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Symbols of Nations



Isaiah: A Topical Look At Isaiah - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores themes that recur throughout the book of Isaiah. He notes that while certain passages are dealing with Israel, Judah, and Assyria, other passages are using the nations as humanized symbols, treating them as if they were animals. The speaker emphasizes that these symbolic representations reveal spiritual truths about Israel's relationship with God, and that it's essential to understand these metaphors to discern the overall message of the text.

Transcript

In this session, we're not going to take any specific block of scripture, but we're going to take certain themes that recur throughout the book of Isaiah, and by the way, not only in Isaiah, but once you learn about these themes in Isaiah, you'll have a lot easier time understanding books like Micah and Amos and a bunch of other books. Jeremiah also uses a lot of the same things, and we will even cross-reference those books from time to time to point that out. But the main thing we want to do is take some of the themes that we're going to hit all the time, reading through Isaiah again and again and again and again, and look at them in all their occurrences so as to gain an understanding of what they mean.

That way, when you read the book itself, certain things will come to light, will be understandable to you immediately, because you will have considered them and looked at the whole gamut of their usage. And so in every individual case where you run into them, they'll make sense to you. You'll know what you're reading about instead of being confused.

Alright, and there's a general heading for a set of symbolic things that Isaiah talks a lot about, which I would call this lecture, the way that he speaks symbolically about nations. This would include the nation of Israel and Judah, but also the other nations. Now, I'm not going to, in this case, deal with the major context of every passage we look at.

Some of the passages will be dealing with Israel, some will be dealing with Judah, some will be dealing with Assyria and other nations. It's not the point to understand so much

the particular passages, but to see the usage of the symbol as often as it is used, so that you'll see that Isaiah does this, and then when you run into him doing it, you'll say, oh, I know what he's doing there. I get it.

I'm familiar with that. Okay, so I've got here, essentially, under this general sense of symbolic ways of speaking about nations, I've got four subgroups I want to consider. One is where nations are spoken of in an anthropomorphic sense, as they're humanized.

They're spoken of as if a nation is a person, and under the same heading, occasionally alternately as an animal, where a nation is described either as an animal or a person. So they are personified. The nations are personified.

The second subset we're going to look at are cases where the Gentile nations collectively are symbolically described as like the sea, like the ocean. This is generally in contrast to Israel, which is the land. Land and sea are sometimes symbols of Israel and the nations, respectively, so that I want to show you some of the places where the sea is a symbol for the Gentile nations collectively.

I want to thirdly show you passages where one nation is mentioned, apparently representing more than one nation, representing all. Some of this we've already run into in our previous lecture. I just want to go a little further into some of these points in this lecture, where he speaks of one nation, where it would appear that what he means is all nations, but he gives one nation by name simply as a representative.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, I want to look at the times where the Church or the New Covenant people, us, are described symbolically in terms of Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the Holy Mountain, and these kinds of images. Where terms that obviously had a direct reference to the nation of Israel and its geography in former times is applied by the prophet to a non-geographical entity, but to a spiritual entity, which is regarded like a spiritual mountain, a spiritual city, and so forth. So these are the four subheadings when we talk about how the nations are spoken of or used symbolically.

First of all, nations humanized or are treated as if they're human or animals. One of the first instances, and by the way, many of these we've already seen, I'll just gather them into their proper categories now for you. In chapter 1 of Isaiah, verses 5 and 6, God says to the nation of Israel, why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more.

The whole head is sick and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there's no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up nor soothed with ointment.

Now, obviously what we're reading of is a very sick person here. A head, a heart, feet, a body full of wounds. But it is a personification, of course, of the nation of Israel.

The nation is being described as if it is a person and a very sick one at that. We know

that he's talking about the nation because in verse 4 he says, alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity. And then he shifts to the metaphor of speaking of a man who's full of wounds, running wounds, nobody has ever bound them up and so forth.

So here we have one instance, the first actually in the book, of the nation being personified as if it was a human individual and spoken of that way. It's just one of the symbolic methods that Isaiah uses here. Also in chapter 7 and verse 20, here we have a prediction of how God will judge the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom of Israel.

And it says, in the same day, Isaiah 7, 20, in the same day the Lord will shave with a hired razor with those from beyond the river with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the legs, and will also remove the beard. Now obviously the picture here is of a human being being shaved. The hair on his legs, the hair on his beard, on his head.

But what he's talking about is Israel, the nation, being shaved with the razor of Assyria. Basically, one way this image could be understood is that it's like they're going to be mowed down. Like the Assyrians are going to come in and mow them down.

It's like shaving all the hair that was standing up on a scalp. There's nothing standing left. They're all gone.

They've been shaved clean. But there's probably another inference here because although that could be intended by simply saying, I'll shave the hair off the head, what's the business of shaving the legs and the beard and all that other stuff too? That seems to hark back to the law in Leviticus where the leper was to be shaved. All the hair on his body was to be shaved.

In Leviticus chapter 14 and verse 8, in Leviticus 14.8, in the midst of the ritual for the diagnosis of leprosy and for the diagnosis of no more leprosy when a person's been cleansed, what part of the procedure was, he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water that he may be clean. And after that he may come into the camp and shall stay close. Now, shave off all his hair clearly doesn't just mean the hair of his head because in the earlier procedures, the hair on the arm turning white was one of the ways to diagnose leprosy.

Hair and other parts of the body were taken into consideration. And I'm quite sure that the law required that all the body hair, as well as the hair of the head, be shaved in this procedure. So when God says, speaking of Israel symbolically as if it was a sick man, in this case a leper, he's going to shave all the hair off the legs and the head and the beard.

This is, again, imagery like this. For those of you who just came in, we're taking certain topics in Isaiah right now. We're not going through any particular block of chapters.

But we're taking certain themes and showing how he develops them and certain

symbolic methods he uses. So you might wonder where we're going from here when we jump from chapter one to chapter seven without the explanation of that. So here we have examples of a nation, in this case Israel in both cases, being compared to a man, a sick man, a leper in the second instance.

But it's a personification, an anthropomorphism where we have to become aware that Isaiah does this because we will otherwise be confused about certain things. Now, also an animal is sometimes used as an image of a nation. In chapter nine, verses 14 and 15, this is talking again about the punishment of the northern kingdom of Israel.

And it says, therefore the Lord will cut off the head and the tail from Israel. Palm branch and bull rush in one day. The elder and the honorable, he is the head.

The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. Now, cutting off the head, of course, could just be a continuation of the human image. But since he mentions tail, he's not talking about a human imagery, but an animal of some kind.

Cutting off the head and the tail. He tells us what the symbols represent. The honorable and aged in Israel are the people who are basically not as worthy of judgment as others.

The honorable, the aged. But the false prophets are the tail. They're the worst.

But you can see that the nation is being spoken of symbolically as if it were an animal. Something to be aware of when we're studying the book. In chapter 8 and verse 8, it says that when the Assyrian armies here are compared with a river overrunning its banks.

As the river comes out of Assyria, it overran the northern kingdom of Israel. Then it came down to Judah, wiped out the villages of Judah. And then, of course, surrounded and besieged the city of Jerusalem, which was the head of the nation of Judah.

And speaking in this figure, it speaks in verse 7 of chapter 8, of the king of Assyria and his glory will go up over all his channels, like a river overflowing its banks, and go over all his banks and he will pass through Judah, just like a flood going through, and will overflow and pass over and will reach up to the neck. Here we see, of course, Judah is represented in sort of a human or animal imagery. It doesn't make it clear whether it's a human or animal, but still some living creature with a neck and a head.

Only the head is above water, is what he said. Only the capital of the nation doesn't succumb to the flood of invaders. Jerusalem did not fall, but all the rest of the nation did.

And for that reason, we see this kind of language used. Also in chapter 30 and verse 28, this is talking about God coming against Assyria, which has been the instrument of God in judging the northern and southern kingdoms until this point. But now God's talking about his judgment being on Assyria.

