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Isaiah 52:13 - 57:21



Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah 52:13-57:21 is a significant part of the Bible as it contains the defining verse of Jesus' ministry: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him". In this section of the book of Isaiah, the prophecy of the servant songs is introduced, which speaks of a servant of God who will take on the sorrows and griefs of humanity. Isaiah is also the most quoted prophet in the New Testament, with his words being mentioned twice as often as any other prophet's.

Transcript

We left off last time at the beginning of really the last of the servant songs. There are four. The first one's in chapter 42.

The second one's in 49. There is one in chapter 50. And now the longest and last of them is chapter 52, verse 13 through 53.

Now I say it's the last. Many people feel that chapters 61, verses 1 through 3 should be included as a fifth servant song. And there certainly is a case that can be made for that because the contents of it are, it is the Messiah speaking.

And he says some of the same things in that passage as are said in some of the earlier servant songs. The only thing is there's no reference to the servant. And I think probably because that passage is divided from the others by such a distance, it's just not considered one of the clusters of these songs.

But in the section we're looking at now, which is chapters 49 through 57, we have three of the four songs. The first one was in chapter 42. But now we come to that which is most well known among Christians also because it, like some of the other ones, is quoted in the New Testament, but far more frequently.

Of the past, Isaiah, remember, is not the book of the Old Testament that is most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Psalms is. But among the prophets, no book is quoted more often in the New Testament than Isaiah, who is quoted twice as often as all the others combined.

And when Isaiah is quoted, Isaiah 53 is quoted more often than any other passage in Isaiah in the New Testament. So very important passage to the New Testament writers and to us. Now, if we take the last three verses of chapter 52 as belonging to chapter 53, which would be the logical way to look at it, then we have a song in five stanzas.

Each stanza has its own direction that it takes the prophecy. Each stanza is three verses long. So that makes it rather symmetrical.

Together, there are 15 verses and they divide into five shorter stanzas of three verses long each. The first one, which is chapter 52, verses 13 through 15, is actually kind of an introduction overview. It begins by presupposing the Messiah to already be exalted at the right hand of God.

That's obviously the end of the story of Jesus' life. That's where he ended up after his resurrection. When he ascended to heaven, he was exalted at the right hand of God.

God gave him a name above every name, that every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's where Isaiah 52, 13 starts. But then it kind of flashes back, as is the case in many stories, even modern movies.

They start the story in the first scene with something quite late in the story, and then they flash back to bring you up to speed on how it got to that point. That's what this does. Behold, my servant shall deal prudently.

He shall be exalted and extolled very high. Just as many were astonished at you, so his visage was marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men. So shall he sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths at him. For what had not been told them, they shall see. And what they had not heard, they shall consider.

Now, clearly, my servant shall be exalted and extolled very high speaks of the end of things. Jesus died, rose again, and was exalted to the right hand of God. Then it reflects back on that prior to that, however, he was pretty badly beat up.

His visage, his face, was marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men. Sometimes people have, preachers have said, Jesus was so physically beat up and abused that he didn't even look human anymore. I don't know if you've ever heard preachers say that.

They're basing it on this verse, which doesn't quite say that. It doesn't say he didn't look human. It says he was beat up more than any man was.

He was very badly abused. And it did alter his visage, his appearance. Obviously, his face would be bloodied, black and blue, and so forth.

And that's what he's referred to. But the outcome is, since he has been exalted, he will sprinkle many nations. Having died, having risen again, having ascended and having been preached to many nations, his blood, his atoning work, will be applied to people around the globe, to many nations.

So we're looking at the outcome of his lifetime and of his sufferings, that he will benefit, sprinkle many nations. Peter uses this expression, speaking about us, in 1 Peter 1 and verse 2. He's writing to what he calls the pilgrims of the Diaspora. In Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, he's talking to Christians.

And in 1 Peter 1 and 2, he says, We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience, and for sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. We have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, which of course is that which cleanses us from our sin. And so also in Hebrews 9, it says in verse 13, For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Now, it talks about how the blood of bulls and goats was sprinkled in the Old Covenant, but now it's the blood of Jesus that purges us, obviously having been sprinkled upon us.

So, he sprinkles with his blood, he cleanses many nations according to Isaiah 52.15. And it says at the end of 52.15 of Isaiah, For what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider. This line, Paul takes as it were his mandate. He takes this as his defining verse of his ministry.

