

# OpenTheo

## Isaiah - Blossoming Desert and Birth of a Nation



### Isaiah - Steve Gregg

This discussion delves into how Israel transformed from a fruit-bearing nation to a barren wasteland due to God's judgement. The speaker highlights the significance of Israel's role in producing fruit for justice and righteousness in the world, and how it failed to do so, resulting in destruction and wilderness. The discussion also touches on the birth of a new nation, referencing how Jesus will produce a vineyard that bears fruit in the Messianic age.

### Transcript

We will continue now about this theme of barrenness and fruitfulness. As we've seen in Isaiah, agricultural images are commonplace. Not surprisingly, all societies, including Israel, were agrarian societies.

They weren't a manufacturing society or a tourist economy, as they are now, but they were agricultural. And I shouldn't say as they are now, because actually Israel still and now produces a great deal of fruit. In fact, I might just add that our dispensational friends often point that out, that modern Israel has taken the desert and transformed it into a lush, fruitful land.

I remember when I was in the 70s, my dispensational pastor referring to Isaiah's statement, which we will look at later in this lecture, that the desert will blossom and bloom like a rose and fill the world with its fruit, fill the earth with its fruit. My pastor said, do you realize that Israel today produces and exports one-third of the earth's citrus fruit? It must be the last days. Because he thought the desert will blossom and bloom and fill the world with its fruit, but he's referring to the last days, natural Israel, natural fruit.

Of course, he could have saved himself the error simply by reading the whole book of Isaiah and realizing that fruit is a very common theme in Isaiah, but it's not talking about navel oranges. In fact, insofar as images of actual fruit are used, it's grapes, not citrus fruit. That is always the fruit that's named, or figs, or olives, but citrus fruit is not mentioned.

But it doesn't matter because, of course, the references to fruit production in Isaiah are not interested in agricultural development in the last days. It is, in fact, imagery of spiritual fruit, and that is made clear the very first time it comes up, which is in Isaiah 5, Judah, Israel, is likened to a vineyard. God was looking for fruit.

He said grapes, but what he got was not what he looked for. He got wild grapes, sour, useless fruit, and he couldn't figure it out. What could I have done more to get what I wanted? I didn't get it.

I know I'm going to tear the vineyard down, and as Jesus put it, he's going to give the vineyard to others who will produce the fruits. Now, therefore, right at the very beginning, Isaiah tells us that God is looking for fruit. That's why he created Israel.

Of course, the fruit he's looking for is not citrus fruit or even grapes, literally, but righteousness and justice. Israel was created, formed as a nation to be a fountain of righteousness and justice in the earth. God intended that the nation should look at Israel and say, that's what justice looks like.

That's what goodness is. In Deuteronomy, Moses says to Israel, this law that I give you today, don't let it slip away from you because it is your boast and it is your glory before the nations who will see it, and they will say, what nation is there that has such a good God and such a wise God who has given a nation such just and good laws? In other words, God intended that Israel, by following God's law, would be paragons of a just society and that it would be an inspiration to the Gentiles. No doubt, although it's not stated, the desire was that this just society would spread out, as it were.

The Gentiles would begin to say, well, these are good laws. We should do this, too. We should be good people, too.

So that Israel becomes a fruit producer of justice and righteousness in the earth. That was God's purpose in making Israel, but he says he didn't get what he wanted. And so we have found that there are references to God tearing down that vineyard.

Or in another parable, the image is changed. He gives the vineyard to somebody else to produce the fruit. Or in the imagery of Jesus' acted parable, cursing the fig tree, no one's going to eat fruit from that tree, Israel, anymore.

It's not God's vineyard anymore. Jesus said, I am the true vine. You are the branches.

If you abide in me, you'll produce fruit, much fruit. So no longer is it Israel, but Jesus. Jesus is the true Israel.

Jesus is the antitype. Israel was the type. And so in Christ, we are fruit producers.

Now in Isaiah, there's quite a few references, as you read through. Actually, these

references to this imagery are as thick as dandelions in a meadow, almost, in Isaiah. And that is the idea that there is land that can pass from being cultivated to being wilderness.

On the other hand, wilderness can be transformed into cultivated, fruitful land. You see it going both ways in different places in Isaiah. There's quite a few references to former cities and cultivated lands.

That is, property that has seen development, human development and cultivation, buildings, fields, crops, and so forth. Going back, reverting back to being as if it had never been touched by man. Just going back to a wild state, becoming a wilderness again.