It says, His breath is like an overflowing stream. That is, God's breath of judgment against Assyria is like an overflowing stream. Just like Assyria was said to be an overflowing stream back in chapter 10, the language is turned around and now God's judgment on Assyria will be like an overflowing stream, which reaches up to the neck.

To sift the nations with the sieve of futility, there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err. Now, the reference to a bridle in the jaws seems to be an animal image, a horse. So it's like the horse's neck deep.

Perhaps this image is also implied in the passage in Revelation, in chapter 16, where it talks about the... No, it isn't chapter 16, excuse me. It's in chapter 14 at the end of Revelation, where a great war outside the city gates of Jerusalem is described, and it says the blood shall flow to the horse's bridles. In other words, up to the horse's head, basically.

And that would be, you know, a similar imagery here. The idea being that the judgment... The nation is neck deep in judgment, up to its neck in trouble. Only the head survives so that the nation does in fact survive, but only at great cost, only by the skin of their teeth do they hang in there.

You see the same kind of thing over in Zechariah. As I pointed out, these same images are used in other prophets as well, although Isaiah is the focus of our study. It's good to study Isaiah first because we run into most of the imagery there that is used in later prophets as well, and therefore we become familiar with it in advance.

But in Zechariah 10, verse 3, it says, My anger is kindled against the shepherds. I will punish the goat herds, for the Lord of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in battle. Now, there's a mixed metaphor here.

You've got Israel compared to sheep, plural, but also singularly as God's horse, His battle horse, His steed that He rides in battle. Now, this is more of a positive image of what He's going to do to Israel rather than the other one where they're neck deep in disaster. But nonetheless, we see Israel compared to a horse in this case.

Okay, well, those are not the only cases in Isaiah. These are representative of how Isaiah sometimes will speak in imagery that presupposes the awareness that he's personifying or animating the image of the nation of Israel. And then there's also this other factor, and that is that the Gentiles, the Gentile nations in particular, are often likened to wild beasts.

Now, we just saw in Zechariah, we looked there a moment ago, in chapter 10, verse 3, that Israel is like God's sheep, His flock. That certainly isn't unique to Zechariah. All the prophets practically refer to Israel as God's flock, and He's the shepherd and so forth.

He takes care of Israel. They're His sheep. In some places, like in Malachi chapter 4,

Israel or God's people are described as a calf in the stall.

And these are basically clean animals, such animals as could be eaten by the Jews under their law and could be sacrificed. Israel is compared with clean animals. Frequently, Israel's enemies are compared with unclean animals, particularly ravenous animals such as each sheep and calves.

I mean, the natural enemies of the domestic animals, the lion, the bear, the wolf, these become symbols in Scripture of the Gentile nations. Now, this is true in Isaiah, but let me show you, first of all, in Daniel chapter 7, how this is the case. We're going to be all over the Old Testament here.

But in Daniel chapter 7, we have, and we won't read it, I'll just show you where the verses are and tell you what they say. In verses 1 through 8, essentially, Daniel has a dream, and in that dream, he sees seven wild beasts come up out of the sea. Now, I'm going to demonstrate a little later that the sea represents the Gentile world taken collectively.

Just like the land represents Israel, the sea represents the Gentile world. Well, he sees a tumult of the seas. The seas are striving.

And out of this stripe of the nations, essentially, is what it refers to, come four individual representations, symbolic, of course. One is like a lion, the second is like a bear, the third is like a leopard, and the fourth is not likened to any known beast, but is said to have ten heads, or is it ten heads? Excuse me, seven heads. It doesn't mention the seven heads, it mentions the ten horns.

In Revelation, the feature of seven heads is added to the ten horns. But here, it's just ten horns. It obviously isn't like any known beast today.

But it's certainly a fierce beast. It's described as a fierce, carnivorous beast that stamps and devours and so forth. Now, there's really no one who's ever read the Bible who has any interpretive skill at all, who doubts that this is a reference to various kingdoms.

I mean, we're not talking about real animals here. We're talking about Babylon, which is represented as a lion, Media Persia, represented as a bear, the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great as the leopard, and the Roman Empire as the fourth beast. Virtually all scholars, regardless of their interpretations of other parts of Daniel, agree on this particular identification, that these beasts represent Gentile world powers.

They happen to be just the kind of beasts that shepherds hate to have around, because lions and bears and leopards come after the sheep. And sure enough, the fact of the matter is, these nations were ones that conquered Israel and kept Israel under their heel. They were oppressors of Israel.

Israel is God's flock. The Gentiles are these kinds of animals. Well, in Isaiah, this kind of imagery appertains also.

In Isaiah 56, when God is actually saying that He's turning Judah over to the Gentiles to come and ransack and devour and so forth, frankly, I understand this passage to be about the destruction under the Romans, but He says, All you beasts of the field, come devour all you beasts of the forest. That is, He's inviting the Gentiles to come in and overrun Jerusalem. But it's like His sheep are being surrendered to the ravenous beasts.

Come on in, you wild beasts, come on in. God's giving them over to the Gentiles. So the beasts of the field, the beasts of the forest are the Gentiles in this place.

Look for a moment, if you would, at Ezekiel chapter 34, just to see another instance of this in another book. Ezekiel 34 is God's complaint against the leaders of Israel who are characterized as shepherds of His flock. In chapter 34, verse 2 says, Son of man, Ezekiel 34, 2, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, obviously Israel is seen as a flock of sheep if it has shepherds over it, prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, should not the shepherds feed the flocks.

Then He goes on and outlines the details of His complaint against the leaders of Israel, how they have neglected the sheep. The whole chapter is cast in the imagery of shepherds with real sheep, but it's really talking about the leaders of Israel and the people of Israel. But further on down, He says He's going to take care of this.

In verse 11, He says, For thus says the Lord God, Indeed, I myself will search for my sheep and I will seek them out as a shepherd seeks for his flock and so forth. And we go on to a prophecy about Christ coming as the good shepherd and doing all the right things which the leaders of Israel previously had done wrong. But in this imagery, in this context, it says in verse 5, that the bad shepherds, it says, through their neglect, the sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd and became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

But later, when Jesus has come into the picture and He's the good shepherd, in verse 28, it says, And they shall no longer be prey for the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. Now, in the imagery, the Jews are the sheep and the beasts of the field devour them. But He tells us in verse 28 what the beasts of the field represent.

As Israel is represented by sheep, the beasts of the field represent the nations, the Gentiles, in other words, that come and devour Israel. So we can see this is a motif that transcends just Isaiah and is found both in Daniel and Ezekiel and you'll find it elsewhere. Now, the reason I gave you all those passages before this one is because the one we're about to look at is a favorite passage of people understood differently than I think it needs to be understood.

In chapter 11 of Isaiah, I'm afraid this may pop some bubbles and ruin some fantasies and so forth because it's a very sentimental picture we have here and we actually picture it as literal. But in Isaiah chapter 11, beginning with verse 6, it says, The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat.

The calf and the young lion and the fatling together. And a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze.

Their young ones shall lie down together. And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole.

And the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain. For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Obviously a favorite millennial passage. And many people, of course, cherish the hope that when Jesus comes back, the millennial earth, there will be literal lions laying down with literal lambs and it will be just a wonderful thing like the Garden of Eden. Maybe there will be.

That remains to be seen. But I would suggest to you that in the symbolism of the passage, it means something else than that. Because the passage has all the marks of being a passage about not the results of Jesus' second coming, but the fruit of His first coming.

The passage begins in verse 1, There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. Well, is that the second coming or the first coming? When Jesus comes back, is He going to come out of the roots of Jesse? No, He did that when He came the first time. He grew out of the lineage of Jesse.

It's talking about His birth, His genealogy, His coming into the world the first time. It says in verse 2, The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him. Jesus said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord is anointed me.

So we're quoting Isaiah 61. The Spirit of the Lord certainly was upon Him during His first coming. And it goes on, it uses language which I take to be very symbolic, which we will cross-reference in due time to show it refers to what Jesus accomplished in His first coming.