In Romans chapter 15, he's talking about his strategy of evangelism. Obviously, he'd like to evangelize the whole world, but he has a certain restraining, restricting policy that he has observed. And in, therefore, Romans 15, verse 20 and 21, Paul says, So I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation.

But as it is written, to whom he was not announced, they shall see, and those who have not heard shall understand. That's a quotation of the last line of Isaiah 52. Paul says, The reason I haven't come to Rome previously is someone else got there first.

And I'm pretty much committed to preaching the gospel where no one else has committed, and no one else has preached before. I'm not going to build on some foundation someone else already got there before me and laid. Now, others built on Paul's foundation.

He laid the foundation in Corinth, and Apollos came afterwards and built on it. But Paul doesn't build on other men's foundations, he says. At least he tries to avoid it, because his policy is defined by this verse.

Now, if Paul felt like his policy of evangelism and mission should be defined by this verse, it's clear that he felt this verse was defining the Christian task, the Christian mission. That he saw, of course, Isaiah 52.15 as relevant to now. Of course, who wouldn't, if they're a Christian? Now, chapter 53 of Isaiah, the second stanza says, Who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.

He has no form or comeliness, and when we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from him, he was despised and we did not esteem him.

So, in this, the first stanza, which was at the end of chapter 52, basically summarizes the fact that in the end the Messiah is elevated to a high status. Though he has been marred, he's been beaten up, he is nonetheless exalted, and now he has a ministry to cleanse all the nations. That's sort of the summary of the whole story.

Now it goes back and talks about when he was here. And this stanza talks about him being rejected. And when it says he has no form or comeliness, and when we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him, many have taken this to mean that Jesus was not a good looking man.

That Jesus was homely, he didn't have any natural beauty about him. And that is very possible, there's no reason why Jesus would have to have been good looking at all. He would have nonetheless had the same impact because in that culture I don't suppose good looks were as determinative of popularity as they are in our modern television and Madison Avenue advertising culture where good looks are everything.

But, on the other hand, this may not be talking about his looks per se. It is saying we rejected him in connection with the fact that there was nothing beautiful that we would desire about him. Certainly Jesus was not rejected by Israel because of his big nose or his weak eyes or his unsightly ears.

There's nothing about his physical looks that caused people to reject him. Therefore, when it says he was uncomely to us, he was not beautiful to us, there was nothing about him that attracted us to him, it might not be referring to his physical looks at all, but to his manner, the things that he did, the project he set about to do, it wasn't what they wanted. He wasn't exactly the Messiah they were looking for.

He was not attractive to them in terms of his mission, his policies, his direction he took, his teaching, he just wasn't what they were hoping for. And it may be not a reference to his looks, although ostensibly it looks like it is, it mentions their rejection of him in connection with him not being beautiful and desirable to them. Probably the beauty and the comeliness that he lacked is not a reference to his looks, but to his mission, to his

manner, and he just wasn't the militaristic redeemer that they were hoping he would be.

And so they rejected him. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Now, why? He hadn't done anything to earn sorrow or grief.

Well, it's because he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The sorrows and the griefs that he bore were because of us. Now, I pointed out before that the word griefs in the Hebrew actually means sicknesses, and the word sorrows in the Hebrew means pains.

It can also mean griefs and sorrows, but we know that when it's quoted in the Septuagint and in the New Testament in Greek, the Greek words that are used to translate it are, in fact, sicknesses and pains, and that is, of course, one of the meanings of the Hebrew words, so that is apparently how we're to understand it. He was a man of sicknesses and pains, not so much that he was sickly himself, very possible that he was simply a man who bore the sympathy of other people's sicknesses and pains, that he was acquainted with pains, he was acquainted with these things. It says, but we hid, as it were, our faces from him, and he was despised, we did not esteem him.

So this stanza talks about the Messiah or the servant rejected by Israel. Then the next stanza talks about how he heals the ills of the land, and of course throughout Isaiah the need for healing of the people has been sort of a central recurring theme, right from the very first chapter where the nation is seen to be a man full of wounds and putrefying sores, and no one has come to bind them up, it's received no medical attention. Well, that's what the Messiah is for.

Surely he has borne our sicknesses, he has carried our pains, we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, now these transgressions and iniquities are what alienates people from God, and therefore this is how he brings about the reconciliation. The sickness is the alienation from God, the healing is the reconciliation with God, and therefore to take care of that problem that Israel had, he was wounded, he was bruised, and this atoned for those things that were the wedge between us and God. The chastisement for our peace, meaning for our reconciliation with God, the suffering that had to be borne was upon him, and with his stripes, which of course is that chastisement, we are healed, and healed of course is the reconciliation, the peace with God, that's the healing.