This imagery is often used when it's talking about God's judgment on some particular people. It might be Assyria. It might be Israel.

It might be Judah. It might be the Philistines or someone else. But in describing God's judgment on a nation, sometimes he just talks about how they will become a wilderness.

Now we saw earlier, for example, in Isaiah 10, that the judgment on Assyria was compared to lopping off the boughs of a tree or cutting down a forest, figuratively. It was the proud that are the trees that are being cut down in Isaiah 10. The point is the judgment is the defoliating.

It's like whether literally or figuratively, or maybe a mixture of both, the land that comes under God's judgment becomes almost as if it wasn't there. The evidence of buildings, the evidence of cultivation and agriculture are gone. It's a wilderness now.

It's just a howling desert now. And so we have that kind of imagery to begin with. We saw it in chapter 5, verses 5 and 6, where God said concerning the vineyard that he had cultivated, it's going to go backward now.

It's not going to be cultivated anymore. Instead, he says in verse 5 and 6, But instead there will be briars and thorns, which is the kind of thing that happens when no one's taking care of a piece of property. It's gone back to being uncared for.

God is not going to cultivate them anymore. I will also command the clouds that they don't rain on it, so it'll get even worse, become a desert. This is imagery.

Of course, Israel is not literally, well, I guess much of Israel is a desert, but really this is not talking about that anymore than Israel being a vineyard. It was talking about Israel being a literal vineyard. We've got the imagery of Israel being the kind of a nation that could have produced fruit for God, like a vineyard could produce grapes.

It's now going to be abandoned by God and be in no position to ever produce fruit for

him, like a vineyard that's gone back to wilderness and no one's cultivating it and it doesn't rain. I'm not probably referring to literal desert there or literal rain or whatever. Though, of course, in the Middle East you've got a lot of that anyway.

So, I mean, you can point to some literal times when there's been drought there as well as everywhere, but especially in the desert areas. But that's not, the literal thing is not what's intended. The idea is God's cultivating of it is over.

And therefore its fruitfulness, whatever fruitfulness it could have had, is a thing of the past. In chapter 10, verse 18, again this time about the judgment on Assyria, it says, And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body, and they shall be as when a sick man wastes away. We've seen the sickness motif before.

Then the rest of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child could ride them. The trees presumably an indication of having a lush, well-watered region. Now it's just a burned over region, not many trees left.

Its forest and its fruitful field are destroyed, consumed. By the way, one interesting thing in this verse 18 says both soul and body. This phrase is used one other place in the Bible.

Jesus said to the people of his time, to his disciples actually, Do not fear him who can kill the body and can do no more, but fear him who can kill both soul and body. Same order. We would say body and soul.

Doesn't matter what order it is, but it's interesting Jesus uses the same order. He that can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Now we are often probably inclined to see Gehenna as a reference to hell.

Therefore the reference to soul and body we think of as the literal body and the literal soul being destroyed in literal hell. On the other hand, Gehenna, which literally means the Valley of Hinnom, is in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah, an image of the destruction of the nation of Judah. Jeremiah and Isaiah all talked about the Babylonians conquering Judah and carrying them captive.

In talking about that subject, Jeremiah said when the Babylonians come and invade Jerusalem, the dead bodies of the slain Jews in Jerusalem will be so numerous that their bodies, their corpses will be thrown into the Valley of Hinnom. And Jeremiah says the Valley of Hinnom will no longer be called the Valley of Hinnom. It will be called the Valley of Slaughter because of the numerous bodies and corpses that are thrown into it.

In other words, the Valley of Hinnom is an image, Gehenna is an image, of the destruction of Jerusalem and the plight of those who are slaughtered when the Babylonians come. Now Jesus lived at a time when the Romans were about to come and do the very same thing, wipe out the Jews, destroy Jerusalem. And Jesus continually warned his listeners that they were in danger of being thrown into the Valley of Hinnom,

Gehenna.

This may not have been literal, but it's probable that Jesus was echoing Jeremiah, saying that just as Jeremiah said Jerusalem would be destroyed, your corpses would be in the Valley of Hinnom, hey, Jerusalem's going to be destroyed again. And the Valley of Hinnom is every bit as hungry for you as it was for the apostate Jews in Jeremiah's day. That is to say, the Valley of Hinnom, although it is in every English translation translated hell, is not necessarily a reference to hell, but rather to the consequences of the judgment of a nation.

