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Isaiah - Symbolic Depiction of Nations



Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Isaiah raises repeated themes and motifs found in later prophets, particularly in the way nations are described non-literally. The speaker discusses how nations are often joined at the hip of existence as a political entity, not necessarily believing in monotheism and worshipping gods other than the God of Israel. The speaker also explains how healing in the book of Isaiah always refers to spiritual restoration, and how Gentiles are often referred to collectively as the sea.

Transcript

I will confide in you that over the past several weeks, I've been something like in trepidation about this week, covering Isaiah. Not that I don't like to cover Isaiah, I love it. There's hardly a book of the Old Testament more enjoyable to teach.

What I don't love is teaching it in one week. Even if I would allow myself 15 sessions, which is how many we have in a week, and even if I was just driving fast through the whole book and took four chapters in an hour, I couldn't cover 66 chapters in 15 sessions. Therefore, I knew I'd have to spill over somewhat into the second week as well.

But still, it's a challenge to me to know what is the best way to thoroughly cover the material in Isaiah in the time allotted. I realized I could just start going through and make quick comments here and there and try to get five chapters done in an hour. That's like 12 minutes each chapter or something.

That's just not realistic. I mean, it is realistic. It's not realistic for me.

Some people might be able to do that. I can't do that. On the other hand, there have been some years that I've taught through Isaiah in a topical way.

Actually, at our website, there are two Isaiah series. One is in the verse-by-verse section, where I go verse-by-verse through Isaiah. The other is in the topical section.

It's called topical Isaiah or topical treatment of Isaiah. This is an alternative way that I found to teach Isaiah back in the 70s, really, or I'd say in the 80s. After I had taught

through it verse-by-verse a few times in the school I was running in Oregon, I realized what was taking me much too much time was that Isaiah brings up the same subjects repeatedly.

Every time we hit them going through verse-by-verse, I'd feel compelled to make the same comments. I mean, after all, you can't take a whole passage and make no comments. Yet, the comments I would make were the same comments I'd made the previous time he said it.

Some things he says five or six times. I'd end up repeating myself a great deal at different stages through the book. I thought, well, maybe I could just take in a single session all the times that he talks about the same thing and just gather it topically from the whole book.

Then I could make all the comments about that in one lecture or at one time and not have to repeat it so many times. That proved to be an efficient way to cover the book. However, it's not the way that I wanted to cover the book in this school.

I wanted to actually go through verse-by-verse. This is the problem I face. What I've hit upon is I'm going to spend part of the time looking at the topics in Isaiah, and then I'm going to make a more rapid pass through the book in a more verse-by-verse, or at least chapter-by-chapter fashion and make sure we do look at every verse.

But, of course, when it comes to every verse, we talked about this when we were talking about this subject here. As you will have under your belt the summary and the treatment of the various topics that are recurring motifs in the book of Isaiah, you'll understand them because we will take them initially as a topical set of lectures. There will be, I believe, six or seven topical lectures.

That will still just get us through Thursday or something. But then we will take several sessions, at least six probably, to pass rapidly through the book and get the big picture. This way we can look at the bark of the trees in detail as long as I think it's profitable and needed to do, and then we can step back and look at the whole forest and take a run through it.

Now, it may be that you would rather take Isaiah a different way, and you can just take a more thorough verse-by-verse treatment if you want to listen to my verse-by-verse lectures on Isaiah, or you can take a completely topical approach by listening to my topical. This is sort of a merging of the two approaches. I want to not merely take it topically.

I want to go through the whole book so you see the lay of the land. But I think it's a profitable thing, and having taught through Isaiah more than 16 times in 16 successive years, I had the opportunity to evaluate the various ways that seemed to be profitable. I

think that taking a topical approach, at least initially, to familiarize yourself with the recurring themes and motifs in the book is extremely helpful.

It transforms the way you'll read the book once you know these and are familiar with these topics. More than that, Isaiah, as I said, is not only the most important of the prophets who wrote, but he sort of sets the pattern for many others. Many of the themes and motifs that Isaiah raises are repeated in later prophets.

Jeremiah repeats some of them. Isaiah's contemporary, Micah, repeats some of them, even has almost some verbatim material from Isaiah. There are, in Amos and in Hosea and in other prophets, some of the same themes.

In other words, the Holy Spirit himself seemed to favor the use of some illustrations and some concepts which recur in other prophets. Isaiah is the first of the prophets that we're studying together, and therefore this is a good time for us to acquaint ourselves with those motifs that will permeate the book of Isaiah, but not only Isaiah, but other prophets that will be studied later on. I have prepared a number of lectures.

I think in my topical Isaiah series there were like 13 different topical lectures. I'm reducing that to about half that many for this school, but I think we're taking all the major themes that are going to recur most frequently. Although you may not be able to anticipate it now, I think once we've gone through these topics, you'll feel like you understand Isaiah and what he's talking about to a degree that you probably don't feel like you do quite yet.

