Figure 2: Hazor in April (top) and October (bottom)

The NT Application to John

All four gospels apply this prophecy to John the Baptist (Table 4). Matt 3:3 says, “This is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias,” and in John 1:23, the Baptist claims, “I am the voice of one crying ...”

The prophecy certainly refers to John, but he does not exhaust it. As often in Isaiah, we are dealing with prophetic foreshortening. Here are two other examples.

- The invasions of Assyria and Babylon are presented in terms of the Day of the Lord, but they do not exhaust it, and the NT still looks forward to this

Feature	Matt 3	Mark 1	Luke 3	John 1
Ex 23:20 + Mal 3:1	(11:10)	2	(7:27)	
40:3	3	3	4	22
40:4			5	
40:5 + 52:10			6	
40:6-8	11-12?		16-17?	

Table 4: Isa 40:3-8 and John the Baptist

day as future.

- Similarly, our Lord in Luke 4:18-19 quoted Isa 61:1-2a of himself, but stopped before speaking of “the day of vengeance of our God,” which was still future at his ascension.

Isa 40:3-8 anticipates the coming of the Lord. The Lord came at the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, but as he himself foretold, he will come again. The NT itself recognizes that the final coming of the Lord has not yet happened. Isa 40, as well as other OT passages, predicts a herald at the time of the Lord's coming, and there is no reason to restrict that herald to the first advent alone.

Why is this insight important?

- It shows how God encourages his people along the way. Like the progress bar at the bottom of a browser that shows the status of a slow download, these intermediate events encourage the saints that God has not forgotten his promises, but is unfolding them in his own time.
- It helps us avoid shoehorning prophecies into supposed fulfillments that they don't really fit. We can understand the Scriptures much more naturally if we don't insist on an “all or nothing” approach to fulfillment at the first advent.
- It allows us to draw application from prophecies whose ultimate fulfillment lies in the future. Just because the promise is for a future date doesn't mean that it has nothing for us now. It is our privilege as believers to “taste ... the powers of the world to come,” Heb 6:5.

To get the full context, consider Table 4, showing the citations in the gospels. There are five points of correspondence:

- Mark conflates Isa 40 with Mal 3:1, the promised messenger, identified in Mal 4:5 as **Elijah**. While the other gospels do not conflate the verses this way, Matt 11:10-14 and Luke 7:27 report our Lord's use of Mal 3:1 (and 4:5 in Matt) of the Baptist.
- All four gospels identify John as the one giving the **command** to prepare the way of the Lord.
- The **statement** (in contrast with the previous command) about mountains and valleys is mentioned only in Luke, and not related to John's activities
- Likewise, the **appearance to all flesh** is only in Luke.
- Though none of the gospels quotes the second panel of the message (about the flesh being like grass), Matt and Luke do report John's warning of a future **judgment by fire** on the chaff, which might be suggested by this part of Isaiah's prophecy.

We'll consider each of these in turn. Table 5 shows that John fulfills only part of the promise.

The Promise of the Messenger

Let's start with the first element, the promise of the Messenger. The citation is a conflation of Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20 (not, as is commonly thought, of Mal 3:1 alone). “Messenger” in Malachi translates the same

Feature		Before	John	After
Ex 23:20	Angel before thee	✓	✓	
Mal 3:1	Angel before me		✓	✓
40:3	Cmd: Prepare way		✓	(✓)
40:4	Statement: Hills			✓
40:5	All Flesh			✓
40:6-8	Grass withers			✓

Table 5: When is Isa 40:1-8 fulfilled?

Hebrew word as “angel” in Exodus.

- Both texts say, in almost identical⁶ language, “Behold, I send a messenger⁷.”
- Malachi identifies the messenger as “my messenger,” and his mission as “prepare the way.”
- Exodus is responsible for “before thy face,” and for the notion that the way is prepared “before thee,” rather than “before me” (as in Malachi).

Before whom does the messenger go? Malachi says “me” (God), but Exodus, “thee” (the people). Recall that Isaiah describes two reasons to build a road: for God to come to his people, and for his people to return to Jerusalem.

- Malachi, like Isa 40, focuses on God's approach to his people. The messenger prepares **God's** way before him as he comes to his people.
- Exodus deals with the people's return to the land. The messenger goes before **them**. Notably, Isaiah will frequently allude to the Exodus in describing the return of the people from Babylon.

By conflating the two passages, the gospels emphasize that the Baptist serves both roles. He is Malachi's messenger preparing the way of the Lord Jesus (one whom Malachi's first person pronouns identify as YHWH of hosts). But he also corresponds to the angel of Exod 23:20, leading the people of Israel back to the land of promise from their exile in sin.

Consider first the promise in Exod 23:20. Our Lord says of John (Matt 11:10), “This is he of whom it is written,” and then quotes the conflated verse. The primary reference of Exod 23:20 is clearly *not* John the Baptist. The verse refers to the angel of God's presence who accompanied the nation through the desert and into the land of promise. He's mentioned not only here, but also in other verses:

Exo 33:2 And **I will send an angel before thee**; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:

Exo 33:14 And he said, **My presence** shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest.

When Moses requests passage through Edom, he reports as a historical event,

Num 20:16 And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and **sent an angel**, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt:

In what sense is Exod 23:20 written of John the Baptist? He is not the primary fulfillment. That fulfillment was the angel of the divine presence, moving through the desert 1400 years before. But in guiding the people to the Lord, he served the same function.

Now consider more closely the messenger in Mal 3:1, whom Mal 4:5 identifies as Elijah. John's identity with Elijah is strange. When the Jews from Jerusalem asked him if he were Elijah, probably based on Mal 4:5, he denied the identity (1:21). Yet the Lord Jesus said of him,

Mat 11:14 if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come.

6 The subject of “send” (present participle of שלח in both cases) is the independent pronoun in Exodus, but the suffix on “behold” in Malachi.

7 The same Hebrew word מלאך that is rendered “angel” in Exodus is translated “messenger” in Malachi.

This “conditional identification” seems strange, but recall that the disciples, even in Acts, were still promising the Jews that if they would repent, the Lord would return and bring “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:19-21). If Israel had received Jesus as their Messiah, then John would have counted for Elijah. But they did not, and he did not. Mark's citation of Mal 3:1 + Exod 23:20 doesn't mention Elijah. He refers to John as the promised messenger, but John's words show that he is not Elijah. Like the angel of Exod 23:20, the messenger of Mal 3:1 goes beyond John. Yet, like the future Elijah, he does prepare the way for the Lord to come to his people, and it is appropriate for the Lord Jesus to refer the prophecy to him.

Further evidence that John does not exhaust Mal 3:1 is seen in the sequel to that verse. Malachi predicts severe judgment (3:2, 5), the purification of the Levites (3:3), and worship on the part of Judah and Jerusalem (3:4), none of which happened at the first advent.

So at the outset, we are alerted that some of the OT passages concerning the messenger, while appropriate descriptions of John's work, have other, more complete, fulfillments.

The Command to Prepare the Way of the Lord

Isa 40:3 is the only element of our text that all four evangelists cite. We saw in Isaiah that it is an exhortation to the people to mend their ways in preparation for the Lord's coming, lest he judge them. This is exactly the Baptist's message: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt 3:2). The NT focus on this verse suggests that it is the part of Isa 40:3 most specific to John.

Luke's Unique Elements

Two elements are unique to Luke: the statement about mountains and valleys, and the appearance of the Lord's glory to all flesh.

Consider first the appearance of the Lord's glory to all flesh. This promise, quoted only by Luke, is clearly not fulfilled in the first advent. We saw in our study of the verse that our Lord himself links this world-wide knowledge with his return (Matt 24:27), as does Rev 1:7.

Luke, with a researcher's compulsion for detail, quotes the whole panel (Isa 40:3-5), but this does not mean that he considers every detail fulfilled in the first advent.