Now the reason I say that is because Jesus said it's better that you don't find that your soul and body are destroyed in Gehenna. Well, is this literal or not literal? The expression destroyed soul and body comes from Isaiah 10, verse 18. Does a forest have a soul and a body? It's talking about a forest and a fruitful field being destroyed, both soul and body.

Apparently soul and body is just an idiom that means completely, totally. Root and branch is another similar idiom in the Old Testament. Destroyed root and branch, head and tail, soul and body.

Trees don't literally have souls. Of course, if these are people, then that would be different. But the point is the imagery is of a forest being destroyed, soul and body, which means a national judgment that is completely devastating, though not necessarily literally hurting a soul, since, of course, trees and forests don't have souls.

Jesus takes that image and says to his people, you could be destroyed soul and body and thrown into Gehenna. Now all I'm saying is that Jesus is using imagery that is coming from the Old Testament, both in his use of Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, and in his phrase soul and body. What we do with that is not entirely clear.

I have my own ideas. I don't say you have to reach the conclusions I do, but I would just leave it with you that when we think of Gehenna as hell, and we think of it as a place where the body and soul are destroyed because of that statement of Jesus, he might not be talking about hell, and he might not be talking about bodies and souls. At least when you're talking about a forest being destroyed soul and body, you're not talking about bodies and souls.

So the language is figurative, at least in its original usage, possibly in Jesus' usage too. That's an aside. That's not totally relevant to our subject of bareness and fruitfulness, but I ran across that phrase here and thought maybe you might be interested to know.

That phrase is found in one other place, and that's in the teaching of Jesus. What the ramifications of that are is up to you to decide for yourself. And once you do, don't tell anybody unless you have enough momentum to run a school or a radio show, and you can get away with it.

But don't tell your pastor. All right. Now, but do reach your own conclusions.

Study the Bible and reach your own conclusions, please. Chapter 14 of Isaiah, verse 17. 14, 17 says, and this is actually describing Babylon, the king of Babylon, who's now in Sheol, and figuratively all the kings who've gone to Sheol before him are saying, are you become like one of us? Are you the one that made the earth tremble? They say, are you the one who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners? The conquest that Babylon made is described as destroying the cities of the conquered peoples and making the world a wilderness.

It's just the imagery of just scraping the land clean of all evidence that people have ever been there and making it just a howling wilderness of jackals and ostriches and things, which are sometimes named, like in chapter 34, as belonging to the wilderness. In chapter 27, in verse 10, it said, yet the fortified city will be desolate, the habitation forsaken and left like a wilderness. There the calf will feed, and there it will lie down and consume its branches.

When the boughs are withered, they will be broken off, and women come and set them on fire. Sounds like the imagery of Jesus talking about the vine branches that don't abide in him. They're gathered up and burned.

But the fortified city, in this case, I believe is Jerusalem in AD 70. My belief is based on the context. Chapters 24, 25, 26, and 27 discuss, I believe, the transition from the old Jerusalem to the new.

24 is that chapter of devastation that is so remarkable in its apocalyptic imagery that most scholars think it's the end of the world. However, the next chapter describes the Messianic age, which continues for chapters 25, 26, and 27, which, as we've seen in Isaiah, is the present age. Therefore, the city that is devastated is replaced by a good city.

The old Jerusalem is replaced by the new. For example, if you look at chapter 26, which is describing the Messianic age, verse 1, This song will be sung in the land of Judah. We have a strong city.

God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates that the righteous nation that keeps the truth may enter in. Now, the strong city, of course, is the church, the new Jerusalem.

But in that connection, it says in chapter 27, verse 10, Yet the fortified city will be desolate. That, I believe, is a reference to the old Jerusalem that fell, to the Romans. That's my thought anyway.

And it talks about it as being left like a wilderness. It was once a city, a thriving city. Now it's just like a desert.

Nothing grows there. No fruit, certainly, is coming from that region. In chapter 32, verses 12 through 14, It says people shall mourn upon their breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, which, of course, is now gone.

That's why they're mourning. On the land of my people will come up thorns and briars. Yes, on all the happy homes in the joyous city.

Because the palaces will be forsaken. The bustling city will be deserted. The forts and towers will become lairs forever, meaning lairs for wild animals that live in the wilderness.

A joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks. The next statement is very important, but we'll save it for a moment. Let's go to 34.

This is a difficult chapter for me because chapter 35 follows from it without a break. Chapter 34 and 35 are like a continuous prophecy, the chapter division being entirely artificial. Yet the part that is in chapter 35 is the Messianic Age, which, by the way, chapter 35 is quoted a number of times in the New Testament as applying to the present time, which raises questions about what chapter 34 is talking about.