Today I want to talk about the way that nations are described non-literally in the prophets, and in Isaiah in particular. There's a number of sub-points under this. You should realize that the prophets, their teaching and their preaching generally had not only religious but political ramifications.

After all, Israel was a church-slash-state. Unlike America, or frankly most modern countries, certainly no Western country is at once a political entity and a worshiping community. That has been specifically removed from Western culture by modern constitutional ideas of separation of these two realms.

Of course, religion always affects politics, but in ancient times, politics and religion were wedded as a single thing. Every nation had its own state religion. Israel did, of course.

They had the religious system that God gave them at Mount Sinai. They had the tabernacle and then the temple, the priesthood of Aaron, and the sacrificial system. All of these things were joined at the hip to the very existence of the nation as a political entity.

In fact, the nation was established at the time that God set up the religious system. It was a religious nation. It was a nation under Yahweh.

Now, the nations around Israel were also religious nations. The Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Philistines, to the north, the Assyrians, the Phoenicians, later and further out, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and others. All these nations had their national gods.

This was a period of time when religion was neither strictly speaking monotheistic, except in Israel, nor technically polytheistic. When we think of polytheistic religion, we might think of the gods on Mount Olympus in Greek mythology, or the Roman pantheon of gods, where they had many, many gods that they all worshipped. In the days of ancient Israel, the religious notions of the people in general, Jewish and Gentile, well, I'll just say the Gentile, because the Jews, of course, had a unique view, but the Gentile nations had a view we call henotheism.

It was not monotheism, because they did not believe there was only one god. And it wasn't polytheism, because the nations didn't serve multiple gods, but they believed there were multiple gods, but each nation had one principal god, one patron deity. So, as a person of a nation would scan the international scene, they would believe there were gods, many gods, but one each for each nation.

So, each nation was, as it were, monotheistic in the sense that it, or maybe sometimes they had two or three, but they didn't believe that all the gods were to be worshipped by all the nations. They believed that nations had their national deities, and that those deities were to be worshipped, so that all nations had priests of their patron deity. The kings of the nations had to worship those patron deities.

They had prophets who allegedly spoke for those deities. In the case of Israel, Israel had a different mentality. They had, of course, their patron deity, Yahweh, but more than that, they believed he was the only real god.

They believed that the patron gods of other nations were not real gods at all. They were just made of stone and wood, and they were superstitious. They, unlike the other nations, did not see any validity in any gods other than Yahweh.

There was only one god who created everything, and who was rightly the god of all nations. As such, Yahweh not only made judgments about affairs within Israel, but God made judgments about other nations, too, that were not worshipping him. You see, the god Bel of the Babylonians didn't have any internal say about what happened in Israel, of course, until Israel was annexed by Babylon.

Then that changed, but the point is that the people of Moab didn't think that Chemosh, their god, really had any affairs in Israel. He was Moab's god, not Israel's god, not someone else's god. But the Israelites had the belief that their god was everybody's god.

It's just that most people didn't know it. Most people worshipped demons instead of God.

This is what the Bible teaches, and this is what Christians believe also.

As such, the prophets who spoke for Yahweh did not confine their interest to what was going on in Israel. The central concern of the prophets had to do with the sanctity and obedience of the nation of Israel to God, the covenant loyalty that Israel owed to God. Prophets usually arose and spoke at times when that covenant loyalty was being violated, when Israel was compromising, usually with idols.

Also, in other ways, Isaiah lists a great number of sins. Oppression of the poor, adultery, drunkenness are all mentioned in Isaiah, among the things that God is complaining about going on in Israel, but mostly it's the idolatry. For Israel to worship other gods is like to a husband his wife sleeping with other men would be.

God was in a covenant relationship with Israel like a man is with his wife. She was supposed to be uniquely his. If a man's wife goes out and sleeps with another man, she's violating a unique covenantal relationship she has with her husband.

Likewise, if Israel worshipped a different god, it was similar. The prophets often referred to Israel's idolatry as fornication or adultery. They were cheating on God.

It's not surprising that the chief complaint that God had of Israel was their idolatry, their drunkenness, their committing adultery with their neighbor's wives, their murders, their injustices. Those were terrible things. God was angry at those, but he was especially angry at idolatry.

Just as a man might be upset with his wife if she's rude and speaks to him contemptuously and so forth, he's more mad if she goes out and sleeps with someone else. There are some things that are the real issues that define covenant loyalty. Israel usually was approached by prophets when Israel was worshipping deities other than God.

Yet, although the prophets spoke to affairs within Israel and to the compromises within the nation of Israel, because the God of Israel is also the God of the whole earth, he also passed judgment on other nations. All the nations that actually were worshipping different gods than him, that couldn't care less what Yahweh wanted, he cared about what they were doing. He acted as if he had jurisdiction in all lands, and therefore he was in the position to judge other nations as well as to judge Israel.