Part of that is this idyllic picture of the carnivorous animals being at peace in this new arrangement with the clean animals, the domestic animals, which, you probably are already ahead of me, I take to be a symbol of the Gentiles and Jews in Christ being reconciled. The harmony between the wild beasts and the domestic beasts. The domestic beasts always an image of Israel, the wild beasts frequently, probably always, a reference to Gentile nations.

I take this very differently than I've ever been taught it. Never heard anyone teach it the way I'm saying it, but I believe it's when you take the consistent use of these images in Isaiah, I think we have a picture here of Jews and Gentiles, former enemies, being reconciled in Christ through the covenant of peace that He makes, described in Ephesians chapter 2, where it says, You were once Gentiles, aliens of the commonwealth of Israel, but you who were once far away He has brought near through the blood of Christ, for He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one, meaning the Jews and the Gentiles have been made one in Christ. He's broken down the middle wall of partition, and He's made in Himself one new man.

So, that's Ephesians chapter 2. I don't know where it begins, around verse 12, I think. I quoted portions up through verse 15. I'll give you some... Okay, not 12 through 15, am I right? Okay.

Right. 11, okay. Thank you.

Alright then. So, I see this as that, only symbolically portrayed. You know? Now, I don't see anything wrong with Christmas cards still having a picture of a lion and a lamb laying down together, which is taken from this passage, as long as we understand that that really means something more important than that real lions and real lambs are going to be happy with each other and at peace together.

It means something far more significant than that. Like, in God's ultimate economy, He's done something tremendous, taken the hostility of the Jews and Gentiles, which was ages long, and in Christ, broken down the grounds for hostility and made one new man the body of Christ of the two. And that, I take to be Isaiah's meaning.

Obviously, a person is entitled to think differently, but anyone's entitled to be wrong. Okay. Can I help it if I'm right? No, I don't know.

There may be literal lions and lambs, you know, dwelling together peaceably in the new earth when Jesus comes back. I'm all for it. I like animals.

And I'd sure like to be able to play with lions and bears and stuff. But when we study Isaiah 11 in detail, which we will when we go through the lecture on the kingdom passages, we'll find there is so much in chapter 11 that is regurgitated, I hope that's not too negative an image, in the New Testament and explained, it's restated, it comes up again, that's what I mean to say, and it's used in the New Testament as an application to what Christ has accomplished now, not just that passage, but many passages. Okay.

So, that deals with the first subdivision of what we want to talk about here. We want to talk about how Isaiah treats nations, either as in a human image or an animal image, both we've seen in the passages we've just covered. Let's move on to the second point that I told you we'd cover, and that is how the Gentiles, taken collectively as the world,

the Gentile world, everything outside of Israel, is symbolically spoken of as the sea, in contrast to Israel, which is symbolically called the land.

We can see why God himself might speak in this way, because the sea is restless. The sea has no foundation. It's ever-changing.

It has no stability whatsoever. We have a brother here who was in the Navy for eight years. I imagine he probably had to see some of that time.

He probably could tell stories how unstable the sea is and how unpredictable the sea is and so forth. But the land, when you get on the land, you know what you've got. You've got terra firma, unless there's an earthquake or something, you know what to expect.

It's firm, it's solid, it's about as secure as you can be. And Israel was the land that was founded on the laws and the revelation that God had given them. The knowledge of God was there.

They were stable. Well, they were supposed to be. To the extent that they imitated the Gentiles, they were unstable.

But insofar as they stayed true to what God had revealed to them, they had stability, foundation, and firmness, like the land does. But the Gentiles, who lacked any foundation, that lacked any revelation from God, that lacked any basis for firmness, they were like the shifting sea, troubled sea, and so forth. And this kind of imagery is used in Isaiah and elsewhere in Scripture.

If you look at Isaiah 57, verses 20 and 21, it says, But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked. Now, I'm willing to allow that the wicked here may not necessarily mean Gentiles.

Certainly Isaiah prophesies against wicked Gentiles, but the burden of most of his prophecies is against the wicked of his own people. But even so, that doesn't change the fact that the sea is generally in the Scripture an image of the Gentiles. The wicked, even the wicked in Israel, are like the troubled sea.

They're like the Gentiles. Insofar as they reject the distinctives of Israel's relationship with God, they become like the Gentiles. Troubled, restless, casting up mire and shame.

The imagery from this verse is picked up in the New Testament by Jude and applied to false teachers in the church. In the book of Jude, verses 12 and 13, in an extended description of the false teachers that Jude says had already come and were in the church, He said, These are spots in your love feasts while they feast with you without fear. Serving only themselves, they are clouds without water, carried about by winds, late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots, raging waves of the

sea, foaming up their own shame.

Wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Most of these images are found in the Old Testament. One of them that he mentions is that the wicked, these false teachers in the church, are like raging waves of the sea foaming up their own shame.

That is, the dirt and the mire and the filth that somehow is brought to the surface by the agitation of the movement of the currents and so forth. And that comes from Isaiah chapter 57 verse 20. Their waters cast up mire and dirt.

Moving to another passage like it, chapter 17 of Isaiah. Isaiah 17, verses 12 and 13. It says, Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the sea.

This is actually talking about Assyria. This is talking about the nation of Assyria, a Gentile nation. It says, They make a noise like the roar of the seas and to the rushing of nations that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters.

The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters, but God will rebuke them and they will flee away. This is like God rebuked the Red Sea and caused it to split. And be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, like the rolling thing before the whirlwind.

Again, there's a mixture of many images. They're like a whirlwind or like a tumbleweed, essentially. Or they're like mountain chaff.

They're like the sea. The nations, the multitude of many people are likened to the sea. Now, consider Revelation 17, which seems to borrow this same image.

In Revelation 17, John saw a vision of a harlot. And she was riding on the well-known beast that was first introduced in Revelation chapter 11 and described in chapter 13. It is described again in chapter 17, the seven heads, ten horns and all that.

The woman is a whore sitting on the beast. And some limited explanation is given of the meaning of the vision. Unfortunately, some of the explanation is as hard to understand as the vision itself before the explanation was given.

Which, of course, means there's all kinds of opportunities to misunderstand it. One thing, though, that is not too hard to understand in the explanation is in Revelation 17, 15. He, the angel, said to me, the waters which you saw where the harlot sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

Now, he said he saw this woman on a beast on many waters. And he says the waters represent nations and Gentiles and many peoples, which is, again, like Isaiah 17, 12, the multitude of many people who make a noise like the sea compared to the sea. Now, in

Isaiah 60, we see one of the places where it's most clear that the sea is being used as an image for Gentiles in general.

In Isaiah 60, a well-known chapter, at least the beginning of it is well known. It's quoted and alluded to, portions of it are in the New Testament and applied to the church, actually. But most people know the opening verses.

Arise, shine, for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people, but the Lord will arise over you and his glory shall be seen upon you.

The Gentiles shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. So we've got a sunrise image here. Lift up your eyes all around and see.

They, that is the Gentiles, all gather, they come to you. Your son shall come from afar and your daughter shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant and your heart shall swell with joy because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you.

The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. In the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, those two last lines are parallel in meaning. The abundance of the sea will come to you.

The wealth of the Gentiles will be brought to you. The sea representing the Gentiles. And of course the passage itself discussing Gentiles coming into the church through the evangelistic mission of the church.

One other place, that actually is speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles. In Isaiah 24, or that I was just reading, that was Isaiah 60 and in particular verse 5, though we read all the first five verses. Isaiah chapter 24, you'll recall we dealt with this in some detail in our last lecture.

It's the one that talks about the earth, the earth, the earth, which can be translated the land, the land, the land. And therefore, and the translation tends to determine the interpretation. But in verses 14 and 15 of this chapter, which I believe is speaking fairly clearly of the church age and the glory of the new covenant in Christ.