Similarly, the statement about mountains and valleys appears in only Luke. We saw in our exposition of Isaiah 40 that this verse is one of a series of passages in the OT (most notably Zech 14) that refer to geographic changes in the Day of the Lord. Is this prophecy fulfilled by John the Baptist? Such a fulfillment would require extensive spiritualizing, not only of Isa 40:4, but of other OT passages as well. For instance, Zech 14 describes the changes with specific reference to the Mount of Olives, Azal, Geba, Rimmon, and five specific landmarks in Jerusalem. A spiritual explanation would have to interpret each of these. If the NT drew a spiritual point from this picture of geographical change, we might seek to follow that lead, but it does not, and we will not.

We have already seen that just because an OT verse is quoted of John does not mean he exhausts its reference:

- Luke includes v. 5, which is clearly not fulfilled by the first advent,

- the application of Exod 23:20 to John is clearly figurative, and
- Malachi's prophecies of judgment and the restoration of the Levites were not fulfilled at the first advent.

So it is not necessary to interpret v. 4 of the first advent, either. The evangelists agree that Isa 40:3 *is* fulfilled in John. But Isaiah's whole prophecy, like that of Malachi two centuries later, and like many others, merges the two advents into one. Only in the light of history can we distinguish what has already occurred, and what is yet to come.

Judgment by Fire

The evangelists do not quote Isa 40:6-8, concerning the withering of the grass before the breath of the Lord. But there may be an allusion to it in Matthew and Luke, in the Baptist's warning of a coming judgment by fire. At the same time, the Baptist does not present it as fulfilled, but as something yet future. If there is an allusion here, it substantiates our claim that Isa 40 collapses events that actually are far separated in time.

Summary

The general picture is clear. Isaiah, and Malachi three centuries later, anticipate a messenger who will introduce the coming of the Lord. John the Baptist, sent by God to introduce the Lord Jesus, is such a messenger. But both texts, and others cited by the evangelists in the same context (Exod 23:20), are not exhausted by John. There will be another coming of the Lord, and aspects of the promise of the messenger are not fulfilled in the Baptist, but look forward to this future coming.

This insight leads naturally to the question, "Are the other fulfillments mentioned in the Bible?" I think we can see at least two, and perhaps three, other steps in this chain of events.

The earliest is recorded in the gospels, at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28ff and parallels). This comes after the Lord's comment about John and Elijah (which in both Matthew and Luke comes earlier; Luke is more likely to be chronological).

Luk 9:30 behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and **Elias** [Elijah]:

Here there is no hesitation, no "if you will receive it." We are told unambiguously, in all three synoptics, that this is Elijah. The association with Moses actually recalls Malachi's prophecy, who also names him along with Elijah:

Mal 4:4-5 Remember ye the law of **Moses** my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you **Elijah** the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

The best candidate for the ultimate fulfillment is in Rev 11. There, the Lord promises two witnesses:

Rev 11:3 And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

The signs with which they are associated in v. 6 recall Elijah and Moses, respectively:

Rev 11:6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy [Elijah]: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues [Moses], as often as they will.

The period of time of their ministry (v. 3), 1260 days or three and a half years, is, according to a Jewish tradition sanctioned by the Lord (Luke 4:25) and James (5:17), the duration of Elijah's ministry. Here, I think, is the ultimate fulfillment of the promised messenger.

But once we recognize the principle of a chain of pointers looking forward to the great fulfillment, we open the door to a more immediate application. Peter exhorts us that we should be

2Pe 3:12 Looking for and ~~hasting unto~~ **hastening** the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Like John, we know that the Lord is coming. We, too, should obey the voice to cry out, warning people of the judgment to come and inviting them to repent, for the coming of the Lord draws near.

9-11, The Testimony of Zion

For the second time the Lord sends forth a messenger. This section forms an alternation AB-AB with vv. 1-8 (Table 1):

A = command to comfort (to two different groups of messengers),

B = the message that is delivered.

In the first panel, the message has two parts: the arrival of the Lord, and his power in withering the grass. In the second panel, a third theme is added to these two: his gracious care to his people, whom he has won by his powerful work.

We will see this same contrast (between God's judgment on all flesh, and his gentle care of his people) in the second part of the chapter, vv. 12-31.

	40:3-8	40:10-11
God is Coming	3-5 Way of the Lord ... glory revealed	9b Behold your God
Power over the People	6-8 Spirit of Lord bloweth	10a Behold ... a strong one ... his arm
Blessing to his Own	(lacking)	10b-11 Behold ... feed his flock

Table 6: The Messages of 40:3-8 and 10-11

9a, The Charge

9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah,

The first message was delivered by anonymous voices to Jerusalem. Who are the messengers and addressees of the second? As the margin of the KJV indicates, there are two alternatives.

- The main text makes Zion and Jerusalem the messengers, and the cities of Judah the addressees.
- The margin envisions a (female) messenger who brings good tidings to Zion, Jerusalem, and Judah. This is the reading followed in Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*.

Isaiah does envision a herald bringing Zion news of her deliverance:

41:27 I will give to Jerusalem **one that bringeth good tidings**.

52:7 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; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

However, in both these texts, the word for “one that bringeth good tidings” (Piel participle of בָּשַׂר) is masculine. In our verse, it is feminine, suggesting that it is in apposition, much like the common expression “daughter Zion,” “daughter Jerusalem.” This reading makes Zion and Jerusalem, who received the message in vv. 3-8, now the new messengers, carrying the message that they have received to others.

This notion of Jerusalem as God's messenger is well established in Isaiah and elsewhere. Recall the initial vision of the Day of the Lord:

Isa 2:3 for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Similar language in 37:32 depicts their population going out to “bear fruit” (v. 31),

For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion:

And in 66:19,

and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, ... and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles

The roots of the Jewish mission to the world are far deeper. Moses' law envisioned an expansionist foreign policy that would spread the knowledge of the Lord throughout all the world (Deut 20:10-20), and the Messiah's kingdom is described as spreading “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Psa 72:8).

Even after the establishment of the church, John anticipates the sealing of 144,000 from the nation Israel, 12,000 from each tribe, to protect them from the ravages of the final tribulation (Rev 7:2-8; 9:4; 14:1). In a time when the vast multitude of Gentile believers perish through persecution (7:9), believing Jews will be God's servants on the earth.

Here, Zion and Jerusalem are given three charges concerning their message.

9 get thee up into the high mountain;--We are not to think of an alpine craig, but of an elevation from which the voice could be more clearly heard over a wide area, while protecting them from harassment. They are to choose a setting that will afford the best opportunity to express their message. Compare

Jotham, the son of Gideon, who “went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim” (300m above the town of Shechem) “and lifted up his voice, and cried” to warn against the self-exaltation of Abimelech (Judges 9:7)

David, who after entering Saul's camp at night but sparing his life, “went over to the other side, and stood on the top of an hill afar off; a great space being between them: and ... cried to the people” to rebuke them for not protecting Saul (1 Sam 26:13-14)

King Abijah of Judah, who “stood up upon mount Zemaraim, which is in mount Ephraim” to rebuke Jeroboam II king of Israel before their great battle (2Ch 13:4)

Our Lord, who “went up into a mountain” to deliver the sermon of Matt 5-7 (Matt 5:1) (though the addressees are expressly said to be the “disciples,” and he may have been withdrawing from the press of the multitude).

lift up thy voice with strength;--From this carefully chosen location, they are to speak loudly, to be heard by as many as possible.

lift it up, be not afraid;--They are to beware the temptation to fear those who hear their message. It is remarkable that such good news as this should meet with resistance, but we see this historically at the Lord's first coming. Entrenched power structures always resist the reign of God, even those who ostensible mission is to serve him. The flesh naturally fears their opposition, but God commands us, “be not afraid.” He who commands us to tell the good news will also protect us.

9b-11, The Message

The first message was punctuated by two crying voices. The second is outlined by three commands to “behold.” The first two recap the messages of the two voices in the first panel, while the third introduces a new theme.

9b, God is Coming

Behold your God!--The first “behold” corresponds to the initial message, in vv. 3-5. The Lord's advent is at hand. In vv. 3-5, his glory is revealed, and we are told that all flesh shall see it, so the command to behold him is appropriate.