Chapter 34, ostensibly, is talking about a judgment coming on Edom. That did happen before the Messianic Age. The Edomites were destroyed.

The Nabataeans, I believe, invaded them sometime in the 2nd century B.C. So the fall of Edom could be, in fact, what is referred to here. But we read about this judgment on Edom, which I'll just say my intuitions would lead me to believe it's really talking about the fall of Jerusalem because you again have this transition from the old, the destruction of the old to the new order, the new order being presented in chapter 35. You kind of expect there to be that old order going out in chapter 34, but it is said to be Edom.

And I have remained undecided about this. Is this talking about the literal destruction of Edom or is it figurative? Because in Isaiah chapter 1, Jerusalem is called Sodom. He says, oh, you rulers of Sodom.

He's talking to his own people in Jerusalem, the leaders. He calls them the rulers of Sodom. And, of course, in Revelation 11, 8, it says that the city where our Lord was crucified, Jerusalem, is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt and maybe in Revelation, Babylon, possibly.

In other words, the prophets take up the language or the names of wicked Gentile nations and because Jerusalem has become no better than them, has become as idolatrous and evil, almost as a means of insulting Israel and pointing out how far they've fallen, they call them, you're Sodom, you're Babylon, you're Egypt, maybe you're Edom. It's hard to say. It's difficult to know whether Edom here is actually just a code name for Jerusalem.

I can't say for sure, but let me give you another reason that it could possibly be so. And that is when you turn to Isaiah chapter 63. Does your brain hurt when these classes are over? In chapter 63, it says, who is this who comes from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, Enidamite city? Then the one who is coming appears to be Jesus or at least God and he says, I've trodden the winepress, verse 3, alone and from the peoples, not one was with me, I've trodden them in my anger, et cetera, et cetera.

But verse 4 says, for the day of vengeance is in my heart and the year of my redeemed has come. Well, the day of vengeance, a term that's used three times in the book of Isaiah is also a term used by Jesus as we saw in Luke 21. Although Jesus says days of vengeance rather than day of vengeance.

But when Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21, I think it's verse 23. He said, these are the days of vengeance that all things that are written may be fulfilled. So the destruction of Jerusalem is described by Jesus as the days of vengeance.

One of the places that the day of vengeance is mentioned Isaiah is here in connection with Jesus coming from the region of Edom. But he's coming bloodstained like he's just come out of a bloody situation where he's done some damage, presumably in Edom. But is the day of vengeance about Edom or is it about Jerusalem? In the New Testament, Jesus identifies it with Jerusalem.

And also, by the way, in Isaiah 61, it seems to be Jerusalem that the day of vengeance pertains to because it's there in Isaiah 61 that, you know, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor and so forth. Jesus said that's fulfilled in his own preaching. And he says in verse 2, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, that is, of course, the Messianic Age, and the day of vengeance of our God.

Now, again, Messianic Age, Jesus came to preach two things, salvation to the remnant, vengeance to the apostate. John the Baptist did the same thing. Jesus proclaimed salvation and judgment.

What judgment? Judgment on the apostate Jerusalem, on this generation, as he put it so frequently. That is, the day of vengeance in this passage appears to be God's vengeance on apostate Jerusalem. But two chapters later, the day of vengeance is mentioned again.

And the bloodshed seems to have been shed in Edom. Again, I'll let you make your own conclusions about this. I wrestle with this.

I've been actually wrestling with this particular data for some years. I haven't really settled on it. Edom might be a code name for Jerusalem, as Sodom is in chapter 1 of Isaiah and in Revelation, and Egypt is, and I think Babylon is in Revelation too.

So, in other words, a lot of these pagan nations provide nicknames for Jerusalem once



Jerusalem is so wicked that it has to be treated like a pagan nation by God. Anyway, whether this is so or not, whether Isaiah 34 is talking about Edom, really, which it could be, or Jerusalem under the code name Edom, I don't know. But here is how its destruction is described in Isaiah 34, verses 13 through 17.

Thorns shall come up in its palaces, nettles and brambles in its fortresses. It shall be a habitation of jackals, a courtyard for ostriches. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the jackals, and the wild goat shall bleat to its companion.

Also the night creature shall rest there and find for herself a place of rest. The arrow snake shall make her nest and lay her eggs and hatch and gather them under her shadows. There also shall be hawks gathered, every one with her mate.