Isaiah 24, 14 says, they shall lift up their voice, they shall sing. For the majesty of the Lord they shall cry aloud from the sea. Therefore glorify the Lord in the dawning light.

The name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we have heard songs of the ends of the land or earth, either one. Glory to the righteous.

But I said, that is Israel representative, I am ruined, ruined, woe is me. Israel goes down, the Gentiles come in. But the idea here is, we have here the dawning light, just like we

had in Isaiah chapter 60.

Arise, shine, your light has come. Gentiles shall come to the light of your rising. That was Isaiah 60.

We have the dawning light here also in this image. But also, the singing of rejoicing is coming from the sea, from the Gentiles. From the coastlands of the sea, that is from the far reaches of the sea.

By the way, this resembles to my mind a statement in Malachi, although the sea is not mentioned there. But in Malachi chapter 1 verse 11, it talks also about the Gentiles worshipping God throughout the world. Malachi 1.11 says, from the rising of the sun to its going down.

Now that does not mean from morning to evening, it means from the east to the west. It is a Hebraism and most of us do not know that until we read enough of them to see it. We might know a worship song, from the rising of the sun to the time that it goes down, the name of the Lord shall be praised, based on this verse.

Well, it is not talking about the rising of the sun, from the rising of the sun to the time that it goes down. It is from the place of the rising of the sun to the place that it goes down that is referred. The rising of the sun is a Hebraism for the east.

And the going down of the sun is a Hebraism for the west. So, from the east to the west is what it means here. My name shall be great among the Gentiles.

In every place incense shall be offered to my name, spiritually speaking. Prayers of the saints are the incense in Revelation. And a pure offering for my name shall be great among the nations, that is among the Gentiles.

Now, across the whole earth, he says, I am going to be honored among the Gentiles. That is also what Isaiah is talking about in Isaiah 24, 14 and 15. The whole world, the Gentiles, are going to be honoring God.

And that is essentially implied here by talking about the cry aloud from the sea. The people singing to God will include those of the sea, the Gentile converts to Christ. Okay? Yes, John.

Right. Yeah, the earth is shaking in that chapter. The land is shaking.

That is supposed to be a stable. But the sea is complacent. Or not complacent, but calm.

The sea is worshipping the Lord. Yeah, that is kind of an irony there. And it is intended to be, I think.

Here is the land trembling, quaking, reeling to and fro like a drunkard, it says. And yet

the sea seems to be at peace with God. The image is significant because, of course, what is being described there is the rejection of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles.

Israel, the land, which was thought to be so stable, comes crumbling down. Maybe. I think Christ's authority over the sea and calming the sea definitely harks back to Old Testament examples where God showed His sovereignty over the sea, as when He split it.

I mean, in Psalm 107 it talks about how sailors, when they are at sea and the storm rises and the waves are above the mast of the ship, it says the men reel to and fro like drunkards, it even says, just like it says in Isaiah 24. And it says they are at their wits' end and then they cry out to the Lord. And He sends a calm and the sea is calm and they are brought to their safe haven.

You can find that in Psalm 107, which sounds very much like the story of the disciples on the sea crying out to Jesus and Him giving the command and calms. The Old Testament does, in more than one place, emphasize that God is sovereign over the natural waters of the sea and Jesus, by calming the sea, showed that He was Jehovah, showed that He was the one who has that authority. And that's why the disciples were so stunned and afraid.

It says they feared greatly when the sea was calm. They were afraid when it was rough, but when it was calm, it says, then they greatly feared. They said, what manner of man is this? They were afraid of death when the sea was roaring, but when the sea stopped, they were afraid of the unknown.

We're not in any danger right now, but who is this in the boat with us? They realized that there's some significant message of who Jesus is that is implied by His ability to stop the sea because in the Old Testament, it's God who always had that prerogative. Okay, the next thing, the third part of this lecture that I pre-announced we get to, is where one nation is mentioned as representative of all nations. Whereas a prophecy may reflect God's dealing with a group of nations or of all nations altogether, but rather than saying it that way, He just gives one representative nation, as you know, this is going to happen to them, but in fact, they stand for all.

And that, too, is a symbolic way to speak of the nations of a different way. If you look at chapter 11 of Isaiah, which we've looked at several times because it's so important. In Isaiah chapter 11, verses 11 through 16, rather a long part, but I like to read these verses.

For the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand. I'm sorry, I'm in the wrong chapter here. Let's get that right.

It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to

recover the remnant of His people who are left from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. I will set up a banner for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Also, the envy of Ephraim shall depart and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off.

Ephraim shall not envy Judah. Judah shall not harass Ephraim. But they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the west.

Together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab and the people of Ammon shall obey them. We can read more, but we don't need to.

The point is here, there's mention of something happening to Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, later on the Philistines, Edom and Moab. Now, the thing to point out is that not one of these nations exists today. Every one of these nations, except Egypt, Egypt exists today, of course.

But with that one exception, all of these nations became extinct in Old Testament times. The Philistines were history before Jesus came on the scene of history. They were extinct.

The Edomites became extinct right around that time. Assyria was destroyed by the Babylonians. Centuries before Christ.

Places like Pathros and Cush and Elam and Shinar, though of course there's still populations in the regions where they were. Shinar was Babylon. Some of these places represent Ethiopia and so forth, but they're not the same ethnic groups.

They're not the same nations. What I'm pointing out to you is that these nations must not be spoken of literally. No matter how you understand the fulfillment of Isaiah 11, and there are two basic opinions.

Neither of them work if you take these literally. One opinion, of course this chapter is about the kingdom of the Messiah. One interpretation holds that it's about the church age and the kingdom established by Jesus when he came the first time.

The other opinion is it's about the kingdom of the millennial age when Jesus comes back. These two opinions are the options. But neither of them can be taken as nations literally because whether it's the first coming or the second coming of Christ, and its effects that are being described here, you still can't have Philistines in the picture.

You can't have Assyria there. None of this can be literal. These cannot be literal nations because they were extinct before Jesus came, and so they obviously will still be extinct when Jesus comes again.

So whether a person wants to identify this chapter as the effects of the first coming or the effects of the second coming of Christ, and that's the basic way that the chapter is divided, opinions divide on the chapter, you still have to acknowledge these nations are not those literal nations. It can't really be Edom. It can't really be the Philistines.

It can't really be Moab. They were gone too before then. They were wiped out in the Old Testament times.

So the reference to these nations simply stands for Gentile nations in general. Specific instances are given of Gentile nations that were current in Isaiah's time. His people would understand, oh, you know, Elam, the Moabites, the Philistines.

These are our big time enemies. You know, these are the Gentiles all around. But those Gentiles weren't around anymore when Jesus came.

Nor are they now. Nor will they ever be again. Therefore, we have to understand that whatever is said about them as an effect of Jesus setting up his kingdom, they must represent Gentiles in general or nations in general.

Although specific nations are mentioned, their mention simply refers to Gentiles in general. That is, I think, a conclusion we cannot avoid. Likewise, in chapter 60 of Isaiah, we see the same kind of phenomenon.

We were looking at Isaiah 60 a moment ago where it said the nations will come to your light and the Gentiles will come to you. The sea will be turned to you. We were there a moment ago.

In that passage, it also talks in terms of the Gentiles coming into the kingdom of God. In verses 6 and 7, symbolic language, but still we see the particular symbols we're talking about here. Isaiah 60, verses 6 and 7. The multitude of camels shall cover your land.

Just as an image of prosperity in general. The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah. All those of Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and incense and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord. The flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you. The rams of Nebihah shall minister to you.

They shall ascend with acceptance on my altar and I will glorify the house of my glory. And then in verse 9. Surely the coastlands shall wait for me. The ships of Tarshish will come to bring your sons from afar.

Their silver and their gold with them in the name of the Lord your God, etc. Verse 13 in the same chapter. The glory of Lebanon shall come to you.

Well, there still is a Lebanon at least. The Cyprus, the pine and so forth. Now, here we

have several ancient nations mentioned who will, according to the passage, bring their gifts, bring their animals to offer on the altar.