10a, His Power over the People

10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him:--The second “behold” describes his powerful work, and reminds us of the manifestation of his power when he blows upon the people, depicted as grass, in v. 7.

Note the difference between the power of his breath and the might of his arm. Withering the grass is an act of judgment, and the weakness of creation requires only that he blow. Indeed, the act of creation was only a matter of fingerwork, like a child playing with a lump of clay:

Psa 8:3 When I consider thy heavens, **the work of thy fingers**, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

But when his salvation is described, it is associated with his mighty power:

Psa 98:1-3 O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: **his right hand, and his holy arm**, hath gotten him the victory. 2 The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. 3 He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

So here, the emphasis may be on his power as seen in redemption, in contrast to the judgment in the first panel. This hint that his power is now focused on salvation rather than judgment is confirmed by

the third “behold,” which goes beyond the two elements of the first panel.

10b-11, His Blessing to his Own

behold, his reward *is* with him, and his **work** pay before him.--This is a very rich expression, and we will linger over it. We will consider first its meaning in Isaiah, then the NT use of the verse, then two other OT idioms that communicate similar ideas, and finally move on to v. 11.

God's Pay and Reward

The parallelism indicates that פְּעֻלָּה, whose base meaning is “work,” should be understood (as often) as the payment for work performed. What is the reward, and who receives it?

A common understanding (e.g., Targum, Calvin, Delitzsch) is that the Lord is bringing a reward to give to his faithful people. This is a true teaching. God does reward people according to their works:

Isa 3:10, 11 Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. 11 Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

2Ti 4:7-8 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day:

However, there is reason to doubt that this is the Lord's meaning in this verse in Isaiah. Invariably in the OT (and often, about 15x) a genitive after “reward” שָׂכָר (or “work” פְּעֻלָּה in the sense of payment) indicates the recipient of the payment. So “his reward” would not mean the reward that the Lord gives to others, but the one he receives for his own labor, the work described in the previous “behold.”

What is his reward for exerting his strength? Isaiah twice more uses this metaphor, and perhaps alludes to it in another place.

In 49:4, the Messiah laments the apparent futility of his work, but places his trust in God:

Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: *yet* surely my judgment *is* with the LORD, and **my work** פְּעֻלָּתי with my God.

“My work,” in parallel with “my judgment,” means (as in 40:10) the pay he receives for his work.

62:11-12 uses the same expression we have here, but goes on to describe the reward:

Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, **his reward** *is* with him, and **his work** pay before him. 12 And they shall call them [that is, the reward], The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.

Similarly, in our present text, this understanding merges nicely with his action in v. 11. His reward is the flock for which he so tenderly cares.

With this in mind, we can hear an echo of this principle in 53:11,

He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my

righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Isa 40:10 and Rev 22:12

The idea that the reward is one that God receives fits well, until we get to the one citation of this verse in the NT, Rev 22:12, just ten verses before the end of the Bible (Table 7). Let's discuss each of these clauses.

Isa 40:10 (MT)	Isa 40:10 (LXX)	Rev 22:12
Behold,	Behold,	Behold,
the Lord GOD will come as a strong one ...	the Lord GOD will come with strength ...	I come quickly ;
his reward <i>is</i> with him,	his reward <i>is</i> with him,	and my reward <i>is</i> with me,
and his work before him.	and the work before him.	to give every man according as his work shall be.

Table 7: Isa 40:10 and Rev 22:12

- “Behold” appears twice in Isa 40:10. Rev 22:12 appears to cite the first of these, because it continues with a description of his coming.
- Both verses describe his coming. The Hebrew text says that he comes “as a strong one,” using the preposition בִּי in an unusual way. The LXX misses this sense, misunderstands the adjective חֲזָק “strong” as the abstract noun חֲזָקָה “strength,” and translates “with strength.” (This kind of mistranslation, showing a lack of Hebrew fluency, is common in the LXX.) One way that a coming “with strength” shows itself is speed, which is the paraphrase that Rev 22:12 adopts.
- The third clause is the most direct quote. Isaiah speaks in the third person, “His reward is with him.” In Revelation, the Lord claims to fulfill this, “my reward is with me.” From Isaiah, we concluded that this refers to the reward he receives for his work. So far, this is consistent with the picture in Rev 19 of the Lord returning with his saints, his redeemed ones.
- The fourth clause, though, brings us pause. It describes, not the pay that the Lord receives for his labor, but the reward he gives his people. The change is due to the LXX.
 - The MT says “his work,” that is, “the pay for his work,” the same expression as 49:4.
 - The LXX drops the suffix and says simply “the work.”
 - Rev 22:12 understands this as the work that people do, and promises that God will give to people according to their work. While Isa 40:10 doesn't teach this, other Scriptures do.

Here is a dilemma. Until we get to Rev, “my reward” always means “the reward that I receive.” Rev 22:12, quoting Isa 40:10, uses the phrase and then goes on to speak of giving to men according to their work. Should we conclude from Rev 22:12, contrary to all earlier usage, that “reward” can take a subjective genitive as well as the more common objective genitive? And since the verse in Revelation is referring to Isa 40:10, should we then bring that meaning back to Isaiah?

Here is a fundamental principle of Bible study. Which direction does meaning flow in the Bible: from earlier texts to later ones, or from later ones back to earlier ones? It's easy for us, who know the NT, to impose its point of view on the OT. But if we put ourselves in the place of the early believers, all they had was the OT. They interpreted the events of the Lord's coming in the light of the Scripture they already had. Luke praises the Bereans (Acts 17:11), not for reinterpreting the OT in light of Paul's teaching, but for validating his teaching in the light of the OT.

If we apply this principle here, we gain a new understanding of Rev 22:12.

- “My reward” should mean the same that genitive phrases with פֶּעֱלָה, שָׂכָר, and μισθός always do, the reward received by the person named. The Lord is referring to ch. 19, the parade of saints accompanying him on his return to earth.
- The end of 22:12 promises that to “every one” in that number he will give a crown according to his labor. The “reward” of 22:12 does not refer to what is given, but to the recipients.

We thus have within a single verse the fundamental principle that those whom God crowns must first be redeemed by him. Our righteousness does not cause our salvation. Our salvation comes first, and then our righteousness emerges as a result. Because we are redeemed into the new covenant, we receive the spirit, who causes us to walk in God's laws (Ezek 36:27). We are first of all his workmanship, created unto good works (Eph 2:10).

God's Inheritance

The Lord's reward for his work is the people whom he redeems. This image of the divine reward is one of several metaphors of possession that describe our relation to the Lord. When the Bible uses several different terms to describe related things, the distinctive meaning of each depends on its relation to the others. We need to understand all of them in order to understand any of them (another important Bible study principle). Let's compare these (Table 8).

Ex 34:9 + many	Inheritance	Permanent
Ex 19:5 + some	Personal treasure	Precious
Is 40:10 + few	Reward, pay	Earned by labor

Table 8: God's People as his Possession

The most common metaphor (more than 20 times⁸) is that God's people are his inheritance נַחֲלָה. Literally, an inheritance is something you receive from your ancestors. It has been in the family for a long time. The noun and corresponding verb are especially common in Numbers and Joshua, where they describe the division of the land to the tribes. Under Israelite law, this kind of inheritance is inalienable. You might borrow against it, but it comes back to you in the Jubilee, unless it is in a walled city. The special attachment that people felt for their inheritance is seen in the example of Naboth. When King Ahab asked him to sell his vineyard in Jezreel, Naboth responded,

1Ki 21:3 The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the **inheritance** of my fathers unto thee.

When the Bible describes us as God's inheritance, it emphasizes the *permanence* of the relation, in both directions, the ancient past and the distant future. We are his ancient, inalienable possession.

- His claim is ancient: God “chose[] us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4).
- It is also inalienable: “no man is able to pluck [us] out of [the] Father's hand (John 10:29).