His judgment of other nations was secondary because, of course, Israel was his primary focus. But still, he reserved the right to speak to and about and to intervene in and to judge other nations, which is clearly seen, for example, in God sending an Israelite prophet to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with the message, in 40 days Nineveh will perish. The king of Nineveh realized this was a prophet of Yahweh, Israel's God.

For some reason, the king of Nineveh thought, I'd better pay attention. You see, a lot of

the people who had their own national gods knew that although they had the one God their nation was loyal to, he wasn't necessarily the biggest, toughest God. In fact, in most international conflicts, the assumption was the nation with the strongest God would win the war.

If you lose the war, it means your God was wimpy, and if you won, your God was tough. People knew that some gods seemed to be wimpy and some gods seemed to be tough. When Israel came out of Egypt and God had brought ten plagues on Egypt, it really bolstered Yahweh's reputation as a tough God, because he judged all the gods of Egypt.

That's what it says in Exodus 12.12. I think it is. He says he brought judgment on all the gods of Egypt, and he brought them to nothing, and all the nations to whom Israel went from Egypt trembled, like the Canaanites in Jericho. They were trembling when Israel was coming.

Why? Because Jericho's God was no match for Israel's God. Yahweh was tough, and he'd shown it by destroying Egypt and judging Egypt's gods. That's exactly what Rahab said when the spies came to her in Jericho.

She said, we've heard what your God did to Egypt. We're terrified. You see, God had a reputation.

When a prophet of Yahweh went to Nineveh, although they worshipped other gods, not Yahweh, if Yahweh was sending a prophet saying, I'm going to destroy you, they just couldn't ignore that, because Yahweh, although he wasn't their God, he was a dangerous God to have against you, because the Israelites had a strong God. Of course, the Israelites knew theirs was the only God, and that's why he was stronger than other gods. The other gods were wooden and stone.

They weren't anything at all. But the pagans didn't know that. But God did necessarily, through the prophets, cast his gaze and his oracles to affairs beyond Israel's borders, to other nations as well.

Now, when God talks about nations, he doesn't always speak in ways that you would necessarily know he's talking about a nation. There's a lot of metaphors in the prophets and different ways in which nations and national entities are addressed. Of course, most of the time it's Israel or Judah, those nations.

Sometimes it's other nations. But we need to realize that the prophets were not people, generally speaking, who'd walk up to some guy on the street and say, I have a word for you from the Lord, unless that guy on the street was the king or someone important like the high priest. I mean, the prophets were not just guys who brought private messages to individuals, like some people in the body of Christ do these days.

The prophets were people who had something to say about geopolitics. They counseled

the kings about making wars and making treaties and things like that. And therefore, the messages of the prophets are primarily on a national and international scale, and therefore nations, rather than individuals, are the principal addressees of the prophets.

And in talking about nations, the prophets, including Isaiah, use various imagery. One way they do it is they liken a nation to a man or an animal. Now, we in the New Testament have sort of a similar concept in the church being likened to a body, the body of Christ.

We recognize that a body usually is an individual man, but in the Bible we have the idea of a corporate man made up of many members. Many people make up this one body, Christ. And that is, for us, probably the last remaining vestige of this mentality that was so common in biblical times.

Generally speaking, a whole nation was viewed as a man. For example, when God was bringing Israel out of Egypt, he said, Israel is my son. Israel is my firstborn.

I'm delivering my son from Egypt. Israel was millions of people, but it was spoken of by God as if an individual. To personify a nation with a human image of like an individual man, or an animal sometimes, is not unheard of.

And it's something we don't do so much. And when we encounter it, we might intuitively sense that that's what God's doing, but we might not be familiar with it enough to know that we can have confidence in our intuitions. So I want to give you some examples of this.

For example, Israel, a nation, is likened in Isaiah to a sick man, an individual. And we run into this right away, right at the beginning of Isaiah, chapter 1. He's addressing the nation of Judah. I said Israel here, but of course, Israel sometimes means the whole 12 tribes.

Sometimes it means only the 10 tribes of the north. But in Isaiah 1.5, he says, Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick.

The whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up or soothed with ointment.

Here is the description of a sick man, sick from head to toe, from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head. He's full of sickness and sores. No attending physician has been present.

There's been no binding up of the running sores and the wounds. There's infection, no doubt. It reminds us a lot of the man who fell among thieves in the story of the Good Samaritan.

A man beat up, bleeding, infection setting in, no one helping. No one binding up those wounds. Now, this is a description of a man, but it's not a man being described.

It's a nation. This is a figure of speech. This is saying that the nation of Judah has been beaten up badly.

Now, the setting would appear to be, from the context, as you read the rest of the chapter, it appears to be when Judah had been overrun by Assyria, and Assyria really burned up and destroyed most of the cities of Judah, but did not succeed in conquering Jerusalem because of the story we've mentioned before, the angel killing so many Assyrian troops outside the walls. Jerusalem was spared, but the land of Judah, of which Jerusalem was merely the capital city, the land was devastated by Assyrians. It seems to be this situation where the land is like it's taken a beating, and no one is rescuing it.