All of which I take to be spiritual. I feel like there is no other choice. But these nations, most of them don't exist anymore.

A lot of them, we don't even know where they were. They are so ancient. This prophecy was made 700 years before Christ.

That's almost 3,000 years ago now. Getting close to it. And a lot of these nations are just so archaic that no one could really argue that this is... Again, this passage is like the one in chapter 11.

Everyone believes either that this is talking about the church age or about the millennial age after Jesus comes back. But whichever it is, whether it's the present church age or the millennial age after Jesus comes back, whichever theory is correct, these nations must be symbolic. Because there was no... A lot of these nations just simply didn't exist in the days of Jesus, nor now.

So we have here what I understand to be simply representative nations, current at the time, which what they symbolize is nations in general. Gentiles coming to worship God. Gentiles coming to bring their offerings to God.

Certain nations are mentioned, but we're not compelled to take them as those literal nations in the fulfillment, but nations which they represent. Chapter 66, one more example of that same thing. Isaiah 66.

I called attention to these verses earlier because Paul quoted them as being fulfilled in his ministry among the Gentiles. Verses 19 and 20. I will set my sign among them, and those among them who escape I will send to the nations.

That is, his remnant people who are saved through Christ are sent out to the nations to evangelize them. Notice which nations. To Tarshish and Pole and Ludd.

I wonder if YWAM has any bases in Ludd yet. I mean, they say they got bases in all the nations. I wonder if there's a YWAM DTS available in Ludd or in Pole.

Or how about Tubal or Javan? I think not. Now, but see, but in the very next verse, 20, then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations. Paul alludes to that verse in his own description of his ministry among the Gentiles, yet Pole and Ludd and Javan and Tarshish existed, I think, still in his day, but a lot of these nations were gone by then.

The point being, it's simply giving examples to convey the concept of Gentiles in general rather than necessarily making predictions that must be fulfilled in those particular

countries. We already talked about chapter 34 in our last lecture, where it talks about Edom. My sword shall be bathed in blood, it shall come down on Edom.

We talked about the possibility that Edom might represent all the nations in that passage. And I cross-referenced you at that time to Amos chapter 9, where Edom is mentioned, but the same passage quoted in the New Testament replaces the word Edom with the rest of mankind. The passage is Amos 9 verses 11 and following, 11 and 12 principally, quoted by James in Acts chapter 15, and where the original passage in Amos says Edom, James in quoting it says mankind, substitutes the word Edom for mankind for the interpretation.

So that would be another example, presumably, or could be, of one nation being mentioned, which is representative of mankind in general, or the Gentiles in general. There's more of this, but perhaps one of the more important ones to take note of is Isaiah 19. The reason I say it's important is because there are some people who, taking this literally, have thought they see fulfillments in some particular political developments today, which I don't think have anything to do with it, frankly.

But, Isaiah 19, principally the chapter 19 of Isaiah is the burden against Egypt, and just basically a judgment that God intends to bring against the nation of Egypt. It happened. It was the Assyrians that came and did it.

But, the chapter closes with sort of an upturn in its note. It talks about a more bright future for Egypt and for Assyria, which destroyed Egypt. And notice in verse 18 and following, In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan, that'd be God's people, and swear by the, because Canaan became Israel, that is the land, and swear by the Lord of hosts.

That means, basically, they'll worship the Lord instead of swearing by their own gods. One will be called the city of destruction, one of the cities that is from Egypt. Now, here, very possibly, Egypt could be Jerusalem, because Revelation says, Jerusalem, Revelation 11.8 says that Jerusalem is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.

But, I think not in this case. In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt.

For they will cry to the Lord because of the oppressors, and he will send them a savior and a mighty one, and he will deliver them. And the Lord will be known in Egypt, excuse me, known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know Jehovah in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering. Yes, they will make a vow to the Lord to perform it.

And the Lord will strike Egypt, he will strike and heal it. And they will return to the Lord, and he will be entreated by them and heal them. In that day there will be a highway

from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come to Egypt and the Egyptian to Assyria.

And the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land. Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed is Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands.

These are terms that were formerly used only of Israel. The work of his hands, his people. And Israel, my inheritance.

Now, what many people have understood this to refer to is, in fact many people thought they saw this in fulfillment in the Camp David Accord some years ago, when President at the time Jimmy Carter managed to work out or help out, mediate I guess a treaty between the Egyptians and the Israelis at that time, who had been perennial enemies, but entered into a non-aggression sort of arrangement mutually. And many people thought, wow, look at this, there's the Egyptians in covenant with Israel, next comes Assyria, whoever that might be, since they're not around anymore. But, you know, there are many people who feel that this is a prophecy to be literally fulfilled with modern Egypt and whoever might be regarded the modern counterpart of Assyria, and Israel, the modern nation of Israel.

Because it talks about Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria, and they're going to be all God's people and so forth. And, you know, the funny thing about this is, that would seem to be, if that's really going to happen, where God is going to say, okay, Egypt is my people, Assyria is my people, and Israel are my people, and no more, just those three. So that Egypt and Assyria are now going to be just like Israel was, along with Israel, but all the other nations outside Egypt and Assyria, they're just out.

You know, those two nations in particular, God has simply, sovereignly decided to just elevate them to the same status Israel had, okay? And there'll be three of them up there. The rest of us, you know, 240 nations out here, we're just out of luck. But those three nations are going to be special people, just like Israel was in the Old Testament.

That's how many people understand this, who take it, you know, literally, of Egypt and Assyria. And how can they take it otherwise, if they take it literally? Now, I'll tell you this, if God really does intend to do that, to revive ancient Assyria, and to take modern Egypt, and join those three in some kind of a league with Israel, and for those three, that triad, to stand above all other nations in the esteem of God, that is so major a thing that you'd expect it to be mentioned elsewhere in the Scripture. But it isn't.

I mean, that kind of a confederacy would be such a turnaround, it would be such an amazing thing, and it would be so significant that you'd expect more than this one passage to mention it in passing. But if Egypt and Assyria in this passage simply represent Gentiles in general, and they are selected to list simply because Egypt and Assyria were the worst oppressors of Israel historically, prior to Isaiah's time, Babylon

had not yet come along in Isaiah's time. Babylon measured in there too.

But in Israel's history prior to Isaiah, the only nations that had seriously and profoundly oppressed Israel long term and severely were Egypt and Assyria. There were really none others like them. And to name those two and say, you know, in the end times, later on what God's going to do is these people are going to be reconciled with God along with Israel.

And I'm going to be able to talk about these people as my people, just as much as I now talk about Israel as my people. And the fulfillment would then be in our own age right now. I mean, there aren't any Assyrians anymore.

There are Egyptians. But the point is, if Egypt and Assyria simply are taken, as in so many other places the ancient nations are, as representing Gentiles in general, then what we have here is just another prophecy of that which is so frequently prophesied in the prophets that the Gentiles will become God's people along with Israel through Christ. And this is a recurring theme.

Like I say, if that's the meaning of this passage, then it fits with what hundreds of other passages say. If instead we're taking this literal Assyria, literal Egypt, there's going to be a literal highway built there out in the desert, you know, and so forth, then what can I say? I mean, it's going to happen. But it's not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture.

Now let me say this too, favoring the interpretation that I'm favoring. I understand Egypt and Assyria are simply to represent Gentiles, period. And it's talking about how Gentiles in the new economy under Christ are allowed to be God's people just as much as Israel is.

There's no distinction between them in God's sight. Now, one way I can support that notion is with the reference here to the highway. We haven't done much with this yet, but we will in another lecture deal with all the places in Isaiah that talk about the highway.

It's a recurring thing. It says in verse 23 here of Isaiah 19, In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians, so on and so forth. This highway business of a highway in the desert, you find it as far back as Isaiah 11, which I've already said that chapter is a kingdom passage for which we have ample New Testament cross-referencing to say that applies to the church age.