God's Peculiar Treasure

Less often, we are called God's “peculiar treasure” סִגְלָה. David uses this term in its secular meaning:

1Ch 29:3 Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of **mine**

⁸ See list in the Notes

own proper good סגולה, of gold and silver, *which* I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, ...

David distinguishes his personal treasure from the wealth of the nation that he controls by virtue of his office. This explains the phrasing in Exod 19:5, where God introduces this image for his people:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a **peculiar treasure unto me** above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:

“All the earth” belongs to him by virtue of his office as creator; but he has chosen his covenant people to be his personal property, especially precious to him. The rest of his property he may allow to be dispersed, but this merits his special protection.

Mal 3:16-17 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And **they shall be mine**, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when **I make up my jewels** סגולה [peculiar treasure]; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Isaiah's image is the least common of the three. The picture of **inheritance** emphasizes that our relation to God is permanent. As his **peculiar treasure**, we are especially precious to him. By calling us God's **reward**, Isaiah emphasizes the labor that God has exerted to secure us. He worked hard to deliver us from our sin. Though we belonged to him by ancient decree, he had to purchase us back, like someone who redeems a foreclosed home. His work may explain why we are so precious to him.

This discussion sets “the love of God” in a new light. God's love is not a general attitude of kindly disposition toward the entire world. It is his dedication to his ancient and inalienable possession, his joy in the jewel that he treasures above all else, his pride in the reward for an unspeakable sacrifice that he has made. He will discard everything else that he owns for the sake of this treasure. He will destroy entire nations to preserve us.

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.

In fact, for our sake he sacrificed his own son.

God's love for us is no casual affection, but as described by Solomon in his love poem,

Sol 8:6-7 love *is* strong as death; jealousy *is* cruel as the grave: the coals thereof *are* coals of fire, *which hath a* most vehement flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if *a* man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

We must not demean or cheapen such terrible love by pretending that sinners have a claim on it. Our only response is to bow before it, humbly accept it, and seek to love him who first loved us.

God's Care for his Reward

The following verse shows his care for this reward for which he labored so hard. Isaiah describes his

actions toward the flock as a whole, then two vulnerable members, young lambs and nursing ewes. The description may be inspired by three actions of the shepherd that David describes in Ps 23:2-3a (Table 9):

11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd:--David wrote, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,” seeing that the flock has adequate food.

Isa 40	Ps 23
Feed flock like a shepherd	2a maketh me to lie down in green pastures
Gather lambs ... carry them	3a restoreth my soul
Gently lead those with young	2 leadeth me beside still waters

Table 9: Isa 40:11 and Psa 23:2-3

he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom,--David wrote, “He restoreth my soul,” literally, “brings my life back again.” One is reminded of our Savior's picture of the shepherd's care for the one lost sheep who has strayed away from the flock. The shepherd seeks it out. Then he carries it back to the fold (Luke 15:5), rather than driving it before him, lest it stray off again.

and shall gently lead those that are with young.--Cognates of this rare verb all have to do with drinking or moisture, suggesting that the uses in Ps 23:2 “he leadeth me beside the still waters” and Isa 49:10 “by springs of water shall he guide them” are prototypical. “Those ... with young” are literally the nursing ewes, with special need for abundant water. The Lord attends to their needs and ensures that they have adequate water to drink.

The “gentleness” of our version recalls Jacob's concern for his flocks, and in particular the nursing females, when he met Esau,

Gen 33:13 My lord knoweth that the children *are* tender, and the flocks and herds with young *are* with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.

The conjunction of the Lord's redeeming work in v. 10 and his gentle care of his redeemed people in v. 11 anticipates our Savior's identification of himself as “the good shepherd,” who “lays down his life for the sheep.”

12-31, The Source of Peace

This section is a threefold alternation, *AB-AB-AB* (Table 10). The second and third panels are formally

	12-17	18-24	25-31
Incomparable God	Who ... Who ... with Whom	To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?	To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.
God is ...	Alone	Without peer on earth	Without peer in heaven
Weak Creation		Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood	Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard
Consequence	Nations ignored	Princes destroyed	Israel strengthened

Table 10: Alternation in 40:12-31

integrated by shared incipits in both *A* and *B*. The first panel and the second are linked by theme, as well as a modified incipit in the first element.

Across all three panels, *A* asks “who,” to show the incomparability of the Lord. In the first panel he is solitary, without helper; in the second, and third, he is contrasted with earthly and heavenly rivals.

B emphasizes the weakness of the nations in the face of this incomparable God. In the first two panels the focus is on the pagan nations and their princes, who are inconsequential and transient. In the third, the weak nation is Israel, but instead of ignoring them or destroying them, God will strengthen them.

Note a structural contrast.

- In terms of structure, the last two panels are much more similar than the first two, because of the closer verbal parallels in both *A* and *B*.
- But in terms of theme, the first two go together, emphasizing the destruction of the nations.

The effect is to throw a spotlight on his blessing to Jacob.

12-14, The Incomparable Lord: Unaccompanied

The first claim to the Lord's incomparability is that he is unaccompanied. Isaiah develops this with two claims, stated as rhetorical questions.

1. He created the world with so little effort that it looks like mere fingerwork (v. 12).
2. No one advised him in his work. He did it alone (vv. 13-14).

12, Creation as God's Simple Work

Four statements emphasize how trivial the creation was from God's perspective. The rhetorical questions expect the answer, “Yahweh.”

12 Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,--70% of the earth's surface is covered by water. The total volume of the oceans is on the order of $1.4E9 \text{ km}^3$, while the volume of the continents above sea level is about $9E7$, more than 10x smaller. Yet the Lord is pictured as cupping the world's oceans in his palm.

and meted out heaven with the span,--The ancients had four units of length used in building, all derived from the body. Four fingers made a palm, three palms made a span (the distance from the thumb to the little finger in the stretched-out hand), and two spans made a cubit (the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger). We can visualize the builder holding out his fingers to measure the gap in a door, or extending his elbow to measure the length of a wall. When God wants to measure the heavens, he doesn't even have to use his full cubit, just the span of one hand.

and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure,--literally, “a third,” only a fraction of some conventional measure. We don't know what the measure is, but whatever it is, the dust of the entire earth won't fill it up.

and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?--Today on the highway we have

scales that can weigh tractor-trailers, but in antiquity scales were something that a merchant in the market would use to weigh out spices or vegetables. Again, the emphasis is that from God's perspective, the largest things in creation are tiny.

13-14, He Rules without Advisor

The creation is trivial before the Lord. Conversely, he himself is unsearchable by anything in his creation. Isaiah makes this point with two parallel verses. Both begin with the interrogative pronoun “Who?”, and both end with the verb “caused him to know” ידעינו. The first verse asks two questions; the second amplifies them into five. This time, the questions anticipate the answer, “Nobody else.”

The theme in these two verses is based on the analogy of a human monarch, who is surrounded by advisors. Not so the king of the world.

13 Who hath directed meted out the Spirit of the LORD,--The word translated “directed” in our version is the same one rendered “meted out” in v. 12, and links this question to the previous one. “Spirit” here has the sense of “mind, intelligence,” emphasizing that God is a cognitive being. Using the same verb and object, Prov 16:2 declares,

All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.

But no one can measure God's intelligence, or the scope of his understanding.

or being his counsellor hath taught him caused him to know?--Earthly kings have counsellors to advise them. Examples in the Bible include Ahithophel, David's counsellor (1 Chr 27:33), who defected to Absalom, and the seven counsellors of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:14) who join him in sending Ezra on his mission. The Babylonian and Ugaritic epics imagine the gods sitting in counsel, arguing with one another over what course of action to take.⁹ In Babylon, Marduk, the high God, receives his authority by decree of the council:¹⁰

O Marduk, you are indeed our avenger.
We have granted you kingship over the universe entire.
When you sit in Assembly your word shall be supreme.
Your weapons shall not fail; they shall smash your foes!

...

"Go and cut off the life of Tiamat.
May the winds bear her blood to places undisclosed."
Bel's¹¹ destiny thus fixed, the gods, his fathers,
Caused him to go the way of success and attainment.