Now, this destruction, whether it's of Edom or of Jerusalem, of course, like the other passages we saw, it results in wilderness. What was once cultivated and built is now uncultivated and uncared for. It's empty and fruitless, a fruitless waste.

In chapter 64, verse 10, it says, Your holy cities are a wilderness. By the way, in this particular case, to my mind, it is clearly talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. Just read the rest of the verse.

Your holy cities are a wilderness. Zion is a wilderness. Jerusalem, a desolation.

Our holy and beautiful temple where our fathers praised you is burned up with fire. All our pleasant things are laid waste. So, the destruction of Jerusalem, AD 70, is described as turning it into a wilderness.

Now, of course, there is a certain literalness to this because the destruction of the cities, any city that's destroyed in the Middle East and not maintained is going to go back to the sand. It's going to go back to the desert. So, no doubt this is literal, but its meaning and significance is not primarily that literal meaning, but rather that this land that once was so fruitful, or at least potentially so, this land that was like a vineyard that God had cultivated and given every opportunity to produce fruit, it's now as fruitless as a desert.

It's nothing. The literal desert there simply serves as sort of a parable or an analogy. Or a metaphor for the wilderness, fruitless region that doesn't produce any fruit for God.

Now, in these very kinds of passages, God talks about pouring out water in the wilderness, a common theme. And in this case, the wilderness goes the other direction. It begins to blossom and bud or become a forest or become fruitful.

And the water that is poured out is the Spirit, which means that this transition is talking about the Messianic age. The Spirit, according to John 7, 39, was not yet given in Jesus' lifetime because Jesus was not yet glorified. But the age of the Holy Spirit and the pouring out of the Spirit began at Pentecost.

And thus, the pouring out of these rivers in the desert is the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost and beyond. But you see, Jesus himself said in John 7, 37, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. And he that believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

And John tells us in the next verse, this he spoke of the Holy Spirit, which was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Now, the idea of the Holy Spirit being like a river poured out, bringing life to a lifeless region, is a common theme in Isaiah. Sometimes, not always, we are told that it is the Spirit being poured out.

Other times, it's just the imagery of water. But in chapter 32, verse 2, Isaiah 32, 2, it says, if you read verse one, you realize this is a Messianic prophecy about Jesus, the king. It says, a man, meaning Jesus, will be as a hiding place from the wind and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Rivers of water is a very welcome thing in a dry place, just as a shadow is very welcome in a hot desert. It's saying that Jesus will serve humanity, serve his people, in all of these ways, like a rock of refuge in a storm, like rivers in a desert for thirsty souls. By the way, there's a famous passage in Jeremiah, chapter 31, verse 12, that says, therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together unto the goodness of the Lord, for oil and for wine, and list some other products, and it says, and their souls shall be as a watered garden, and they shall not sorrow anymore at all.

But Jeremiah 31, verse 12, talks about how in the Messianic age, their souls shall be like a watered garden. Obviously, this idea of wilderness becoming fruitful is talking about a condition of soul. It's talking about spiritual things.

It should not be mistaken for physical transformation of the terrain, which unfortunately is often done, because, of course, since 1948, when Israel came back to their land, many of them, it was a fruitless desert, and they cultivated it, they irrigated it, they've turned it into a lush land. In a very real sense, Israel has physically turned the desert into a fruitful field, and that tempts Bible prophecy interpreters to say, that must be what's being talked about here. But when you see the motif being used through the whole book of Isaiah, it's not talking about physical deserts and physical fruit and so forth.

It's talking about spiritual transformation. Their soul is to become like a watered garden, fruitful, fruitful spirits. And so in chapter 32, we see that Jesus, in verse 2, is likened to a river in a dry place.

In the same chapter, verse 15 and 16, I should point out that we read verses 12 through 14, which talks about how everything's going to be deserted, like verse 14, because the palaces will be forsaken, the bustling city will be deserted, its forts and towers become lairs, a joy of wild donkeys and pasture flocks. But verse 15, until the Spirit is poured out

upon us from on high. That's Pentecost.

And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field. That's spiritual. The spiritual barren soul, the spiritual barren world, will become a place where God's fruit is indeed produced, as he has always wished for it to, spiritual fruit, though.

And the fruitful field is counted as a forest. So, I mean, the wilderness becomes a fruitful field that keeps growing from there until it's like a forest, like a jungle. It's that wet.

It's that fruitful. It's that lush. So is the imagery, at least.