The highway that the redeemed walk upon in returning to God, okay? It's there. It's many, many places in Isaiah, but one of the ones that is a passage that tells us clearly what the highway is and when its establishment is, is Isaiah chapter 40. This gets us on to a theme that I want to deal in more detail with later, but just since we're trying to figure out Assyrian Egypt here and what the time frame is and what's going on in this

passage, here's one of our characteristic highway themes in Isaiah.

Isaiah 40, verses 3 through 5. See if this has a familiar ring to it. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Now you know that verse from the New Testament.

It goes on, Every valley shall be exalted, every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. This entire passage, verses 3 through 5, are quoted either entirely or in part in all four Gospels. Or at least the three synoptic Gospels.

I think it's in John also, but I know that the three synoptic Gospels all quote from this passage and they all make the same application. They all say this is John the Baptist's ministry. Now, obviously it's symbolic because John the Baptist wasn't running a highway crew.

He didn't build... Sure, he lived out in the wilderness, but he wasn't building a pavement out there. He wasn't employed by Rome to help increase the system of roads that all led to Rome. But this is symbolic.

It's as symbolic as all the occurrences in Isaiah of the highway metaphor are symbolic. The idea is... You see, in days before paved highways, we can hardly relate with it. Travel was hard without paved roads.

I mean, it's hard enough even now without paved roads when it rains. Even my driveway is hard. We just dumped four loads of gravel on it recently, so now it's not so hard.

But that muddy old thing, when it rains, I can hardly get my car up it. To walk in it without hip waders would be a drag. But before the days of hip waders and paved roads, people just counted on it.

You travel, you walk in the mud, the road's rough. If it's dark at all, you trip over the rocks and it's a bad deal. And if you're riding in a chariot or something, bumpy roads, they didn't have great shock absorbers in those days.

And travel was just plain unpleasant unless you had a paved road. And there were some. The Romans, in fact, had paved a great number of roads throughout the empire.

But most travel didn't have the luxury of a paved road. A highway, however, was a road that had been smoothed, particularly the valleys, the low spots had been filled up. The mountains had been brought low, the mounds, you know, it was all equalized.

And the road was made smooth for comfortable travel. Now, this highway that's being

described as being formed in the wilderness is for the Lord. It's about preparing the way for the Lord.

It harks back to the custom in ancient times. If a city knew that the emperor or some important king or someone was coming to visit them, they'd be given advance notice so that for months before his arrival they could go out and smooth the roads so that when he could come into their fair city, he would have a pleasant ride, you know, in his coach or whatever, you know. So they'd go out and they'd fill up the low spots, the potholes and stuff, and they'd lower some of the bumps and so forth and try to make as smooth a road as possible to facilitate the arrival of this important person.

So he might come to a place that was prepared for him. And that's what John the Baptist came to do, figuratively speaking. In Jesus, the king was coming, and the road that had to be paved was the moral climate, the moral environment of Israel.

But he came to prepare a highway for our God. Now, this highway is throughout Isaiah. We can see it was prepared by John the Baptist.

It applies to something that God began to do in the early stages of Christ's ministry. And, of course, that road was paved so that not only God but the Gentiles could come in on it too. We have to be aware, and it's hard for some of us because we've been taught that a strictly literal approach to the Bible is the only way to honor God.

Listen, a strictly literal approach is the only way to honor God when reading a passage that's written to be taken strictly literally. But when you read a passage that's written in poetry, as these passages are, when you're reading a passage that's using established symbols and figures of speech that recur again and again and again in Hebrew literature, in which the Hebrew readers would understand, when you're reading, in other words, passages that are not to be taken strictly literally, you are not honoring God more by insisting on a literal interpretation. You honor God more by understanding it the way he wanted it to be understood and the way that his readers were intended to understand it.

So, it's clear that this imagery that comes up again and again would begin to be familiar, and it's symbolic. It doesn't take anything away at all from the importance of the passage, but it does help us to know how it's being understood. So, this highway is also in the Isaiah 19 passage about Assyria and Egypt, and it connects it to the present age, to the church age, which was established in the days of John the Baptist and Jesus.

We need now, in the time remaining, to go to the last point, which I think is the most important point of the four that I said I was going to cover. The first was when nations are symbolically treated as if they were a human or animal. The second is seeing the Gentile nations corporately as the sea, that symbol of the nations.

The third is when one nation or a representative nation is in fact representative of all

nations. That's the passages we were just looking at. And finally, we want to talk about the places where the church, which is a spiritual kingdom, a spiritual nation, is described in terms reminiscent of the natural kingdom of God in Israel.

That is where the kingdom of God in Christ, the church, is described in terms of Zion, Jerusalem, Israel. These terms, where if taken in the natural, must refer to the geography of the Middle East, are used in Scripture to speak of a spiritual phenomenon, a new Israel, a new Jerusalem, a new Zion. This we can see justified, first of all, by a New Testament reference.

Actually, more than one, but one in particular just kind of spells it all out. And that's in Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 18.

Now, we haven't studied Hebrews here yet, have we? So, you may not be aware, the book of Hebrews is mostly about, almost entirely about, the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant over everything in the Old Covenant. And this chapter is no exception. He's talking about how the New Covenant has given us greater privileges, and it's a better deal than the Old Covenant was.

In saying so, he says this, Hebrews 12, 18, For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched, and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and to the sound of a trumpet and voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the words should not be spoken to them any more. That is, of course, a reference to Mount Sinai. Why does he say that? Because Sinai is where the Old Covenant was established.

The law was given there. He's saying this is not the covenant mountain that we have come to. The Mount Sinai and all the law and all that stuff, that's not where we're at.

That mountain, that physical mountain that might be touched, well, where have we come? Verse 22 says, But you have come to Mount Zion. Oh, have we? I've never made a trip to the Holy Land. Mount Zion is the mountain upon which the city of Jerusalem sits.

I've never been there. I'll bet some of his readers have never been there. Yet he assumes they've all been to Mount Zion.

Now, of course he's not talking about the literal Mount Zion, because he has already said in verse 18, You have not come to the mountain that may be touched. The mountain you've come to is not a physical mountain that you could touch. It's not tangible.

It's another kind of a mountain. You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Apparently this is not heaven itself, because we haven't gone there yet.

To an innumerable company of angels, notice verse 23, to the general assembly and

church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. To God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus. Now, we haven't come to Mount Sinai.

We have not entered into an old covenant like the Jews did there, under the law. We've come to something far superior to that. It's not even a mountain that's physical.

We've come to the spiritual Mount Zion, the spiritual Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. You know, in saying the city of the living God, this no doubt was reminiscent of Jesus' statement to the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 5, and I believe it would be verse 16 or 15 maybe, Jesus said, you are the light of the world, a city set on a hill.

Now, the church is a city that is set on a hill. The hill is spiritual Zion. The city is spiritual Jerusalem.

How do I know that? Well, for one thing, it says so here in Hebrews. We have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the church, the general assembly and church of the firstborn. The spiritual entity that is known as the church is the Mount Zion that we have come to.

It is the heavenly city. It is the city of God. It is the heavenly Jerusalem.

That's all synonyms for the church in this passage. Yes, Tom? That particular verse is Hebrews 12, verses 22 and 23. Now, if you look over at Revelation real quick, I thought we were studying Isaiah.

Well, we are. You can't study any part of the Bible without reference to the rest of it, I think. In Revelation 21, verses 1 and 2, Revelation 21, verses 1 and 2, I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, also there was no mercy.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Talk about mixed metaphors here. A city dressed up like a bride.

Well, it goes on. In verse 9, Then one of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues, came to me and talked with me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. Well, the Lamb in Revelation is, of course, Christ.

The bride is said to be the Lamb's wife. That would be the bride of Christ. I don't think any of us have any doubts as to who or what the bride of Christ is.

Biblically, it's the church. So, this elder is about to, or this angel is about to show John the bride of Christ, the church. So, verse 10, He carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of

heaven from God.

I thought he was going to see a bride. I thought he was going to see the church. Well, he did.