It's in trouble. It's actually under the judgment of God. God basically suggests that he's the one striking them.

He's trying to discipline them like an unruly teenager, and they're not turning back. He says, why will you still be stricken? Why do you want to keep taking a beating? Look at the condition you're in, and the nation in this devastated condition is like a man who's really in a bad state of health. He's taken a beating, and he hasn't gotten any hospitalization.

And so this is a personification or an anthropomorphic description of a nation as if it's a man. Now, by the way, this particular usage of the sick man image for the nation is an important one for us to understand and to keep in mind as we go through the book of Isaiah because through the rest of the book, many times the ills of the nation continue to be described as if they are sickness in an individual. And the subject of healing of sickness comes up later in Isaiah, and many people who are not aware of this motif in Isaiah have concluded that Isaiah is talking about the physical healing of individual believers of their sicknesses, when in fact, if you follow the motif through, you realize it's the national restoration, the national sickness being healed that is under consideration.

Let me just show you this because this plays out this image that we find in Chapter 1 somewhat. If you look at Chapter 3, which describes judgment and terrible things happening to the nation, it says in verse 6 and 7, When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, You have clothing, you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your hand. Now, what this is describing is a situation where the nation is in such bad shape, no one wants to take responsibility.

No one wants to be the king. Whoever takes over is going to have a huge problem on his hands, and most people don't want it. And everyone's looking to his brother saying, Listen, you're better off than most of us.

Because you at least have clothes. The rest of us are wearing rags. Why don't you be a king? You look closest to a king of any of us here, because we're all in rags and you've got clothes on.

And the answer he receives in that day, verse 7, he will protest saying, I cannot cure your ills. Actually, in the King James says, I will not be your healer. For in my house is neither food nor clothing.

Do not make me a ruler of this people. Notice the ruler of the people would have the task of healing the sickness. It's like the nation is sick and somebody needs to be a doctor.

In this case, this man is hypothetically being presented as somebody who might be able to take charge and fix the situation. He says, I'm not a healer. I'm not a doctor.

I can't cure your ills. And this is that imagery in chapter 10 and verse 19. It's actually not talking about Israel, but in this case, Assyria.

But it uses the same image of Assyria when Assyria comes under judgment. But chapter 10, verse 19 says, Then the rest of the trees of his forest. Now, this is another imagery where people are being likened to trees.

We'll see that in another at another point. But the rest of the trees of his forest will be so few a number of child may write them. And, again, it's the previous verse rather than this I should have given.

My notes are inaccurate. Verse 18, It will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruit-fulfilled both soul and body. And they will be as when a sick man wastes away.

They, meaning the Assyrians. They, plural, will be like a singular sick man. Collectively, the nation is seen like a man who's sick.

Why? Because he's under the judgment of God. He's suffering. It's a national calamity described as if it is sickness.

And it's a calamity that comes on them because of God's being on bad terms with them. Their alienation from God. The idea of God healing people's backsliding is found in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea.

In Isaiah 47, for example. I'm sorry, Isaiah 57, verses 17 and 18. Let's talk about how the nation of Judah has backslidden from God.

And he says, 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. I have seen his ways, and I will heal him.

I also will lead him and restore comforts to him and to his mourners. So this idea, I will

heal him, of what? Of his backsliding. In other words, the relationship with God has been broken.

They are alienated from God. They've backslidden from God. And this has resulted in the judgment of God.

And they need to be healed. The healing that has to take place is in their relationship with God. And so, you can look at parallels to this.

For example, in Jeremiah 32. You see that these images are taken up in other prophets as well. Jeremiah 32, he says, Return you backsliding children, I will heal your backsliders.

The imagery of healing a sickness is really healing a relationship. The sickness is alienation from God and its consequences. The relationship with God needs to be healed.

And that is what the healing motif of an individual. It's like the healing of an individual man is the language. But it's talking about the restoration spiritually of a nation that is in mind here.

Jeremiah 30, for example, another occurrence of the same thing. Jeremiah 30 and verse 17 says, I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord. Because they called you an outcast, saying, this is Zion, no one seeks her.

Remember in Isaiah chapter 1, no one had bound up the wounds of the nation that were putrefying and running sores. And God said, I'll do that. I'll bind up your wounds.

I'll heal you. The same imagery in Jeremiah, different circumstance, but the same images that we find in Isaiah. Now, of course, where this becomes significant to us in Christian theology is when we come to Isaiah chapter 53.

Where the language of healing is used and very commonly, in my opinion, misunderstood. In Isaiah 53, verses 4 and 5, this chapter, of course, is about Christ. I say, of course, because as Christians, we take that for granted.

The Jews would not say so, but we say so. And I'm convinced there's no reason to deny that this chapter is a description of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. And speaking of him, it says, surely, verse 4, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Now, the words griefs and sorrows in Hebrew can be translated sicknesses and pains. In fact, this verse is quoted in the New Testament, and the Greek words used in the quote in the New Testament are sicknesses and pains. The Hebrew words can mean that too.