There is no such discussion in heaven. No one is wise enough to be God's counselor, and no vote is needed to endow him with authority. God does convene a council, as in 1 Kings 22:19-22. But in the Babylonian council, the members empower Marduk and send him into battle with Tiamat; in 1 Kings it is YHWH who commands his angels, who only obey his word:

⁹ <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/mshv1n1dcoverview.pdf>

¹⁰ Enuma Elish, tablet 4

¹¹ A title, “Lord,” applied to Marduk.

Psa 103:20-21 Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. 21 Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.

14 With whom took he counsel,--This question summarizes the last question in the previous verse, and puts it under the microscope for closer examination. It opens with the theme of counsel from that question, and ends with the same verb, "cause to know." The clauses in this second question tell what it would mean to be a counselor of the Lord.

and who instructed him,--The verb means, "to cause to understand, to cause to discern." The kings of the OT routinely assembly spiritual leaders to guide them. Of **Uzziah**, the Chronicler writes (2 Chr 26:4-5),

he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. 5 And he sought God in the days of **Zechariah**, who instructed *him* in the fear¹² of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

Jehoash, the boy-king installed and protected by the **Jehoiada** the priest, relied on his mentor:

2Ki 12:2 And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

Even Ahab had his court prophets (1 Kings 22). The Lord needs no such an instructor. No one enabled him to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad.

and taught him in the path of judgment,--The "path of judgment" is the way of life that conforms to God's standards. Earth's kings must study God's law to learn how they are to live:

Deu 17:18-19 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites: 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

Not so the Lord. No one has to teach him the righteous way.

and taught him knowledge,--We need teachers to instruct us:

Ecc 12:9 And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still **taught the people knowledge**; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs.

God teaches man knowledge:

Psa 94:10 He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? **he that teacheth man knowledge**,

Psa 119:66 **Teach me** good judgment and **knowledge**: for I have believed thy commandments.

But no one can instruct God.

and shewed to him caused him to know the way of understanding?--Jethro charged Moses to instruct the people in this way:

¹² BHS has "the visions of God" rather than "the fear of God," but there is mss variation at this point.

Exo 18:20 And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them **[cause them to know] the way** wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.

Moses in turn asked God,

Exo 33:13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me **[cause me to know] now thy way**, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight:

David recognized that God answered Moses prayer,

Psa 103:7 He **made known his ways** unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

And he himself prayed,

Psa 25:4 Shew me **[cause me to know] thy ways**, O LORD; teach me thy paths.

Psa 143:8 Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: **cause me to know the way** wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

He is the one who shows us the path in in which we should walk. No one can thus instruct him.

15-17, Weak Creation: The Nations Ignored

v. 12 dealt with the inanimate creation. v. 13 introduced the idea that God is a king, which presumes that he has subjects. Now we turn to the nations, the objects of his rule. What do they mean to him?

This paragraph is chiasmic (Table 11). It begins and ends with threefold references to the nations, rejecting them as trivial. In the middle is the description of a massive sacrifice, far exceeding the best that these nations could offer to the Lord, but utterly inadequate to the majesty of the one with whom they have to do. They have no way even to get the attention or merit the favor of their creator.

3x insignificant	15: a drop dust very little	17: nothing an end vanity
No offering	16: too little wood for a pyre too few animals for an offering	

Table 11: Chiasm in 40:15-17

15 Behold, the nations are as a drop of [from] a bucket,--The rare name for "bucket" גִּלְיָ is derived from

the verb גָּלָה meaning "to draw," referring to the process of hauling water out of a well in a leather bucket at the end of a rope. The water you care about is inside the bucket, but inevitably some drips from the outside, the "drop from a bucket." At best, you ignore it; at worst, it muddies the ground at your feet, causing an annoyance. The nations are like this worthless seepage

and are counted as the small dust of the balance:--When you weigh something in a balance, it's important not to have anything extra on one of the pans, but as the pans hang in the shop, they gather dust, and it's so light that it doesn't affect the transaction. Again, it's something that can be ignored.

behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.--The isles are the coastlands, the distant nations. Isaiah may be continuing the image of the balance: God weighs them and finds them too light to matter.

16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.--What could these nations bring to merit God's attention? Lebanon was renowned for its dense forests

and towering cedars. Imagine that you could cut down all those trees for fuel for your altar, and slay every beast to form the sacrifice. That would not suffice for a sacrifice to one as majestic and sovereign as the Lord. The nations have no way to earn God's favor.

Now we return to another triplet dismissing the nations as insignificant, using three words that Isaiah employs more than any other OT book.

17 All nations before him are as nothing אֵין.--This word is the common Hebrew term for non-existence.

and they are counted to him less than nothing אַפֶּס.--This noun is related to a verb meaning, “come to an end.” It appears in the common expression, “ends of the earth.” They are exhausted, depleted, done.

and vanity תְּהוּ.--This is the word from Gen 1:2, “without form.” They are like the uncreated earth; their vaunted efforts at sophisticated society and great cities are reckoned by God as formlessness.

This first panel casts down the gauntlet to human pride. God created the world without us. He rules it without any need for our input. In his eyes, we are nothing, and even if we could offer all the world to him, it would be insufficient to make any impression on him.

18-20, The Incomparable God: Idols

This and the next panel both claim that God is incomparable. This panel asserts his incomparability to anything on earth, that is, a man-made idol.

18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?--What is God like? One common answer in antiquity was to prepare an image and point to that. But such a likeness is absurd, for it is created by the very ones who profess to claim it as their creator.

19 ... a graven image,--The Hebrew begins with this word, as though proposing it as the answer to the previous question: “The idol?” It then goes on to describe this supposed likeness to God.

This is the first in a chain of parodies of idols that pervades the first part of the trilogy (41:6-7; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:1-7; 48:5). 46:5-7 directly echoes this section, starting with the challenge, “To whom then will ye liken me?”, and continuing with the parody of the idol.

19 The workman ... the goldsmith ...--The whole point in the first panel was that God is alone. No one else joined him in the work of creation; no one advises him in his rule over the universe. By contrast, the idol depends on its worshipers to bring it into existence.

19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold,--The most attractive aspect of the idol, the gold of which it is fashioned, is only an overlay. At its heart it is some base metal, or wood, or stone. Its value is only skin deep.

and casteth silver chains.--The word “chains” appears only here. These may be either ornamental or a means to suspend or stabilize the idol, lest it fall over. The root of the word appears to have the meaning “to bind, lock, restrain” (cf. Nah 3:10). In contrast to the absolutely independent creator of the world, the idol is chained, locked up.

20 He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot;--Not everybody can afford to make an idol of gold or silver. In this case, he will have to settle for wood. At

least, he'll try to choose one that won't rot. Here, the glory of the god depends entirely on the status of the worshiper, rather than the other way around.

he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image,--As with the image in precious metals, its beauty depends on the skill of the craftsman. It is creature, not creator.

that shall not be moved.--The verb refers, not to purposeful movement from one place to another, but to shaking or tottering. The customer wants to be sure that his idol will be stable, and not fall over. 41:7 makes the same point:

Isa 41:7 So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, *and* he that smootheth *with* the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, *It is* ready for the soldering: and he fastened it with nails, **that it should not be moved.**

21-24, Weak Creation: Princes Blown Away

21 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?--This verse has two interesting structural features (Table 12).

1. Delitzsch observes the chiasm, with the source of knowledge in the center (hearing, being told), and the result on the outside (knowing, understanding).
2. The second panel adds something to the first, the idea that both the telling and the resulting knowledge go back to the very beginning.

Have ye not known?	have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?
have ye not heard?	hath it not been told you from the beginning?

Table 12: Chiasm in 40:21

The first point emphasizes a pervasive point throughout Scripture: our knowledge of God comes through the use of language, not by abstract reasoning or by feeling. Nature tells us enough to condemn us (Rom 1), but salvation comes by the Word of God.

Luk 8:11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

Rom 10:14 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?