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. Not the sicknesses in the literal sense, but the iniquity. He is wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, there is no reference here to him having atoned for physical sickness, and the problem was not that we were sick in that sense, but that we were like sheep going astray.

All we like sheep have gone astray, and therefore that's what needed to be cured, this

wandering, this backsliding had to be cured. And so Peter quotes this verse, or alludes to it very, very strongly, he quotes from the chapter, and in 1 Peter chapter 2, it says of Jesus in verses 24 and 25, 1 Peter 2, 24 and 25, that Christ himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we having died to sins might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed, for you were like sheep going astray. So this idea of by his stripes we are healed, and we are all like sheep going astray, but we've returned, it says you were like sheep going astray, but you've now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your soul, so this is the healing, you have been healed by the sufferings he endured, you have been reconciled to God, formerly you were sheep going astray, that was the problem that's been remedied, that is the healing of the relationship in other words.

So in this second stanza, or third stanza of the song, in Isaiah 53, 4 through 6, it's the Messiah or the servant finally brings that healing that was spoken of as absent. From the chapter 1 on, there was sickness in the nation, alienation from God, finally there's someone who does come and bind up those wounds, there is someone who heals that breach, and that is the Messiah, the servant. Then the next stanza expresses the servant's suffering, we read of his rejection in the second stanza, but this actually focuses on his suffering in more detail.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, he opened not his mouth. When he stood before Pilate, he was reticent to speak.

He answered Pilate sometimes, other times he just came to the end of his conversation and just didn't say anything more. And Pilate left and said I can't find anything wrong with this man. But he was sent to Herod, and Herod wanted to see a miracle from him, and the Bible says he wouldn't even speak to Herod at all, he was totally silent.

And yet these were the men who were in the position to release him, these were the ones who were in the position to condemn him. And that's what Pilate said, don't you know that I have the power to put you to death? Why don't you speak to me? And Jesus then did speak, he said well you don't have any power except what's given you from above. But the point is that Jesus was not articulating a defense for himself.

He wasn't defending himself in any way. It was as if he was hearing accusations that were false about him and not answering them at all. Like a sheep led to the slaughter, led to the shearers, he is not speaking in his own defense.

He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was stricken. My people would be Israel, so he isn't Israel. He is stricken instead of my people.

This servant cannot be a reference to Israel, the nation, because it's Israel the nation for

whom he has stood in. The judgment they deserved, he is taken instead. So it's very clear this cannot be the servant who was earlier referred to as Israel.

Now when it says he's taken from prison and judgment, we don't know that Jesus went to a literal prison, but he was taken captive. He was held a prisoner and then he was taken to the judgment seat, both of the Sanhedrin and later to Pilate. And from there he was taken out and cut off from the land of the living.

That is, he's killed. And it says this was not for anything he did wrong, it's for what we did wrong. It's for my people's transgressions this happened.

And they made his grave with the wicked, but with the rich at his death, because he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. The wicked and the rich are persons with whom he was associated in the final hours. He was crucified between two thieves, wicked men.

He was buried in the tomb of a rich man. And so there's a sense in which, though he was righteous, he was associated with the wicked in his death. Though he was poor and abandoned, he still had connections with the rich.

And it says in verse 10, which begins then the fifth stanza, We have the servant vindicated. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoiled with the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Now that Jesus bore the sins of many people, and by his knowledge he will make many righteous, he will justify many through his knowledge.

These are the upshot of his sacrifice and of the sequel, his resurrection and exaltation. He makes his soul an offering for sin, verse 10 says, which means that Jesus' death was a sacrifice for sin. Now the words after that in verse 10, there's a couple of he's and his's, and it's not entirely clear who he or his are, because it says in verse, at the beginning of verse 10, it pleased Yahweh to bruise him.

That is, it was Yahweh's pleasure to have his servant stand in for those who deserve to be bruised, and be bruised in their place. He was bruised for our iniquities. And it pleased Yahweh, but we've had Yahweh and the Messiah both mentioned in the first line.

Then there's several he's and his's, and when it says, he shall see his seed, does this mean Yahweh will see the Messiah, his seed, as he'll see Jesus dying for the people? Is that what it means? It could be. And he shall prolong his days would then mean, though he dies, his days are going to be prolonged, he'll be resurrected. That is one way to see it.