This is talking about sickness and pain. And it says, he has borne our sicknesses. He has carried our pains.

Yet, we astrict him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. We were the ones in pain and sick because of our being stricken. But we see him as the one who is stricken.

He's the one who is crucified in our place. And it says in verse 5, he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.

The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes, or by his stripes, we are healed. Now, this last statement, by his stripes we are healed, is often lifted from its context in popular preaching and teaching, and saying, you see there, Jesus, when he was whipped, when those stripes were laid on his back at the whipping post before he was crucified, those stripes purchased our healing. Just as Jesus on the cross purchased the forgiveness of our sins, so his stripes, inflicted at the whipping post, purchased our healing from sickness.

And so there's extremely common teaching, especially among Pentecostals, and especially among the word of faith element in the Pentecostal movement, but even those who are not Pentecostals. People like Andrew Murray, who is an Anglican, taught this, that when Jesus died, or actually when he was whipped, he purchased the healing of our sicknesses. So it's not strictly charismatic in Pentecostals who believe this, but it is especially taught in those circles, because basically what they say is, you've got no reason to be sick.

Jesus purchased your healing, just like he purchased your forgiveness of sins. There's no more reason for you to be sick than there is for you to be unforgiven. Jesus took care of both those things in the atonement.

And so this is the doctrine of healing in the atonement, and it rests upon this one verse. Well, this one and the previous one, that he carried our sicknesses and bore our pains. They say, well, if he carried them, then we don't have to carry them, just like he carried our sins.

Now, that sounds very convincing if you only look at those verses as the only verses you're looking at in the book of Isaiah, and if you do not read how the New Testament writers quote them. Both of those verses are quoted in the New Testament, separately. Verse 4 of Isaiah 53 is quoted by Matthew in Matthew 8, 17, and verse 5 is quoted in 1 Peter 2. What does this talk about? Well, we see in the book of Isaiah a thread running through.

From chapter 1, the nation is sick. No one is healing it. No one is caring for the wounds.

The nation needs to be healed. What needs to be healed? They need to be restored to God. Their backslidings need to be healed.

They need to heal that relationship that they have broken with God. That's their problem. That's their illness.

Now, to say of the Messiah, by his stripes we are healed, in the context of Isaiah generally, would suggest that it's talking about the restoration of people to God, not any reference to me getting my flu healed or my cancer healed. It's about the people of God who are alienated from God being restored to God. That's the healing.

Now, is there any reason to believe that this is so in the passage itself, besides the broad context of the book? Well, there is. In Hebrew poetry, the main distinctive of Hebrew poetry is repetition of the same thought twice, sometimes more than twice, but always twice. And we have it in this poetic section.

You can see from the way the type is set, this is poetic. This is part of Isaiah's poetic writing. And there is, therefore, there are couplets, parallelism.

Notice the statement in verse 5, He was wounded for our transgressions, is in content the same as the next line. He was bruised for our iniquities. Wounded and bruised.

Transgressions and iniquities are essentially parallel ideas. The two statements mean exactly the same thing. In the typical Jewish poetic fashion, because it has an aesthetic appeal to the Hebrew ear, they say the same thing twice but different ways.

It's just a cultural thing in their poetry. So he says the same thing twice. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.

Then he says another thing twice. He says the chastisement, which means discipline, usually took the form of a beating. A rebellious child or a rebellious servant would be beaten usually, chastised.

The chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. Now the parallelism is chastisement parallels with what? Stripes. A slave who is rebellious, being chastised, receives stripes.

What is healed paralleled with? Our peace with God. What is healed is our relationship with God. We were not at peace with God.

We were at odds with God, and now we are at peace with God through his being beaten on our behalf. Through his suffering we are restored to a peaceful relationship with God. There's reconciliation.

That's what's healed. Now in case we weren't sure from the broad context of Isaiah or even from the immediate context of the line in verse 5, we could see how the New Testament quotes the verse, and that is done by Peter in 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2 verses 24 and 25. Peter says, But he continues, He says, Notice when he talks about what was laid on Jesus at the cross, he says our sins.

He bore our sins in his own body. That we died to sin that we might live to righteousness.

He doesn't say, and our sicknesses so we might live a healthy life.

He says, no, God has placed our sins on Christ. He's taken our sins away, given us the assignment to live a righteous life different than before, because we've been healed of that backsliding. We've been healed of that wandering.

We were like sheep going astray. We've returned now. That's being healed.

In other words, with his stripes we are healed, whether you take it directly from Isaiah or from the quote in the New Testament. It is actually referring to a healing of a relationship, a healing of the alienation, a reconciliation with God. It's a spiritual thing.

And it flows from Isaiah's early identification of the nation as a sick person in need of healing, in need of medical care. If you look at Isaiah chapter 61, verse 1 and following, it says this, this verse, by the way, was quoted by Jesus in Luke chapter 4, when he preached in the synagogue of his hometown in Nazareth. He quoted verse 1 and part of verse 2. And then he closed the book and said, this scripture has been fulfilled just now as I read it.