Rom 10:17 So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1Pe 1:23-25 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24 For all flesh *is* as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

With regard to the second point, God communicated with our first parents the nature of his creation and their relation to it. Religion is not a late-comer, a recent development in human evolution. The knowledge of God has been intrinsic since the creation.

Isaiah's claim anticipates Paul's argument in Romans 1,

Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being

understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead;

The assertion of God's strength in vv. 12-14 emphasized two aspects of his power: over the inanimate creation (v. 12), and as king over the world (13-14, developed in the deprecation of the nations in 15-17). We see the same two aspects in the next three couplets (Table 13). Three

Inanimate Creation	12 waters ... heaven ... dust ... mountains ... hills	22a above circle of earth 22c stretch out heaven
People & Nations	13-14 king w/out counselors 15-17 nations are nothing	22b inhabitants grasshoppers 23 bring princes to nought, maketh judges vanity

Table 13: Two aspects of God's power

of the clauses (1, 3, 4) refer to the inanimate creation (“earth,” “heavens”), while the other three (2, 5, 6) focus on people (“inhabitants,” “princes,” “judgments”). (Does Paul perhaps recall these in his distinction between God's power and his Godhead?)

22 It is he that sitteth upon above the circle of the earth,--“Circle of the earth” refers to the horizon. Compare the use of the term in Prov 8:27,

he set a **compass** upon the face of the depth

To a farmer in the field, the horizon looks like a straight line. But at sea out of sight of land, or from the peak of a mountain, it is equidistant in every direction, and forms a circle. From his vantage point in heaven, far above the earth, it appears as a circle to him.

and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers;--Another result of the great elevation from which he views the earth is that we become insects in his sight. Note the introduction of people to the discussion. The metaphor recalls the report of the spies,

Num 13:33 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, *which come* of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

If only the inhabitants of the world would fear the Lord as much as the spies feared the sons of Anak!

he that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain,--“Curtain,” related to “very little thing” in v. 15, has the sense of a thin gauze, a very fine fabric. This is no heavy canvas, but a gossamer veil, which he tosses about with ease.

and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:--To us, the heavens appear permanent. God treats them the way a Bedouin would a tent, as something to spread out and then roll up at his discretion.

Psa 102:25-26 Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens *are* the work of thy hands. 26 They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed:

23 That bringeth the princes to nothing;--With the third couplet, he has moved completely from his power over the inanimate creation to his authority over people. This couplet recalls v. 17 with “nothing” and “vanity,” the first and third of the terms he uses there of the nations.

The princes, those who think they rule, are counted as non-existence before him.

he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.--A judge in the Bible is more than one branch of a

divided government. It refers to someone who has responsibility for ordering the society as a whole. To judge is “to exercise the processes of government” (Culver, TWOT). Compare the judges in the book of Judges, who not only ruled the people but led in their defense. Solomon also uses the term to sum up all his functions as king:

1Ki 3:9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to **judge** thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to **judge** this thy so great a people?

To call judges “vanity” תהו, confusion, disorder, is to say that all their efforts at ordering society amount to nothing.

24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth:--He continues the theme of God's judgment on the judges with an agricultural metaphor. The people are compared with cultivated plants, which bring the hope of fruitfulness. But under God's judgment, the plantation will not succeed.

The agricultural vocabulary echoes Isaiah's earlier imagery of Israel as the Lord's vineyard,

5:1-2, 7 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: 2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and **planted** it with the choicest vine, ... 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant:

Isaiah does not use “sow” of Israel, but he does use the word in 17:10 to describe setting out cuttings, which fits in with the metaphor of the vineyard.

The harvests were a disappointment, and the Lord gives the vineyard over to wild beasts. But this judgment is not permanent. He promises a fruitful plant from the stock and root of Jesse.

11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch [**stock**] shall grow out of his **roots**:

And he promises that one day the vineyard will bring rejoicing to the heavenly husbandman.

27:2-6 In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. 3 I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest *any* hurt it, I will keep it night and day. ... 6 He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.

God prospers the planting of Israel. But he dooms the gentile plantations.

and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.--Here is why the gentile vineyard fails. God blows upon it and dries it up. The imagery recalls the judgment on the people as grass, in vv. 6-8.

25-26, The Incomparable Holy One: Heavenly Bodies

25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.--Again, he is incomparable, but this time the comparison is heavenly rather than earthly.

Note that the Lord now introduces himself into the discussion. Up to this point, Isaiah has been

describing the Lord. Now the Holy One steps to the front of the stage and addresses the people directly.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold—The Hebrew accents tell us to take this all as one clause. “Behold” is a parallel command to “lift up your eyes” (רָא, not הִנֵּה). The most sacred objects on earth were unworthy of comparison with the Lord. How about the heavenly host, who have formed the heart of almost every ancient pantheon?

He highlights four aspects of God's superiority over the heavenly host.

who hath created these things,--He brought them into existence. Like the idol, they are themselves created, and must take second place to their creator.

that bringeth out their host by number:--The stars were considered innumerable. Recall God's promise to Abraham.

Gen 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Yet God counts them one by one as he creates them.

he calleth them all by names—To name something is one step beyond counting. It presumes that the one giving the name has authority over what is named. Thus, in Gen 1, God gives names to the great divisions of the cosmos that he creates:

Gen 1:5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

Gen 1:8 And God called the firmament Heaven.

Gen 1:10 And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas:

But he assigns dominion over the animals to man,

Gen 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

And so he leaves to man the task of naming them:

Gen 2:19-20 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof. 20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field;

Recall also how the pagan kings who dominate Israel rename their people:

2Ki 23:34 And Pharaohnechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim

2Ki 24:17 And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

Dan 1:6-7 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel *the name*

of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

Not only does he create the heavenly bodies, number them (as man cannot), and name them to show his authority. He also sustains them.

by the greatness of his might, for that *he is strong in power; not one faileth.*--We are accustomed to assign the ongoing operation of the universe to impersonal laws of nature, but the Scriptures insist that God sustains them moment by moment. What we call laws are simply generalizations over his moment-by-moment care.

Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist [hold together].

Heb 1:3 Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

How futile it is, then, to worship the heavenly host, and ignore the one who is sovereign over them.

27-31, Weak Creation: Jacob Restored

At this point we have had two cycles emphasizing the incomparability of the Lord and the weakness of creation. In both of the first two cycles, the weakness of creation is seen in the God's attitude toward the nations. At best, he views them as nothing (vv. 15-17), unable to get his attention even by sacrificing all the animals in Lebanon. At worst, they invite his judgment (vv. 21-24), and he withers them with his breath. We are prepared to hear a third round of condemnation on the nations. Instead, the prophet turns our attention to the chosen nation, and anticipates God's help in their weakness.

The argument is developed in three stages:

- God's people are weak and discouraged (27)
- God is powerful (28).
- Therefore he can empower his people (29-31)

27, God's people are weak

27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel,--The singular number is telling. Sometimes, God refers to the nation as plural:

14:1 For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set **them** in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with **them**

But here it is singular, as though he were addressing the man Jacob rather than the nation. This ambiguousness in number has roots as far back as Deuteronomy, where Moses often alternates between singular and plural in addressing the people, e.g.,

Deu 12:1 These *are* the statutes and judgments, which **ye** shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of **thy** fathers giveth **thee** to possess it, all the days that **ye** live upon the earth.

Deu 12:5 But unto the place which the LORD **your** God shall choose out of all **your** tribes to put his name there, *even* unto his habitation shall **ye** seek, and thither **thou** shalt come:

Deu 12:7 And there **ye** shall eat before the LORD **your** God, and **ye** shall rejoice in all that **ye** put your hand unto, **ye** and **your** households, wherein the LORD **thy** God hath blessed **thee**.

This grammatical ambiguity points to a very deep theological mystery, the relation between a people and its head. This mystery is anticipated in the one-flesh relationship that exists in the smallest social group, man and wife:

Gen 1:27 So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he **him**; male and female created he **them**.