It is also possible that he is the Messiah who sees his seed, which would be his offspring, that he would see the results, those who are born again as a result of what he's doing.

This is very possible because chapter 54, which picks up the theme of the church, talks about Gentiles being born, as it were, into the kingdom of God. And so there is some question as to who he and his are.

Is it God sees Jesus and prolongs Jesus' days as in resurrection? Or is it that Jesus sees those who are his offspring, as it were, and he gives them eternal life, he prolongs their days? Hard to say. But then it's the same thing in verse 11, he shall see the travail of his soul. Who is seeing the travail of his soul and being satisfied? Some people say it's Jesus that is being satisfied.

I personally think it's more likely that it's God who sees the travail of Christ's soul. And God is satisfied. That is, there is a satisfaction theory of the atonement, that Christ satisfied the demands for an atonement.

And God is satisfied with what he has done. There are different ways these lines have been understood, none of them heretical, all of them within the realm of what could be theologically correct. It's just not entirely clear in every case who the pronouns are referring to.

But it says in verse 12, therefore I'll divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoiled with the strong. Now the strong are the Christians who are strong in the Lord. Isaiah has already used that term.

And therefore Christ and the Christians divide the spoils of Christ's victory. That's basically what is being said. That Christ's victory is now going to be rewarded, and his spoils are going to be divided among himself and others, who of course we know are us.

And so Paul says in Romans chapter 8, Romans 8, verses 16 and 17, Paul says the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs. God's children are heirs. They're going to inherit what is his.

And he says heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. So we are joint heirs with Christ. Christ inherits the spoils of his victory, and we are going to jointly inherit those things with him.

So this is how it ends. This passage, it does say that because he was numbered of the transgressors, and it says, and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. He prayed for those who crucified him.

He said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do. He made intercession for the real sinners.

He was not the sinner. He was being punished as if he was the sinner, but they were the sinners, and he interceded for them. But it says he bore the sin of many.

You know, Jesus himself said that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. It says that in Mark 10, verse 45. Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

This has raised questions as to whether Jesus really died for everybody or just for many. Because there is, of course, that doctrine of the limited atonement, that Christ really just died to redeem the elect. It's not really for everybody.

It's just for the some, for many, but not all. However, Paul in 1 Timothy 2, and verse 6. 1 Timothy 2, 6. Paul says of Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time. Christ gave himself a ransom for all.

Now, who are all? Well, if you look at the verses before that, all doesn't just mean the elect. For example, he says, therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. And he gives examples of who all men includes.

For kings and all who are in authority, for example. Well, certainly kings and all who are in authority are not definitely Christians. So you're praying for all men, including the rulers.

And then he says in verse 4, God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. Probably the same all men as in verse 1. Everybody, all categories of men. Everybody, including kings and those in authority.

Not necessarily just the elect. And then he says in verse 6 that Christ gave himself a ransom for all. So certainly the theme of these first six verses is Christ's concern for all people.

We should pray for all people. Because Christ wants all people to be saved because he gave himself a ransom for all people. So why does Jesus say he came to give his life a ransom for many? Why not all? Well, all certainly are many.

You see, the word many has two uses in language. One is that many might be in contrast to all. If I said, I can't take all of you with me to the airport in my car, but I'll take many of you.

I mean, many is not all. Many is some subgroup. Smaller than all.

And the word many does mean that sometimes. But also, many can simply mean the opposite of few. Many and few are antonyms.

And so to say he bore the sins of many, he died as a ransom for many, means not a few. He's one man, but he carried the load of many people. How many? All.

And all certainly is many. All is not few. So, in other words, when Jesus said he came to

give his life a ransom for the many, Paul said, yeah, that's all.

All men are the many he gave his life for. And so, certainly Isaiah 53 is in mind in Paul and Jesus' statements that he is a ransom for many. He says he bore the sins of many.

And in Isaiah 53, 11, By his knowledge, my righteous servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Who? The many. Who are they? All.

Now, in chapter 54, then, we will see no more servant songs in this section, but we do see, for the most part, in the remainder of this section, Messianic age prophecies, chapters 54, 55, 56, are almost entirely given over to typical Messianic age material. The exception would be at the end of chapter 56 and chapter 57, which turns again to a discussion of the apostate Israel, which is always in contrast with that remnant that make up the true Israel in the Messianic age. But in 54, 1, it says, Sing, O barren, you who have not born, break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not travailed with child.