He said, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. In other words, Jesus fulfilled this scripture in his ministry. And he says, here's what the scripture is.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to do what? To preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal. What? The broken hearted, a spiritual condition.

To proclaim liberty to the captives, to open the prison, etc., etc. Now, Jesus was sent to heal. He doesn't say to heal the cancer victims and the lepers.

He was sent to heal the broken hearted. Those who, through alienation with God, have a spiritual heart condition that needs to be healed. Actually, the word heal here is to bind up.

And you remember in chapter 1, the nation had these wounds. No one had bound them up. To bind up is to give medical attention to the wounds.

And so Jesus said, God has sent me to bind up these wounds of the broken hearted. In other words, this healing motif in Isaiah is always about spiritual restoration. Now, we know very well that Jesus healed sicknesses too.

In fact, Isaiah 53, 4, he carried our sicknesses and bore our pains, is quoted in the New Testament about physical healing of sickness. Now, we looked at Isaiah 53, 5 and saw that that is used in the New Testament to speak of a spiritual restoration. But Isaiah 53, 4 is quoted in Matthew 8, 17.

In what context? Jesus in Capernaum is healing every sick person around. That it might

be fulfilled what was written in the prophet Isaiah. He has carried our sicknesses and borne our pains.

In other words, Isaiah 53, 4 is treated in the New Testament as if it is in fact about the healing of physical sickness. But where? Not at the cross. Not at the whipping post.

Years earlier, when Jesus was ministering in Capernaum healing people, that was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, 4. Not what happened when he was beaten at the whipping post. What is being said here is that Jesus on an individual basis did lift people's burden of sin. He carried, the word carried in Hebrew means lifted.

A person who is burdened with sin. An issue of blood that wouldn't heal. Leprosy.

Blindness. Curvature of the spine. People who had physical conditions that no one else could heal.

Jesus healed them. He unburdened them. He lifted those sicknesses.

Yes, he did that. And that is a reference to healing of sickness. Physical sickness.

But what we have to understand is the miracles of Jesus I think are very poorly understood by the average Christian. Most people think the healing ministries of Jesus and the various miracles were just there to show that he was supernatural. Just to impress people.

Just to wow people and say, wow, he must be God. No, his miracles were testifying in a physical way to something that was spiritually true. For example, when the man who was paralyzed was lowered through the roof to him by his friends.

Jesus said, son, your sins are forgiven you. And someone said, you can't forgive sins. You're not God.

And he said, oh, well, what's easier for me to say, your sins are forgiven or rise, take up your pallet and walk? But so that you might know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I'm going to heal him. In other words, the healing of this man showed that Jesus had the authority not just to cure a man's physical condition, but his spiritual condition too. And so we find, for example, in the gospel of John, this is really underscored.

John, in his gospel, only records a few miracles of Jesus, seven, I think, apart from the resurrection. And John associates these miracles with spiritual things. For example, he records Jesus saying, I am the light of the world.

And then he records him opening the eyes of a blind man, illustrative of giving the man light. But, of course, the light of the world is a spiritual thing. But he physically heals a blind man to illustrate the spiritual reality.

He says, I am the true vine. And so he turns water into wine, like vines do. He physically turns water into wine.

But the true vine and bearing fruit is not about physical grapes. It's about spiritual things. Jesus says, I'm the resurrection and the life, which is a spiritual thing.

He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. He that whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die. And then he raises a man from the dead to illustrate that.

He didn't raise everybody from the dead. He raised one man from the dead to illustrate this claim that he makes. Jesus says, I'm the bread of life.

And then he multiplies loaves and feeds people. And so what we see is that the miracles of Jesus were not random acts of kindness. They were specific agenda-driven acts of miraculous power, showing miraculously in the physical realm what was going on in the spiritual realm.

When Jesus healed sicknesses, he was fulfilling Isaiah 53.4, which said that he would do that. But he did it in order to show that by his stripes we would be healed. That is spiritually.

That is, Jesus went about doing miracles as individual evidences that he was, in fact, the one that Isaiah said would come and heal the nation in the spiritual sense. Physical healings served as tokens of him being the healer of the nation, the healer of the sinful state of mankind that needs restoration. So even though we do have in Isaiah 53.4 actually a reference to physical healings that Jesus performed, they are put in the context by the addition of verse 5 that he's the healer of our sins.

He was bruised for our transgressions, wounded for our iniquities. It was for our peace that he was chastised and for our healing that he received the stripes. The healing was the peace that was restored.

This imagery is in Isaiah and in some other parts of the Bible, too. The idea of healing an individual man is really referring to the restoration of a nation from a more broadly applied problem. In Isaiah chapter 7 on this, God is talking about how he's going to use Assyria to mow down, for the most part, Judah and Israel.

And he used the imagery of shaving a man. In chapter 7, verse 20, it says, 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, he's talking about Israel as if it's a man with hair who's being shaved.