It reaches its climax in Rom 5, which sums up all of humanity under two men, Adam and Jesus the Messiah:

Rom 5:17-19 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Isaiah is a major stepping stone along the way, with his image of the Servant of the Lord, who is both the nation Israel and also the promised Messiah.

My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?--Jacob, no less than the nations, exhibits weakness in comparison with God's incomparability. Remember that Isaiah is writing for the captives in Babylon. From their perspective, God regards Israel just as he does the nations in vv. 15-17. Captive Jacob feels that in God's eyes he, like the nations in v. 17, is nothing, finished, utter confusion and emptiness.

The use of the singular suggests that there is a parallel between the nation's sense of being abandoned in Babylon, and the Servant's coming suffering. Compare the lament of the Servant in 49:4,

Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: *yet* surely my judgment *is* with the LORD, and my work with my God.

Our Savior on the tree felt forsaken by his Father, just as Israel did in Babylon. And just as the Lord brought the nation back from the suffering that sin imposed on it, so he brought our Savior back from the dead. The difference is that while Israel suffers for its own sins, the Servant suffers for the sins of his people, as 53:4-6 spells out in explicit detail.

28, God is Powerful

28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard,--This question echoes v. 21, but with two changes.

- There, we had a chiasm, with hearing at the center and the result of hearing on the outside. Here, we have only one of each. This chiasm has been folded, a common structural pattern in

the OT.¹³

- The second person plural is replaced with the second person singular. “Jacob” and “Israel,” though conventional names for the nation as a whole, are personified as a single individual.¹⁴ Isaiah is preparing us for his mysterious identification of the nation and the Messiah.

From this verse through the end of the chapter, Isaiah plays with words for strength and weakness. In particular, he builds on word families for “faint” and “be weary.”

that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth,--To emphasize God's power, he highlights three of his characteristics.

- “Everlasting God” emphasizes his eternity. He has always existed, and always will. There has never been a time when he was not, and there never will be such a time. Even when Israel is in captivity, he is still God.
- “Creator of the ends of the earth” builds on his omnipresence. He is not only present throughout the world; he actually created it all. So no matter how far the people are carried from their homeland, they are never spatially beyond God's reach.
- “Lord,” between these two, is the title יהוה, which emphasizes God's covenant relation to his people. This eternal, omnipresent God is their God.

fainteth not, neither is weary?--He never runs out of strength.

This is the first of three repetitions of this pair of words, which tie the argument together.

- God never faints or is weary (here).
- Even the strongest of his people do (30).
- Those who wait on him replace their weakness for his strength (31).

there is no searching of his understanding.--Not only is he always strong, but he always knows how to use that strength.

29-31, God empowers his people.

v. 29 is a summary: God empowers the weak. Then 30 revisits the theme of the weak, and 31 the theme of their empowerment.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.--This verse, in summary, brings the previous two paragraphs together.

- “The faint,” “them that have no might,” are the children of Israel in v. 27, lamenting that God has forsaken them.
- The all-powerful God of v. 28 commits himself to give them power and increase their strength.

¹³ My dissertation on Ezekiel discusses numerous instances of this pattern.

¹⁴ See the notes for a review of Isaiah's usage in this regard. While the singular number is more common in Isaiah for Jacob and Israel, it is by no means universal.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:--One might expect the old men to be weak. But the young are full of vigor. The second word in particular often refers to young military men.

31 But they that wait upon the LORD—Here is the secret to strength: to wait on the Lord.

The word is sometimes translated “to hope,” emphasizing an attitude of mind. But it really combines this with the temporal aspect. It is not just hoping that the Lord will act, but making back-up plans “just in case.” Nor is it waiting casually, “waiting for the Lord,” while attending to other things. The expression means to fix our mind on the Lord, trust in him alone, refuse to take refuge in substitutes, and then, as long as he delays, remain focused on him.

The word is used in a secular sense in 5:2 of the vintner:

And he fenced [the vineyard], and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he **looked** that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

After laboring to prepare the vineyard, the vintner waits expectantly. Both time and attitude are involved. The grapes won't grow overnight. He has to wait. But he doesn't just go off and do other things. He waits expectantly, eagerly, with anticipation.

shall renew their strength;--The verb means “to exchange, to replace,” like a suit of clothes. The natural man relies on his own resources for strength, and when they are exhausted, so is he. The believer's strength comes from the Lord, and when it comes to an end, we go back to the source for a new supply.

they shall mount up with wings as eagles;--Our version interprets this clause as the first in a three-part series “mount up, run, walk.” But the Hebrew accentuation groups this clause with “renew their strength.” “Wing” is better rendered “pinions, wing feathers,” and is most simply understood as the direct object of the verb, which can mean “to sprout.” Thus we can render, “They shall push out new wing-feathers as the eagles do.”

Like most birds, eagles molt periodically, replacing old feathers with new ones.¹⁵ In maturing they go through four different sets of feathers, and renew their flight features about once a year. This natural process is an image of the believer's renewal of strength.

they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.--Note the repetition of the verbs “faint” and “be weary.” First (v. 28) we were told that the Lord never does this. Then we learned (v. 30) that even those who are strongest in the flesh experience weariness and fainting. Now those who wait on the Lord are delivered from their natural weakness and enjoy his strength.

Notes

The Lord's Return to Zion

Isa 59:20 20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression

¹⁵ <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/eagle/ExpertAnswer09.html>

in Jacob, saith the LORD.

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~~ return to Zion.

Way of xxx

When xxx is a place, the expression means, “the road to xxx.” (Thus Dorsey.) For example:

Gen 3:24 and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.--The angel protected the road that led to the tree of life, to keep people from returning there

Gen 24:62 And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi;

Gen 48:7 Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.

But when the genitive is a person, it means, “the road over which xxx travels.” Here there are two varieties.

Some of the uses are metaphorical, describing a manner of life. This usage is very common in the wisdom literature.

Gen 18:19 they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; Jud 2:22

1Ki 15:26 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin. Common expression in Kings to indicate following the example of an earlier king.

Psa 1:1 nor standeth in the way of sinners

But there are uses (less common) to describe a physical road as well, designated by those who use it:

Num 21:1 king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; --that is, the road that the spies had used to explore the land in ch. 13

Jdg 8:11 And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah,--perhaps a well known migratory route for the nomads of the area

Jos 23:14 And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth—the road that everybody must one day travel; also 1 Kings 2:2

Exod 23:20?

All four gospels cite Mal 3:1 of the Baptist, but with the addition of the phrase, “before thy face.” Let's look at two kinds of parallels:

Sending + messenger + before the face

Abraham to Eliezer:

Gen 24:7 The LORD God of heaven ... shall send **his angel before thee**, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

Gen 24:27 And he said, Blessed *be* the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: *I being* in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.

Gen 24:40 And he said unto me, The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee,

Jacob to Esau: Gen 32:3 And Jacob **sent messengers before him** to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

God at the Exodus:

Exo 23:20-21 Behold, **I send an Angel before thee**, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name *is* in him.

Exo 33:2 And **I will send an angel before thee**; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:

Exo 33:14-16 And he said, **My presence** shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest. 15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence. 16 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? *is it* not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

Prophecy of the Baptist

Mal 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me:

God sends an angel

In addition to the instances included above, these fall into three classes

Exodus (parallel to 23:20 and 33:2)

Num 20:16 And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and **sent an angel**, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt:

Angel of Judgment against Sin

1Ch 21:15 And **God sent an angel** unto Jerusalem to destroy it:

2Ch 32:21 And **the LORD sent an angel**, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria.

Psa 78:49 He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by **sending evil angels among them**.

Pro 17:11 An evil *man* seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel **messenger shall be sent** against him.

The Nation as God's Messenger (cf. mission in Isa 42:1ff)

Isa 42:19 Who *is* blind, but my servant? or deaf, as **my messenger that I sent**? who *is* blind as *he that*

Isaiah 40

is perfect, and blind as the LORD'S servant?