For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman, says the Lord. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations. Do not spare, lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes.

For you shall be expand to the right hand and the left, and your descendants will inherit the Gentiles, the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited. Now, this idea we have encountered in chapter 49 earlier, where he says of Israel, your waste places, chapter 49, 19, your waste and desolate places, and the land of your destruction will even now be too small for the inhabitants. He talks about how, he'll say, where did these new kids come from? I lost my kids, how come I have all these ones now? And he says, because the Gentiles are going to be coming in.

That's what he's saying here too. Israel, the true Israel, will be defined not by the narrow boundaries of the land of Israel anymore, but by other considerations. The Gentiles are going to be involved in here.

The tent, as it were, the tabernacle, the house that Israel lives in is too small. They're going to have to make bigger, they're going to have to put on room additions. Add more curtains to this tent.

Strengthen the stakes, because it's going to have to hold up more weight of curtain, because there's going to have to be a big, big tent here. They should consider that Israel is not as narrow a category as they have formerly thought, because the Gentiles are going to be added on. Now, verse 1 of 54 is quoted by Paul in Galatians 4.27. And in the connection, what he's saying is that the Gentiles are actually coming to God in larger numbers than the Jews.

And Paul likens the Jews who do not come to Christ as belonging to the Jerusalem which

now is, which is in bondage with her children. That is the law. They're in bondage to the law.

The Jewish people of Jerusalem who are not Christians are, under Judaism, the law. Mount Sinai and Jerusalem, he said, are the same thing. They're in bondage, the people are in bondage to the law.

But he says the Jerusalem which is above, which is the church, is free, which is the mother of us all. And so he's talking about the children of the promise, the children of the new covenant, are not the Jews. I mean, there are some Jews among us, but it's not defined as Jews.

They're defined differently. They're defined by the promise that God would make Abraham the father of many nations, and therefore people of many nations are part of this family. And he quotes Isaiah 54.1 in order to point out that the barren nations, like a barren woman who had never had children and couldn't have children, are the nations that God never had a relationship with.

God was never married to the Gentiles before. He was married to Israel. And therefore he never produced any children among the Gentile nations before.

And therefore they are childless. However, no longer. With the Messiah having died and risen again and sprinkling many nations, as the previous prophecy said, there will be many nations born into God's family, many children.

And they will come mostly from these barren nations, the Gentiles. And more will be the children of the barren than the children of the married woman, which is Israel. So the idea is, again, God will have children from Israel and from the nations, but more from the Gentiles.

And that's why the Jewish reader is concerned. You've got to kind of expand your thinking here. You've got to strengthen your cords and make a bigger tent.

Put in some more curtains because you're going to have Gentiles included in your family living under your roof with you. Verse 4, Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed nor be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame. For you will forget the shame of your youth and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.

For your Maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is his name, and your Redeemer is holy, the Holy One of Israel. He is called the God of the whole earth.

Now, your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, but he's the God of the whole earth, not just Israel. For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused, says your God. For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you.

With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. Obviously, the Jews would understand this to mean during the Babylonian exile, God had momentarily turned his back on them, as it were, he'd forgotten them. But now he's bringing them back to their land, he's re-establishing them.

But more importantly in these passages, God is not forgetting his promise to bring about a Messianic community and a new Jerusalem. And it's talking about that, showing mercy on all who come in. It's not just the Jews, but the many nations as well who come and respond to him.

For this is like the waters of Noah for me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you, for the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has mercy on you. The covenant of peace is that new covenant that Christ has made, which is sometimes called the everlasting covenant. He says this is a promise, like the promise I made to Noah, I said I'd never again flood the earth, and I bound myself by that, so I will never again forsake the true Israel, the true church, will never be forsaken.

Now of course, I and you as members of the church might depart from the church, and that would of course mean that we fail to continue to have the benefits of being in the church, but God has not departed from the church and will not depart from the new Zion. O you afflicted one, tossed with a tempest and not comforted, behold I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires, I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord, Jesus quoted this, and great shall be the peace of your children.

In righteousness you shall be established, you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear, and from terror, for it shall not come near you. Indeed they shall surely assemble, meaning your enemies will come against you, but not because of me, whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake. God will defend the church from all who seek to destroy it.

Behold I have created the blacksmith who blows on the coals in the fire, who brings forth an instrument for the work, and I have created the spoiler to destroy. In other words, if I bring in oppressors who bring trials and persecution on the church, he's still in control, just like he controls the blacksmith who blows the coals and shapes the iron. There's a reason for that heat, there's a reason for that testing, it's making an instrument for his work.