In a symbolic vision, it's like a city from God. A city on a hill. A shining city that cannot be hid.

A light to the world. Interestingly, later on, as the description goes, we won't look at it all, in verse 14, it says, The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Twelve foundations? The twelve apostles of the Lamb? Paul said in Ephesians chapter 2 that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

Symbolic. The foundation of the church is the apostles and Christ himself. Here the city has, the walls have twelve foundations, the names of the apostles are on them.

There's more, but we don't have time to go into it. We'll talk about Revelation another time. But, what I'm suggesting to you, is that Jesus told his disciples they were like a city on a hill.

The writer of Hebrews was more specific. The city is the heavenly Jerusalem. The hill is the spiritual Mount Zion.

The book of Revelation says it in more of a symbolic, graphic vision. You know, you see the wife of the Lamb, the church, is coming down like a city with these symbolic features. Now, this all was justified by Isaiah himself.

All this New Testament application, I mean, it's not some kind of newfangled, weird, out to lunch kind of a thing the apostles were saying. It was justified by the way they understood the use of Zion and Jerusalem in many places in the Old Testament. Not every time, there's places in the context quite clearly.

Zion is the real Mount Zion. Jerusalem is the real earthly Jerusalem. But, that's just the point.

Context has to decide, in many cases, whether it's the natural or the spiritual. But, remember, it says in Luke 24, 45, I believe it is, or 44, Luke 24, either verse 44 or 45, it says that Jesus opened the understanding of the apostles so that they might understand the scriptures. Now, they didn't go to seminary like the Pharisees did, but the Pharisees didn't understand the scriptures.

But, the disciples, Jesus opened their understanding so that they might understand the scriptures. That's an important verse, because they quoted the scriptures a lot and made application a lot. The apostles frequently took the familiar language of the Old

Testament scriptures and gave it application and interpretation in their writings.

We've just looked at a few places where they did so, where they applied Zion and Jerusalem to the church as a spiritual thing. Now, I believe that when they did that, they were seeing what God intended, because God opened their understanding. You couldn't see it if God didn't open your understanding.

You could read Isaiah and think it was all about natural Jerusalem and Zion, but Jesus opened his disciples' understanding to what it really meant, so they could properly understand the scriptures, and what they said it meant is what it meant. And it took spiritual insight to see it, because Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2.14, things of the Spirit cannot really be received by the natural man, because they have to be spiritually discerned. The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit, and it required Jesus opening their eyes, opening their understanding so they could discern the things of the Spirit.

Now, I don't get real mystical in my interpretation of the scriptures. Believe me, I don't. I'm not one of these guys who looks for hidden meanings and spiritual meanings to everything.

Not at all. But where the apostles have themselves done so, I feel compelled to do the same, where they will say, OK, this verse means that, and I look at it and say, well, I would have thought it meant something else than that. I'll go with what they said, because Jesus gave them supernatural insight into it.

So, when they say that the church is the spiritual Zion, or actually the writer of Hebrews just said, it is Mount Zion. We have come to Mount Zion. That's the church.

He, of course, speaks spiritually. Therefore, we are entitled, at least, as we read the Old Testament about Zion and Jerusalem, to discover whether in any particular instance, Zion or Jerusalem is referring to the church or to something else. Now, look at Isaiah 60.

We're going to move kind of quickly here, because we're running low on time. Isaiah 60. Fortunately, we're in our final point.

That's good. That's doing well. Isaiah 60.

We saw this chapter before. We're taking it piece by piece as we look at different things in it. But in verse 11, it says, Therefore your gates shall be opened continually.

They shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles and their kings in procession. Now, it talks just before this about them bringing their animals for sacrifices. So the imagery is of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the only city where sacrifices could be brought. And the gates of the city,

then, are the gates of Jerusalem, or at least that's the imagery that's being used. However, I believe that the Jerusalem in view in this passage is the church.

I'll tell you why in a moment. Look at verse 14. Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despise you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet.

And they shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Now, why not just call it Zion? Jerusalem was already called that. No, this entity is going to be called the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

You know, Paul in Galatians 6.16 referred to the church as the Israel of God. Why didn't he just say Israel? Because the church isn't Israel. The church isn't literal Israel.

It's not the physical Israel. But it is the Israel of God. So also it's not literally Mount Zion, but it is the Zion of the God of Israel, of the Holy One of Israel.

The expression, it modifies Zion to tell us that we're not talking about the original Zion. This is the Zion of God. Just like the church in Galatians 6.16 is the Israel of God.

Well, okay, so we're talking about Zion. We've got Jerusalem, the city of the Lord. In the same chapter, verse 18, it says, Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders.

You shall call your walls salvation and your gates praise. In other words, we're not talking about a physical city here with physical walls and gates. The gates represent praise.

We enter into His courts with praise. Praise is our approach to God. The walls of the city are not made of brick.

They are salvation. God's salvation is our security. This is a spiritual picture, but you see the picture of the church is in the imagery of a city with walls and gates and all that stuff.

Like Jesus said, His disciples are like a city on a hill, but they're not really a city, not physically. But Jerusalem, Zion is the particular city mentioned, the city of the Lord. But it's the spiritual Zion.

Why do I know that? Because it's got spiritual walls, spiritual gates. Furthermore, this passage, especially verses 11, which we read a moment ago, and verse 19, have images that are brought up again in Revelation 21 in describing the new Jerusalem, which is the bride of the Lamb. Remember, I'll show you the Lamb's wife, and He saw the Jerusalem.

Well, you will find, if you check that chapter out in more detail in Revelation 21, for example, in verses 25 and 26, you'll find reference to the gates being opened continually. Neither day nor night shall they be shut, so the Gentiles' wealth can be

brought in. That's what it says in Isaiah 60, verse 11.

It says the same thing about the church, the new Jerusalem, in Revelation 21, verses 25 and 26. Likewise, Isaiah 60, verse 19. Isaiah 60, in verse 19, says, The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light.

But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Well, over in Revelation 21, 23, it says in the city, It had neither the sun nor the moon to shine it, but the glory of the Lord is the light of it. Same thing.

Lifted directly from this passage in Isaiah 60. But that's a picture of the bride, the Lamb's wife. The church.

So, I dare say, so is this. Though it is called the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel, it is spiritual Zion. It is the spiritual city of God.

It is the church, I believe. There's other places like this. In Isaiah 33, 20, I realize this is going so fast that you can't check everything out I'm saying, so I'm hoping you're writing down the references and you will, like the Bereans, search the scriptures on your own time to see if these things are so.

But, in Isaiah 33, verse 20, it says, Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feast. Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that will not be taken down. Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, nor will any of its cords be broken.

But there the majestic Lord will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, in which no galley or oars will sail. That's ships of war, warships. It's like beating the swords in the plowshares and spears to pruning hooks.

No war. Nor majestic ships pass by. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King, He will save us, etc.

Now, notice, look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feast. It is a tabernacle, verse 20, that will not be taken down. Not one of its cords will be removed.

Not literal. The city never was a tent with cords, literally. But, it's another image that Isaiah uses of the church as the tabernacle of God.

So does the New Testament. But notice, a tabernacle that will not be taken down. Clearly, the Zion here is permanent.

It cannot refer to earthly Jerusalem, it appears. Because, although after Isaiah's time, Jerusalem was destroyed and was rebuilt, it was destroyed again in 70 AD and has never been rebuilt. Now, some people say, well, there's a city of Jerusalem over there now.

It has never been restored. It is not... The people there do not worship God. I mean, they

might worship God as they prefer to think of Him.

They don't worship Jesus. And if you don't come through Jesus, you don't come at all. They have their own man-made religion.

They've rejected the law of Moses. They practice rabbinic Judaism, which is man-made traditions, the very things Jesus decried. And, you know, like the Muslims.

I mean, they worship God too, but not acceptably. Not through Jesus. Jerusalem today is not the city of the Lord.