Chapter 35, which, as I said, in following chapter 34, we saw chapter 34 is either talking about Edom or Jerusalem, but it talks about, in 34, verses 13 through 15, how everything becomes a desert. But in chapter 35, which follows without a break, in verse 6, it says, The lame shall leap like a deer, the tongue of the dumb shall sing, for waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. Now, the first part of that verse, Jesus quoted, is taking place in his own ministry.

That's the message he sent back with the messengers from John the Baptist, to take this message back to John, what you see. You see these things, and he alluded to Isaiah 35, verses 5 and 6. He did not mention the waters part, but that is part of the whole picture, the Messianic Age. It's rivers in the desert.

It's spiritual. It's the Holy Spirit being poured out in what would otherwise be a spiritually barren environment. In chapter 41, verse 18, it says, I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys.

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and dry land springs of water. He says, I will plant in the wilderness the cedar in the acacia tree, the myrtle in the olive tree. I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, etc.

In other words, the wilderness desert becomes a forest. Again, suggesting an abundance of water, and also the opportunity to be fruitful again. In chapter 43, verses 19 and 20, Behold, I will do a new thing.

Now, you might remember we looked at verse 18, and even verse 17, it talks about the exodus. The first exodus, the old exodus. And then he says in verse 18, don't remember the former things.

Notice, the old exodus is not going to be what you'll commemorate in your Passover anymore. There's going to be a new exodus that you'll commemorate. Behold, I do a new thing.

This is a new covenant. Now it shall spring forth. Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

So we get the highway motif and also the river motif here. So, some more references in Isaiah 2. The wilderness becoming lush, fruitful. Isaiah 27, a Messianic passage.

Verse 6 says, Those who come, he shall cause to take root in Jacob. People taking root like trees do. Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit.

Remember now, this is the very verse that I used to hear say this is fulfilled in Israel today, producing a third of the world's citrus fruit. But it's talking about a person taking root like a plant. Jacob, or those who come, the remnant that come to God, will take root.

Therefore, they will produce fruit like plants do. It's not talking about them going and starting farms and orchards and producing fruit that way. It's talking about the spiritual fruit from spiritual plants, people.

Chapter 29 and verse 17. Is it not yet a very little while till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest. Again, the idea that the desert starts out as a fruitful field, then it grows into a jungle.

The impression is that there's so much water now where there wasn't any water. The water is what? The spirit. The spirit, till he pours the spirit upon us from on high.

The desert, the wilderness becomes a fruitful field. That is chapter 32, verse 15. Now, chapter 35.

Again, that transitional 34 and 35, the destruction of Edom or Jerusalem, one or the other, to the Messianic age. Verse one says the wilderness and the wasteland should be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose. Not only fruit, but beauty as well.

A rose desert becomes a rose garden. Chapter 41, verse 19. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree.

I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together. Once again, the same imagery. Those kind of trees normally would not grow in the desert.

You need more water than that. Chapter 51, verse 3. For the Lord will comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places.

He will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. So, you can see how many times Isaiah makes reference to something like this.

The wilderness is a desert under the judgment of God because, well, Israel has become a wilderness because they were a vineyard that didn't produce any fruit, so he made them into a wilderness. But when the Messianic age comes, the spirit is poured out like water in the wilderness. And the Holy Spirit produces what? The fruit of the spirit.

So that the imagery is the desert now suddenly becomes fruitful. The dry land, those of us who had formerly not been fruitful, well, we become fruitful. And we see that also when we shift from the imagery of agricultural fruit to the imagery of the womb.

The fruit of the womb, which is, again, along with agricultural, a recurring theme in Isaiah, God's looking for fruit just as a man when he marries a woman seeks children. He expects a fruitful womb. If she doesn't bear fruit, she's called barren, just like a land is called barren if you can't grow crops on it.

Barrenness is the opposite of fruitfulness. Barrenness is an image for simply not being worth anything because God's looking for fruit. And if you can't produce fruit, you're not worth anything.

You're like briars and thorns. And a barren woman, of course, was a reproach to her husband or at least to herself. Now, the imagery of God bearing children through Israel or whatever, or through God's people, comes up a fair bit in Isaiah.

In Isaiah 46, God talks about how he was the one who bore Israel from the beginning. He used the imagery of himself being the father of the nation. Isaiah 46 and verse 3, Now, this doesn't necessarily say that he gave birth to them, but he does in other places.