So also, the destroyer who comes to destroy you, God uses that too, to form an instrument for his work. He says, no weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every

tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from me, says the Lord.

So we've got an imputed righteousness. There's no crime in applying these promises to the church, that's who they're intended for. This is talking about those who are the new Zion, who've come out of the sufferings of the servant, the Gentiles and Jews, who now make up the community that was sprinkled by the Messiah's blood.

These are promises to the church, not to natural Israel. And it continues, ho, everyone who thirsts, chapter 55, come to the waters, you who have no money, come buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money, without price.

That is to say, God is offering to satisfy the spiritual needs of those who are hungry and thirsty. Everyone who thirsts, Jesus said the same thing, if anyone thirsts, let him come unto me and drink, in John 7, 37. And the book of Revelation contains a promise like that too.

This is the new covenant, living waters. This is the satisfaction of spiritual hunger that talk about. It says, why do you spend money on what is not bread and your wages on what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

Now this could mean, if you listen to me, you know, I'll bless you with abundance. It also could mean, if you listen to me, those words are what is good for you to eat. If you hearken diligently to me, you are eating what is good.

Peter said, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. The spiritual hunger is satisfied through imbibing the word of God. And so, in a sense he's saying, you're seeking satisfaction from things that don't satisfy.

You're spending effort and money in directions that will not bring the satisfaction to your soul that you want. You'll be satisfied if you listen to my words, hearken diligently to me. Then you'll be eating what is in fact satisfying.

Incline your ear and come to me, here in your soul shall live. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you. The sure mercies of David.

Paul quoted that verse in Acts chapter 13 as being fulfilled in Christ. Christ has received the Davidic promises fulfilled to him. Indeed, I have given him as a witness to the people.

A leader and a commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know. And nations who do not know shall run to you.

Because of the Lord your God and the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. So, the inclusion of other nations with the remnant of Israel is obviously here again affirmed.

Seek the Lord while he may be found.

Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him.

And to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Now this, I believe, is the invitation that is extended to the nations to come and be part of this Messianic covenant community. And it's sort of representing the message of the good news.

What is the good news? People around the world are encouraged to seek Yahweh. And to call upon him. When they have the opportunity, while he is near.

And the wicked need to forsake their way. And the unrighteous may have to forsake their thoughts. Their behavior and their thinking have got to change.

That's repentance. It's a message of repentance that the church preaches. Calling people not to come and get it and get a ticket to heaven.

But to change their ways and change their thinking and come under lordship. And return to the Lord. He will have mercy.

He'll pardon. He'll pardon when you repent, that is. He doesn't pardon without repentance, apparently.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. This passage is used sometimes by people, including myself in the past, to say, God's thoughts are beyond our ability to grasp.

Therefore, we shouldn't try too hard to understand certain mysteries. Now, I do believe that's good counsel. There are certain mysteries we probably can't understand.

And we might just say, well, God understands, we don't. That's good enough for me. But this verse isn't saying that.

When he says, my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Notice what he's saying. It's a tag on verse 7. Let the wicked forsake his way.

That is, his wicked ways. Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts. That is, his unrighteous thoughts.

Because my ways and my thoughts are better than your wicked ways and your unrighteous thoughts. In other words, exchange your wicked ways and your unrighteous thoughts for thinking the way I think and going the way I say. Because my ways and thoughts are higher, better.

You'll be taking the high road if you follow my way of thinking and acting. You're taking a low road now. My way, my thinking, what God wants you to repent unto, repent from wicked ways, unrighteous thoughts, and repent unto righteous ways and righteous thoughts.

God's ways and God's thoughts. These are much higher. These are superior ways, he's saying.

The way I'm asking you to go and live and think is far superior. As high as the heaven is above the earth, my ways are superior to your ways, your unrighteous and wicked ways. He's not saying that the philosophical minds of godly people can't grasp God's mysteries.

That may be true, but that's not what he's saying. It's addressing the wicked and saying, you really need to stop thinking and acting the way you are because that's low. That's worthless.

I'm offering you something much superior to that. Why don't you exchange your thoughts and ways for mine? As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there but water the earth, and make it bring forth than bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word that goes forth from my mouth, it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. God's looking for fruit.

His word is able to produce that fruit. And so Jesus often gave parables about the word preached bearing fruit, especially the famous parable of the sower. The word of the kingdom goes out and it accomplishes something.