Isaiah's Voice and John the Baptist

Isa 40	Other OT	Matt 3	Mark 1	Luke 3	John 1
		1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.	1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;	3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;	22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? 23 He said,
		3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying,	2 As it is written in the prophets,	4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying,	as said the prophet Esaias.
	Exo 23:20 Behold, I send an Angel מלאך before thy face , to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Mal 3:1 Behold, I send my messenger מלאכי, and he shall prepare the way before me :	(11:10 For this is <i>he</i> , of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face , which shall prepare thy way before thee .)	Behold, I send my messenger before thy face , which shall prepare thy way before thee .	(7:27 This is <i>he</i> , of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face , which shall prepare thy way before thee .)	
3 The voice of him that crieth, In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.		The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.	3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.	The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.	I <i>am</i> the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord,
4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:				5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways <i>shall be</i> made smooth;	
5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see <i>it</i> together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken <i>it</i> . 52:10 and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God .				6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God .	
6-8 All flesh <i>is</i> grass, and all the goodliness thereof <i>is</i> 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 <i>is</i> grass. 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:		11 ... he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and <i>with</i> fire: 12 Whose fan <i>is</i> in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.		16 ... he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan <i>is</i> in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.	
			4 John did baptize in the wilderness , and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.		

God's People as His Possession

Peculiar Treasure נגולה

The fundamental concept is the personal property of a monarch (as opposed to the wealth of the realm, which he controls by virtue of his office). Illustrated by David's contribution to the temple,

1Ch 29:3 Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of **mine own proper good**, of gold and silver, *which* I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house,

God claims Israel as his peculiar treasure.

Exod 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a **peculiar treasure unto me** above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:

Deu 7:6 For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a **special people** unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

Deu 14:2 For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a **peculiar people** unto himself, above all the nations that *are* upon the earth.

Deu 26:18 And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his **peculiar people**, as he hath promised thee,

Psa 135:4 For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, *and* Israel for his **peculiar treasure**.

Mal 3:16-17 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my **jewels [peculiar treasure]**; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Inheritance נחלה

The major themes of inheritance are ancient, inalienable possession that passes by succession within a family. Illustrated by Naboth's attitude toward his vineyard.

1Ki 21:3 And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the **inheritance** of my fathers unto thee.

This attitude may be why Esau is so deprecated for despising his birthright, which reflected the right of inheritance.

The Land

Exo 15:17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of **thine inheritance**, *in* the place, O LORD, *which* thou hast made for thee to dwell in, *in* the Sanctuary, O Lord, *which* thy hands have established.

Jer 2:7 And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made **mine heritage** an abomination.

Israel

Exo 34:9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it *is* a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for **thine inheritance**.

Deu 4:20 But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, *even* out of Egypt, to be unto him a **people of inheritance**, as *ye are* this day.

Deu 9:26, 29 I prayed therefore unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and **thine inheritance**, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ... 29 Yet they are thy people and **thine inheritance**, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm.

Deu 32:9 For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of **his inheritance**.

1Sa 10:1 Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured *it* upon [Saul's] head, and kissed him, and said, *Is it* not because the LORD hath anointed thee *to be* captain over **his inheritance**?

1Sa 26:19 for they have driven me [David] out this day from abiding in **the inheritance of the LORD**, saying, Go, serve other gods. *Probably, we should understand בנחלת יהוה in the sense "among the inheritance of the Lord," that is, among his people. If they could induce him to serve other gods, he would no longer be numbered among the Lord's inheritance-people. But see Exod 15:17 and Jer 2:7, above.*

2Sa 14:16 For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man that would destroy me and my son together out of **the inheritance of God**.

2Sa 20:19 I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up **the inheritance of the LORD**?

2Sa 21:3 Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless **the inheritance of the LORD**?

1Ki 8:51, 53 For they *be* thy people, and **thine inheritance**, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron: ... 53 For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, *to be* **thine inheritance**,

Psa 28:9 Save thy people, and bless **thine inheritance**: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.

Psa 33:12 Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD; *and* the people *whom* he hath chosen for **his own inheritance**.

Psa 74:2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of **thine inheritance**, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

Psa 78:71 From following the ewes great with young he brought [David] to feed Jacob his

people, and **Israel his inheritance**.

Psa 94:14 For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake **his inheritance**.

Isa 19:25 Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed *be* Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and **Israel mine inheritance**.

Isa 47:6 I was wroth with my people, I have polluted **mine inheritance**, and given them into thine [Babylon's] hand:

Isa 63:17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, *and* hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of **thine inheritance**.

Mic 7:14 Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of **thine heritage**, which dwell solitarily *in* the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed *in* Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.

Mic 7:18 Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of **his heritage**? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

Gentiles

Psa 2:8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* **thine inheritance**, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.

Psa 82:8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for **thou shalt inherit** all nations.

Eph 1:11 in [Christ] we have **been inherited** [Gk]

Payment שכר, פעלה

Related to his redemptive work.

Isa 49:4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: *yet* surely my judgment *is* with the LORD, and **my work** with my God.

Isa 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Isa 62:11-12 Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, **his reward is** with him, and **his work** before him. 12 And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.

Grammatical Number of Jacob and Israel

In 40:27, Isaiah uses the singular number to describe Jacob and Israel. How common is this? Let's collect the verses in which he conjoins the two names, and see what number he uses.

Side note: is there a hint here to the function of the *Numeruswechsel* in Deuteronomy? Is this alternation perhaps a factor in how the Spirit leads the prophet to contemplate the relation between the

people of God as a group and a single individual who represents them?

Relate this to the broader issue of the One and the Many, as seen also in the Godhead and in the marriage union (see notes on Gen 1:26-27).

Singular (14x, 15x with emendation in 41:14)

10:20 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again **stay** upon him that smote them; but shall **stay** upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

40:27 Why **sayest thou**, O Jacob, and **speakest**, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? 28 Hast **thou** not known? hast **thou** not heard,

41:8 But **thou**, Israel, *art* my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

43:1 But now thus saith the LORD that created **thee**, O Jacob, and he that formed **thee**, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed **thee**, I have called *thee* by **thy** name; **thou art** mine.

43:22 But **thou** hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but **thou** hast been weary of me, O Israel.

43:28-44:2 Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches. 44:1 Yet now **hear**, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen [sg]: 2 Thus saith the LORD that made **thee**, and formed **thee** from the womb, *which* will help **thee**; **Fear** not, O Jacob, my servant; and **thou**, Jesurun, **whom** I have chosen.

44:21 Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for **thou art** my servant: I have formed **thee**; **thou art** my servant: O Israel, **thou** shalt not be forgotten of me.

44:23-24 Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done *it*: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel. 24 Thus saith the LORD, **thy** redeemer, and he that formed **thee** from the womb,

45:4 For Jacob my **servant's** sake, and Israel mine **elect**, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

48:12 **Hearken** unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I *am* he; I *am* the first, I also *am* the last.

49:5 And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb *to be* his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not **gathered**, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

49:7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, *and his* Holy One,

44:5-6 One shall say, I *am* the LORD'S; and another shall call *himself* by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe *with* his hand unto the LORD, and surname *himself* by the name of Israel. 6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and **his** redeemer the LORD of hosts;

Plural: 6x

9:8 The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. 9 And all the people **shall know**

14:1 For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set **them** in **their** own land: and the strangers shall be joined with **them**, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

42:24 Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the LORD, he against whom we have sinned? for **they** would not walk in his ways, neither were **they** obedient unto his law. [but see v, 25, "him," in chiasmic correspondence with 24a]

Isaiah 40

46:3 **Hearken** unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne *by me* from the belly, which are carried from the womb:

48:1 **Hear** ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.

49:6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved [pl] of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Mixed

27:6 He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud [singular], and fill [plural] the face of the world with fruit.

41:14 Fear not, thou [singular] worm Jacob, *and* ye men [plural] of Israel; I will help thee [singular], saith the LORD, and thy [singular] redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. [Singulars are feminine, to agree with “worm”] (but מתי can be repointed “my dead one,” as in Gen 23:4, 8, 13, leaving us with a pure singular).

No Data

29:23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.