But here he's from their infancy, from the time they were born, he has been their parent, the one who carried them. In chapter 49, verse 15, he speaks about himself as the mother. We know, of course, the imagery Jesus preferred was that God was the father.

Now, God is never called the mother, but here he is in the metaphor likened to a mother. And he says in verse 15 of Isaiah 49, Can a woman forget her nursing child and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. Meaning Israel, God's people.

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me. Your sons shall make haste.

Your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you. Et cetera. Now, actually, not et cetera.

We could actually read a little further. Lift up your eyes, look around and see all these gathered together and come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall surely clothe yourself with them all as with an ornament and bind them to you as does a bride.

For your waste and desolate places and the land of your destruction will even now be too small for the inhabitants. And those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children you will have after you have lost the others will say again in your ears, the place is too small for me.

Give me a place where I may dwell. Then you will say in your heart, who has begotten these for me? Since I have lost my children and I'm desolate, a captive and wandering to and fro, who has brought these up? There I was left alone. But these, where were they? And he answers.

Now, let me just tell you what's going on here. Israel is likened to a woman. In this case, a woman who's lost her children because they've gone into captivity.

And that would be, of course, initially in this section of Isaiah referenced the Babylonian captivity. But then again, that's an image that leads to a salvation image in the Messiah. The idea here is Jerusalem had a lot of children, as it were, Jews.

Most of them were lost, still are. As it says in Galatians 4, Jerusalem that now is, is in bondage with her children. Of course, Jerusalem was in physical bondage in Babylon.

Paul said, spiritually speaking, Jerusalem is in bondage today with her children, in bondage to the law and therefore to sin. So, I mean, Paul sees this bondage image of the people of Jerusalem as applying to now. But the point is, Jerusalem once had children of sorts for God, the Jews, but they lost them.

Jerusalem has lost its children. But now there's more coming, far more than before. In fact, she doesn't even recognize, whose children are these? These aren't my children.

How come I have all these children? Where were they? They're the Gentiles coming in to the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem in this morphs from old Israel to new Israel, from old Jerusalem to new Jerusalem. The old Jerusalem lost her children.

The new Jerusalem gets so many children, there's no room for them in the land of Israel. It's not geographical here. There's no room.

You couldn't put them all in Israel because there's the Gentiles coming in. That's what's answered. When they say, where were they? Where were these children? I don't recognize these children.

They're my children now. Verse 22, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will lift up my hand in an oath to the nations, the Gentiles, and set up my standard for the peoples. Earlier, we saw in chapter 11, verse 10, that God will set up a standard or a banner that the Gentiles will come in and rally around this banner.

He's bringing in the Gentiles. To bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers.

Now, what he's saying is, you wonder where all these children are coming from. They're coming from the nations. This is the influx of the Gentiles into the Messianic kingdom.

But notice the imagery is having children. In this case, it's not a city that had never had children. It's a city that has lost her children.

But the idea still is that this city is now having a lot of children. A lot of fruit is coming through this agency. God, who is like a father to Israel, and although a literal mother might abandon her child, God will not abandon them.

Yet, he will produce many children for himself through her. Not the children that Israel thought, the Jews, but a much larger family than that, which includes Gentiles. That is the imagery that this passage is bringing up.

Now, in chapter 53, which we know to be a key chapter about Jesus, in verse 11, it says, He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Now, therefore, I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.

Now, this says that as a result of Jesus' sufferings, there's going to be many people justified. And it goes on in the next chapter, which the division is artificial, and says, Sing, O barren, you who have not born. That's the Gentile nations.

Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not prevailed with child. God has never used the Gentiles' previousness to bring children for himself. Only Israel had been chosen before this.

Israel was the married wife. The Gentile nations were a barren, fruitless, unmarried woman before. But now, time to sing, Gentiles.

You're having kids, lots of kids. It says, For more are the children of the desolate than of the married woman, says the Lord. Now, he goes off to talk about the Gentiles again here, as he did in chapter 49, which we're looking at.

He says in verse 2, Enlarge the place of your tent. Let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations. You need to put on some room additions on your house.

In other words, you're going to have a bigger family than you ever anticipated. Do not spare. Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.

For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the Gentiles, the nations, the goyim, and make the desolate cities inhabited. So here, again, the Messiah dies in chapter 53, rises and is exalted. He's satisfied with what he sees as a result of his travail, because he sees that many are being justified.

Many what? Gentiles. These barren nations that have never been married to God, never produced children for God, never borne fruit. They're going to be fruitful and multiply.