It produces fruit. It's alive and powerful and sharper than an intuitive sword. It can accomplish what God wishes.

For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree.

Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Obviously, we've seen this imagery before, typical of the Messianic age. Chapter 56 continues with the Messianic age, at least up through about verse 8. Keep justice and do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it, who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil. Do not let the son of the foreigner, who has joined himself to the Lord, speak saying, the Lord has utterly separated me from his people. Nor let the eunuch say, here I am a dry tree, fruitless because I'm a eunuch.

For thus says the Lord, to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath, and choose what pleases me, and hold fast my covenant, even to them I will give in my house, and within my walls a place and a name. Better than that of sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Also the son of the foreigner, the Gentile, who joined themselves to the Lord, and serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants.

Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast my covenant, even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in the house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus quoted this as the reason he was upset that they had turned it into a house of merchandise, the temple.

The Lord God who gathers all the outcasts of Israel says, yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered, others besides Israel. The outcasts of Israel are being gathered in, but others too, Gentiles as well. Now there's two examples given here, the foreigner and the eunuch.

The foreigner of course is an outcast, marginalized by the Jewish community because one thing, generally not circumcised. Has not lived a clean life, does not avoid unclean things like the Jews are required to do. The Gentile is seen as unclean, and not a part of the community.

And the eunuch was one of those categories in the law that were not permitted to come into the tabernacle. For reasons we cannot discuss right now, but mainly probably symbolic reasons. Nonetheless, he picks out two categories.

The eunuch who is probably a Jew, but for, because he's a eunuch, unclean and not allowed to come into the tabernacle. And the Gentile, who for the same, who also is deprived of the same for different reasons, because he's not a Jew. Both categories are selected to be encouraged.

They are told not to say, the Lord has cast me out, the Lord, I'm a dry tree, I'm excluded from God. Now, that's not true. If he, he says, if you keep my Sabbaths and choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant, I'm going to give you a position in my house.

Your sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. Now, this passage is often used by Sabbatarians, saying, see, this is talking about the new covenant, and it says they must keep the Sabbath. Both the foreigner is said he has to keep the Sabbath, in verse four, and the eunuch, or actually eunuch in verse four, and it would be the foreigner in verse six.

And it is true, it does say they have to keep the Sabbath, but it also says they have to offer animal sacrifices on the altar. In other words, this is the language of old covenant

faithfulness. This is many times the case that New Testament worship, communicated to Old Testament people, is framed in language that they can relate to as, you know, covenant faithfulness.

It's a new covenant in this case, and therefore the requirements are different than the old. The Sabbath was a sign of the old covenant, God said in, what is it, Exodus 30? And he says it's a sign of the covenant I have with Israel. Likewise, the sacrifices were part of the Jewish religion, not Christian religion.

And so, although it is no doubt talking about God accepting as his children those who formerly were not accepted under the old covenant, eunuchs, and perhaps uncircumcised foreigners, yet they can be accepted by God on different terms than that, by keeping his covenant. But this has to be the new covenant. We have to translate this into those terms.

Alternately, one could say he is talking to the Jews of his own age and the Gentiles of his own age, prior to the time of the Messiah. Anyone can be one of God's people, even under the old covenant, if they just come under covenant terms. In which case, keeping the Sabbath and offering animal sacrifices would be, in fact, a part of it.

The point he is making, though, is that God is not a racist. He is not really as exclusive as the Jews have made out to be. Gentiles, even some of the people who are technically unclean, like eunuchs, can actually be accepted by God and their worship be honored by God, if they are otherwise faithful to God.

Gentiles could become faithful to God, and so could eunuchs, and therefore the law is not the final word. But there is God, who judges people on the basis of their heart's faithfulness to Him. Now, the remainder of chapter 56 and chapter 57, at least 57 through verse 13, describes, again, the bad side of Jerusalem.

The idolatrous, the apostate. And he says in verse 9, This is the attitude of the Jewish leaders that are not spiritual, and becomes one of the occasions for the fall of the old order. They always had bad leaders.

They'd rather drink than govern righteously. And so 57 says, He considers that the righteous is taken away from the evil. The King James says, The evil to come, and that's probably what is intended.

There's evil coming. There's disaster coming on Jerusalem. Righteous people seem to be dying prematurely.

It should be a sign. Why are these righteous people dying? How come the good die young? Well, maybe because God is bringing some disaster. He's kind to them.