The beard, even the hair on the legs. In other words, the body hair is removed as well as the head hair. This person being shaved all the way down to the skin, all over.

This is no doubt a picture of the treatment of a leper. In Leviticus chapter 14, when a man was a leper, when he was diagnosed with leprosy, he had to shave every bit of hair off his body and his head. And otherwise you wouldn't do that.

First of all, Jews never shaved their beards. Once David sent some emissaries to the king of Moab to congratulate him on his ascension to the throne. And the king suspected these were spies, and so they treated them with indignity and shaved off half their beards.

Sent them home. They couldn't go home with half their beards shaved. You'd say, well, just shave the other half.

That was not an option. They had to stay in another town until their beards grew back, and then they could go home. It was too shameful for a Jewish man to be seen without a beard.

So to say God's going to shave your head, your legs, your beard, there's not many reasons to do that, unless we're talking about the case of a leper who needed to have all his hair shaved off. And therefore the nation is being compared again to a sick man, in this case a man with leprosy. And so this imagery of a human being, and particularly a sick human being, is not uncommon in the prophets.

Now, it's not clear whether some of this imagery is of a human or an animal. Sometimes a tail is mentioned. Once in a while, in Isaiah 8, it says, he will pass through Judah.

He will overflow and pass over. This is Assyria will come through. He is Assyria, the Assyrian nation.

Again, treated like an individual, he. He will reach up to the neck, and the stretching out of the wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Emmanuel. Now, he will reach up to the neck.

What this means is the king of Assyria is being likened to a person, but also like a river. The previous verse says, therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the river, strong and mighty, the king of Assyria. The armies of Assyria are like a flooding river, flooding into the land, and it reaches up to the neck.

In other words, the land is submerged, like a man is submerged underwater, up to the neck. His head's above water, so he's not drowned, but he's definitely overwhelmed in general. So also, Judah was overwhelmed when Assyria came through.

Only the head, Jerusalem, remained above water. Only the head was not submerged. Jerusalem was spared.

The rest of the city was—the rest of the nation was overwhelmed. But this is talking

about up to the neck. It's like the nation has a neck and a head.

That's human imagery, no doubt. And also in chapter 30, verse 28, chapter 30, verse 28 says, His breath is 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.

The bridle may suggest an animal, a horse, and therefore the neck may be a horse's neck rather than a human neck in this case. It's not clear. But the point is that the nation is compared to something that has a neck, either a human or an animal figure.

Clearly an animal in some cases, because in chapter 9, in verses 14 and 15, it says, Therefore the Lord will cut off the head and the tail from Israel. So Israel is compared to an animal that has its head cut off and its tail cut off. And he describes what he means by that in verse 15.

The elder and honorable man, he's the head. The prophet who teaches lies is the tail. So the people of Israel were like body parts of an animal.

The false prophets were like the tail. The honorable people were like the head. But all, the honorable and the wicked, will be cut off like cutting off the extremities of an animal's body.

In chapter 19 and verse 15, Neither will there be any work for Egypt which the head or the tail, palm branch or bulrush, may do. Again, Egypt is considered to be an animal in this image having a head and a tail. Strange imagery from our way of thinking, but that's how it is.

Now I mentioned also that a nation can be like a river, especially if it is an invading army. It's like a flood of water. Or the nations in general, the Gentiles, can be likened to the sea.

In Israel, it was common to think of the land of Israel as stable. Because they had the law that they were based upon. They had a foundation in God.

And therefore they were stable and unmovable. The nations, however, who didn't have God or His law, they were unstable. They might do anything.

They had no foundation. They were like the sea, restless and nothing to keep it consistent. And so in the prophets sometimes, or in the Bible itself, you'll find Israel is simply called the land.

Just the land. Which is in contrast to the sea. The sea is sometimes the nations.

We saw already that in chapter 8, verse 7, God referred to the Assyrian invading armies as a river. An overflowing river. But there are also places where the nations are referred

to collectively as the seas.

Sometimes obscurely, sometimes obviously. In chapter 17, for example, verses 12 and 13. It says, woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas.

And to the rushing of nations. This is not Israel. These are nations.

The word nations, by the way, in Hebrew is goyim. If you know anything about Yiddish, if you ever lived in New York around Jews, they refer to Gentiles as goyim. It's this word.

The word Gentile and nation are the same word. So when it says nations, it could be translated Gentiles. In most cases.

On occasion it specifies the nation of Israel. But when the nations are mentioned without other designation, they are the Gentiles, the goyim. And so he says, they make noise like the rushing of the seas.

And to the rushing of nations. That make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters. The nations, the goyim, will rush like the rushing of many waters.

So here, while Israel is likened to land, typically, nations are likened to waters, seas, floods. In chapter 16, verse 5, it says that you may see, then you may see. Let me get it right.

Then you shall see and become radiant. Your heart shall swell with joy because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you. Then he explains, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.