They're going to produce more children for God than his wife did, Israel. That's what it

says in verse 1. And then this imagery, speaking, as it were, to the New Jerusalem. You think of yourself as needing enough room for your kids, the Jews.

Well, your kids are going to be the Gentiles now, so you better get a bigger tent. You need to make a much bigger tent, because your house is too small for your family. It's like it said in chapter 4, the children come and say, the place is too narrow.

We need more space here. What? Where did these kids come from? Well, I'm bringing the Gentiles in. The land of Israel will not contain the kingdom of God anymore.

It's too narrow, too small a vision. It's going to have to use the whole world for that. Make your tent bigger, he says.

So this is referring to the birth of the church, and using the imagery, of course, of such birth. In chapter 66, and this is the last we will look at today, I think, as the book of Isaiah winds down with actually a depiction of the new heavens, new earth, and the new Jerusalem, and the new messianic age, which is, I believe, in this context now, in the church age. Chapter 66, verse 78 says, Before she travailed, she gave birth.

Before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth, or maybe the land, be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she gave birth to her children. Interesting.

Go on. It says, Shall I bring to the time of birth and not cause delivery, says the Lord? Shall I, who cause delivery, shut up the womb, says your God? In other words, you're not going to be fruitless. When God brought about the new order, there will be fruit where there was not before.

There was passing of gas before. Now there's passing of real babies. There's real birth.

There's real fruit. Now, here's the thing. He says, Before her pain came, before she travailed, she gave birth.

Who's she? Zion. Zion? What's Zion giving birth to? The church. The church was born out of Israel through Jesus and the apostles who were part of Israel before the travail really hit hard.

It happened later in the same generation. Tremendous travail. And this imagery is given in Revelation chapter 12 of this woman in travail to bear, as it says, a male child.

So the language from here, she delivered a male child. That male child is Jesus. But in this sense, there's no distinguishing the birth of Jesus from the birth of the church.

He's simply the head. He's the cornerstone. He's the firstborn of the family.



The male child is the beginning of the new era. And we are part of that baby in a way. And so as soon as Zion was travailing, she gave birth to her children.

And he specifically refers to it as the birth of a nation. The church is a nation. It was born in a day.

Probably a reference to Pentecost. Or it might be the resurrection day of Jesus. Depending on how you want to see it.

Because Jesus did breathe on his disciples that very day and said, receive the Holy Spirit. This is the same night that he raised from the dead. The birth of the church was in a single day.

Perhaps the resurrection day. Perhaps Pentecost. It doesn't matter to identify the day.

The point is there was a sudden birth of a new nation. Like a baby coming out. And it was Zion that gave birth.

But not without travail. Jerusalem had to go through suffering. And even judgment.

But not without fruit this time. God brought forth fruit out of the remnant of Israel. Christ and his movement.

Christ and his people. His body is born here. This passage is, I'm totally convinced, a reference to the birth of the church.

The nation. The man child. And so, how do we summarize all this? Well, it's a very simple message.

It is conveyed in a lot of different ways in different parts of the book. Sometimes through agricultural imagery. Sometimes through childbirth imagery.

But the point is, God intends to have fruit for himself. There is a condition of the earth that God has intended should prevail. And it was not brought about by Israel.

He gave Israel the opportunity to produce it. They did not produce good grapes. They didn't produce good fruit.

They didn't produce a baby. And so, God had to judge them. And replace them.

And give the vineyard to others. To another nation that would bring forth the fruits thereof, as Jesus put it. And so, a new nation was born through the Messiah who, as Jesus said, will produce the fruit.

And Isaiah is adamant about this. There will be good fruit. The fruit of the earth will be beautiful and glorious.

The fruit of the earth, God will have the fruit he wants. In fact, there will be an abundance of fruit coming from the Gentiles, especially. And so, these themes, again, of Israel's failure.

And God's redeeming the situation. By bringing forth a new nation to do what Israel failed to do. Is depicted in these images throughout the book.

Alright, so. I would hope that as a result of these topical lectures. When you read the book itself, you'll be reading a new book.

It will actually make some sense. Things that just were, you know, a mixture of garbled images. That you thought, what in the world? Well, now you know what in the world.

Most of these images. We're not done yet. In the next, we have a couple of other topics to talk about.

And then, we will, in fact, take as many hours as we need to. To go rather quickly through the whole book, chapter by chapter. That will no doubt happen next week.

We still got tomorrow's Friday. We still have a bit to go through as far as topics go. Okay.