Let them die before that happens. Let them be taken away from the disaster that's

coming. He says, He, meaning the righteous, shall enter into peace.

They shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness. That is, each person who walks in uprightness when he dies will enter into peace. No description of the life after this, but he enters into a place that's not going to be calamity.

Even the grave would be a place of peace and rest, as opposed to the disasters coming on the nation. But come here, you sons of the sorceress, you offspring of the adulterer and the harlot. Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth and stick out the tongue? Are you not the children of transgression, offspring of falsehood? Jesus said they were children of the devil.

Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks, among the smooth stones of the stream is your portion. They are your lot. Even to them you have poured a drink offering and have offered a grain offering.

Should I receive comfort in these? The smooth stones are relatives of the gods they're worshipping because they're made gods out of stone. On a lofty and high mountain you have set your bed. Even there you went up to offer sacrifice.

Not literal bed. He's saying that when you offer to these pagan idols on the high places, it's like you're committing adultery against God. It's like you've gone up there to open up a brothel and offer yourself to these gods.

And actually, Ezekiel picks up that imagery and uses that a lot. How Israel's like a woman who went up and made her bed up in the pagan altars and gave herself away in adultery to these other gods. Also behind the doors and their posts you have set up your remembrance for you have uncovered yourself to those other than me and have gone up to them.

You have enlarged your bed and made a covenant with them. You have loved their bed where you saw their hand. You went to the king with ointment and increased your perfumes.

That is, they're seducing these other gods like a woman trying to seduce the king. You sent your messengers off, far off, and debased yourself even to Sheol. You are wearied in the length of your ways, yet you did not say, there is no hope.

You have found the life of your hand, therefore you are not grieved. Now, you've survived this long. You haven't realized how hopeless your situation is.

You're facing judgment, but you're oblivious to it. You're worshiping idols, committing adultery against God. You don't seem to realize there's no hope for you.

It hasn't caused you to be grieved because you're still alive. Your life is still in your hand, so what do you care? Everything's cool. Verse 11, And of whom have you been afraid or feared that you have lied and not remembered me, nor taken it to your heart? Is it not because I have held my peace from of old that you do not fear me? I will declare your righteousness, this is rather sarcastic, and your works, for they will not profit you.

When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you, but the wind will carry them away, a breath will take them. But he who puts his trust in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain. So there will be a remnant who trust in him and inherit the true promises, the true Israel, the holy mountain, the church is it.

And one shall say, Heap up, heap up, prepare the way, take the stumbling block out of the way to my people. That is, someone's going to be encouraging them to go the right way. There's a remnant.

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and lofty place, but with him also who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. There's the remnant there. God dwells in the highest place, but he also deigns to visit those in the lowest places.

If they are humble, he dwells high and low. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry, for the spirit would fail before me and the souls which I have made. If I was continually angry, eventually everyone would be wiped out.

I don't want that to happen. There's a remnant will be survived, so I will not be permanently angry. I'll have to relent on my judgments eventually for the righteous sake.

For the iniquity of his covetousness, I was angry and struck him. I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart, that is Israel did. I have seen his ways.

I will heal him. He'll heal the backsliding, in other words. I will also lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners.

I create the fruit of the lips, peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near, says the Lord. And I will heal him. 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 the context here, the wicked is, of course, is wicked Jerusalem. He's not talking about the world in general.

He's talking about the remnant of the wicked Jerusalem are saved and righteous and humble before God. The rest are like the wicked sea foaming up shame and filth. Now, when he says, I create the fruit of the lips, peace, peace to him who is far off and to him

who is near, this almost certainly is what Paul is alluding to this very verse in Ephesians chapter 2, where he's talking about Christ being our peace.

Because it says in verse 17, And he came and preached peace to you who are far off and to those who are near. So this speaks of peace, peace, the message of peace to those who are far off and those who are near. Paul takes that exact phrase and says, Well, Jesus came and preached peace to those who are far off, meaning the Gentiles and those who are near, meaning the Jews.

For through him, we both Jews and Gentiles have access by one spirit to the Father. So Paul sees this as a reference to what is true in Christ at this time. This is a passage about now, not the millennium.

So Paul says that Christ has already come with this message of peace, peace to those who are far off and those who are near. And he's made them both one in himself. And so we come to the end of this section and have only one section left to finish up the book.

Although, I can't say it will be only one session. I said one section, not one session. We'll see how many sessions it is.