The abundance of the sea is the wealth of the Gentiles. Because the Gentiles are the sea in this particular imagery. In chapter 24, verses 14 and 15, it says, they shall lift up the voice.

They shall sing for the majesty of the Lord. They shall cry aloud from the sea. Probably a reference to the Gentile nations.

Therefore, glorify the Lord in the dawning light. The name of the Lord, God of Israel, in the coastlands of the sea. Which would be in the Gentile world.

What this is saying is, it's talking about the Messianic age, I believe, in which Gentiles as well as Jews will be praising God. This praise is coming from the sea. The water doesn't really praise God, not at least vocally, but the Gentiles will.

That is what I believe is being referred to in the context of this passage. Then we have the phenomenon of sometimes a single nation, usually an ancient one. One that's current at the time of the prophet.

A nation that is likened or represented by, represents all the nations. That is, one nation will be mentioned specifically, but it refers really to all nations in general. One of the places, I mean, this happens in Isaiah sometimes, but one of the places that it's obvious that it is happening is in another book of the Bible, Amos.

Since these same motifs occur in other prophets, this is a good place to see that this one is occurring, and then we can see it in Isaiah as well. In Amos chapter 9, verses 11 and 12, it says, Now it mentions the remnant of Edom. If you'll look at, keep your finger there in Amos, and look at Acts chapter 15.

This verse is quoted by James at the Jerusalem Council. It's interesting to see how he quotes it. At the Jerusalem Council, James is pointing out that the coming of the Gentiles into the church, which is the issue that caused the Jerusalem Council to be convened, was something predicted in the Old Testament.

He quotes this verse in Amos to make the point. In verse 15, Acts 15, James says, In Amos, it's the remnant of Edom. But James understands it to mean the rest of mankind.

Edom simply represents Gentiles. Edom was just one Gentile nation, but it is named as representative of Gentiles in general. And you can even see that in Amos, where the next line after the remnant of Edom is, in the poetic parallelism there of Amos 9-12, So we can see that when Amos said Edom, the early church understood mankind in general, outside of Israel, Gentiles.

Many times a single nation or a group of Gentile nations are mentioned specifically, but they simply stand for Gentiles in general, not necessarily those specific nations. For example, in chapter 11 of Isaiah, there are quite a few nations mentioned. In verses 10-12, it says, Now there's no question about the fulfillment of this, because Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15, and he says this is a verse that substantiates his ministry among the Gentiles.

In other words, Paul said that his ministry evangelizing the Gentiles was predicted in this verse, that God has raised up Christ as a banner to the nations, and the Gentiles are seeking him. So we're looking here in Isaiah 11 at the Messianic age, at the church age, at the age when Paul was preaching to Gentiles, and when we still do. This is what this is talking about.

Now many of these nations that are mentioned don't exist anymore, and didn't exist in the time when God raised up the banner to the Gentiles. In other words, these are extinct nations, many of them, and yet they simply stand for Gentiles in general, because of course the fulfillment occurred when some of these nations were already gone. Likewise, in verse 12, he will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together to disperse from the four corners of the earth.

So he's talking about the nations in general, but he names some specific nations. These nations were, you know, contemporary nations in Isaiah's day, but not anymore. Not at the time even that the prophecy is talking about.

The prophecy is talking about now, but it names nations that don't exist now, but they simply stand for, in general, Gentile nations. Paul quotes, as I said from this verse in Romans 15.10. In Romans 15.16, he quotes from another verse in Isaiah that does the same kind of thing, and that's in chapter 66. Isaiah 66, this is also talking about the church age, though the language is poetic and symbolic, and it uses this kind of symbolism we're talking about right now.

Because in Isaiah 66.19 and 20, it says, I will set a sign among them, like the banner of chapter 11, and those among them who escape I will send to the nations, to Tarshish and Pole and Lud, who draw the bow and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, who have not heard my fame or seen my glory, and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord, out of all nations, on horses and chariots and so forth. Now, Paul quotes or alludes to verse 20.

In Romans 15.16, he talks about the Gentiles that he is evangelizing are an offering to the Lord, a phrase that is taken from this verse. In fact, any Bible you have, if you look at Romans 15.16, the cross-reference will say Isaiah 66.20. So, I mean, it's universally recognized Paul is quoting or alluding to this verse. But he's talking about his ministry.

This is talking about the church age, the outreach to the Gentiles, of which Paul was a pioneer. And he saw this verse fulfilled in his time. But look at the nations that are mentioned specifically Tarshish and Pole, Lud, Tubal and Javan.

These are ancient nations. They simply represent the Gentiles in general. And so it says in verse 20, from all the nations.

These individual nations are mentioned simply to represent all nations. And this is the way it is sometimes used. I give other examples, by the way, in the notes.

But I will not do so now because we have run out of time for this lecture. We will continue on this same set of notes, though, when we come back. And we'll see some of the most important instances of this phenomenon of using symbolic ways of speaking of nations.

Especially symbolic ways of speaking of the nation that is called the church. And we'll see that when we come back.