And certainly, its walls and its tent pegs and its tackle has been taken down in the past. This is, to my mind, yet another description of the church, though it is called the Zion, the city of our appointed feast here. Isaiah 52.

I'm just trying to... I've got to be selective here now because of the shortage of time, but because there's a lot of passages like this in Isaiah. Isaiah 52, verses 1 through 3, and then verses 7 through 9. Here is Zion, I believe is indisputably a reference to the church, when you understand how the New Testament picks up these thoughts and uses them. Isaiah 52, 1 through 3, Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion.

Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. There we are, Zion, Jerusalem, holy city. All these expressions.

For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you. This is figurative in Old Testament images. That is, those who are not spiritually circumcised, circumcised of heart.

Shake yourself from the dust, arise and sit down, O Jerusalem. Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus says the Lord, you have sold yourselves for nothing and you will be redeemed without money.

It is the church, the Zion of God, that is redeemed without money. Peter said in 1 Peter 1, 18 and 19, 1 Peter 1, 18 and 19, Peter said, For you have been redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. That is the redemption without money spoken of here.

It is the church that is so redeemed. Further down in the passage, verse 7, Isaiah 52, 7 through 9, says, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns. Your watchmen shall lift up their voice, with the voices they shall sing together, for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring back Zion.

Break forth into joy, sing together for your waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. Now, I realize a lot of people understand this to be literal Jerusalem, but there is a problem with that. It is connected with the good news, the good tidings, and the good tidings is the gospel.

How do I know that? Because verse 7 here, which mentions the good news and the beautiful feet, is quoted by Paul in Romans 10, 15, where he says that everybody has had a chance to hear the gospel, and he quotes this, and he doesn't say everybody has heard the gospel there, he says that a little later, but he says that gospel preachers have to be sent. He is talking about the gospel of Jesus, and he quotes this verse, and he replaces the word good news, or good tidings, with the word gospel, because that is what gospel means. Gospel is a word that just means good tidings.

So Paul understood this passage to be about the gospel he was preaching, the gospel of salvation through Christ. Therefore, the salvation that comes to Jerusalem comes to the spiritual Jerusalem. Only the church are saved.

Only they have salvation. And therefore, we have here, I believe, another case in Scripture of Zion being the church. Now, there is a whole bunch of them, and we don't have time to look at them all.

Let me give you just a couple more that are particularly important. We'll find them throughout the book, but let me show you just a very few more here. In Isaiah 28.16, I drew your attention to it in our last lecture, a verse frequently quoted in the New Testament and alluded to.

Every time in the New Testament that Jesus is called the foundation, or Jesus is called the cornerstone, it's alluding to this verse. The imagery of the cornerstone and foundation is drawn from this verse in Isaiah 28.16. It says, Now, here we have the laying of a stone to be a foundation and a cornerstone. Peter quotes this very verse in 1 Peter 2.6 and states that Jesus is the cornerstone.

Therefore, he's also the foundation, because the same stone is for a foundation and a cornerstone. It's a verse about Jesus. Jesus is, a number of times in the New Testament, spoken of either as foundation or cornerstone.

A number of times. That being so, we have no question in our minds but that this is talking about Jesus, the foundation, the cornerstone. Yet, this foundation is in Zion.

This foundation is the foundation of a new city, a new Zion. You see, the nation of Israel never made Jesus their cornerstone or their foundation, but he is, in fact, the foundation and cornerstone of the church, as Paul frequently says, and therefore Paul is alluding to this verse. He is assuming that Zion here is the church.

He said, the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ

himself being the chief cornerstone, quoting this verse, of the church. In another place, in 1 Corinthians 3, I think around verse 11, Paul said, no other foundation can any man lay, meaning of the church, than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. Jesus is the foundation of the church and the cornerstone.

So, the Zion of which this Jesus is foundation and cornerstone is the spiritual Zion, the church. Okay, now having said that, and there are more places where we can get that, but we'll have to wait until another time because of our time running out here. Let me say, this will be significant in a number of places.

When we come to the kingdom passages, let's take the first one for example. Look at chapter 2. We won't go beyond it, I don't think, in this lecture, but look at chapter 2. We have the first of the golden age, messianic age kingdom passages in Isaiah 2, 1 through 4. Now, right away it says, this prophecy is concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In verse 1, Isaiah 2, 1. Then in verse 2 it says, it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills and all the nations shall flow into it.

Many shall come and say, come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, that's Mount Zion, to the house of the God of Jacob and he will teach us his ways and we shall walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Zion, the mountain of the Lord.

Now, here's the crux in interpreting this passage. Is it natural Jerusalem or is it spiritual Jerusalem? Well, I believe it's spiritual Jerusalem, but many people think it's natural Jerusalem. Those who do so often say, well you've got to take the Bible literally.

If you don't do that, how are you going to understand it at all? They say, if you depart from a literal hermeneutic, which is a canon of interpretation, if you dislodge yourself from a strict literalism, then you're adrift in an anchorless sea of subjectivity and you have no star to shoot your course by and so forth. You need to hold to a consistent pattern of literalism. And I've read and heard so many preachers say this, and basically what they say it for is for passages like this.

This is not about the church, this is about, it says Jerusalem, it says Zion, you've got to be literal when it says Zion, it's got to be Zion. Well, I mean, I've heard preachers preach that so hard because of millennialism. Basically, if this is natural Jerusalem, that immediately relegates the passage off to a time future from now, a time, no doubt, after Jesus comes back and a restoration of the natural city of Jerusalem, and therefore you've got a messianic kingdom in the millennium here.

But if Zion can be spiritualized, if it is the church, then we're describing a symbolic thing of what's happening now. All the nations are flowing into the body of Christ. And they're being disciplined, unfortunately not very well at the present time, but they are nonetheless

learning His ways, walking His path, the true Christians at least are.

And therefore, we're going to look again at this passage in detail, but I'm just pointing out that this talks about Jerusalem, Zion. If we're stuck with a literal interpretation in every case, well then we've got something that hasn't yet happened, it hasn't even begun to happen yet. But if in fact this is the spiritual Jerusalem, the spiritual Zion and so forth, then I believe that we have here a picture of the church and the messianic kingdom age passages are about the church.

Now, I will say this. The passage begins with the words, It shall come to pass in the latter days. Really one needs only to look up the term last days, latter days, or whatever in the New Testament which occurs frequently and see what it applies to.

Peter said, This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel in the last days, saith the Lord, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. This is that, the day of Pentecost. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 1.1, God, who at sundry times in diverse manners spake in times past to our fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son.

Peter says in 1 Peter 1.20 or so, He says, Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last days for you. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10.11, He says, All these things happened to them as examples for us upon whom the end of the ages have come. John says in 1 John, My little children, it is the last time.

And as you have heard that Antichrist shall come, now there are many Antichrists whereby we know that it is the last time. That's 1 John. You know, every one of the New Testament writers, at least the major ones, Peter, Paul, John, and others.

James spoke similarly. He said, This is it. This is it.

The last days. This is the last time. The church age.

They were living at the beginning of it. And it says here, In the last days. In the latter days.

This is going to happen. The apostles understood themselves to be living in the latter times. And who might argue with them? Jesus opened their understanding.

So they might understand the Scriptures. I agree with them. Okay.

So, we have to acknowledge in many passages, we're going to find this kind of language. Israel, Jerusalem, Zion, the mountain of the Lord, which in fact, if taken literally, refer to geography in Palestine. Sometimes they're not intended to be taken literally.

They are passages that were spiritualized by the apostles through the inspiration Jesus gave them. And therefore, guided by them, guided by the writings of the apostles on the

same subjects, and quoting verses like this, we learn what it's talking about. In many cases, it's going to be talking about the church.

Context will often determine that. And not in every case does Jerusalem mean the church. Sometimes it's the natural Jerusalem, but the context is usually the determining factor.

Or, the question of whether the verse in question was quoted by the apostles. If so, that determines everything. We're out of time, so we'll stop there.

And I managed to get through my notes mostly. Any questions?