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Volume II:

Neviim Achronim - Later Prophets

Section A:

Yeshayah - Isaiah

A Brief Introduction to the Book of Isaiah

Yeshaya (Isaiah) is the first book of the Neviim Acharonim, the Later Prophets. While the books of the Neviim Rishonim, the Early Prophets, focus heavily on the history of the Jewish people from the time of Joshua until the Babylonian exile, the Later Prophets focus on the actual prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve “minor” prophets. Accordingly, the Later Prophets are much more esoteric, full of symbolism and allegory.

The books of the Later Prophets occur concurrently with those of the Early Prophets. Occasionally, we will see familiar stories from a new perspective. (Compare Isaiah’s visit to the ill King Hezekiah in II Kings chapter 20 with Isaiah 38 for one such example.) Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah (Azariah), Yosam, Achaz and Hezekiah, though the prophecies in the book are not in chronological order. Some of his contemporary prophets were Nachum, Yoel and Habakkuk, who prophesied to Hezekiah’s son, Menashe. (Menashe was the king who had Isaiah executed - see Talmud Yevamos 49b.)

Isaiah is different from most other books of the Prophets in a significant way. Most of the prophets wrote down their own prophecies when they had finished the active part of their careers. Isaiah, however, was assassinated. Since he died abruptly, he was unable to write down his own prophecies. Since they were recorded by different students, there are some stylistic differences in the book. Bible critics attribute this to “two Isaiahs;” but this is unnecessary, since our tradition already addresses the authorship of the book and resolves this perceived difficulty before it even arises.

Much of what we know about the Moshiach and the Messianic era comes from the Book of Isaiah. (Chapter 11 is a major source of such information.) However, there has also been much misrepresentation of the book by other religions’ missionaries. For example, the alleged prediction of a virgin birth in chapter 7 and the famous “suffering servant” of chapter 53. We will address these mis-interpretations as they arise in the text.

Finally, when Isaiah chastises the nation for their sins, don’t get the misimpression that every single person must have necessarily been guilty of these shortcomings. We can all name the sins of our era, but we are also aware that not everybody is guilty of them. Similarly, in Isaiah’s time, there were certain misbehaviors that were rampant, but they were by no means universal. (So, when he compares the nation to Sodom, don’t take it too literally.)

The Neviim Acharonim are a completely different experience from Chumash and the Neviim Rishonim. If you haven’t been exposed to them before, you’re about to embark on a unique journey of Torah learning.

Chapter 1

You've Got to Change Your Evil Ways

Isaiah (Yeshayahu) was the son of Amotz, who was the brother of Amatziah, then king of Judah (Megillah 10b). He prophesied to the nation of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem. This prophecy is called a vision ("chazon"), which denotes a harsh form of prophecy.

In this chapter, Isaiah calls upon the heavens and earth to bear witness to what G-d has said: the Jewish people have rebelled against Him. An ox recognizes its owner and a donkey knows its home, but the Jews failed to recognize G-d. They've suffered punishments, from head to foot, but they continue to sin against G-d. The land is desolate and the cities have been burned, as in the Tochacha, the rebuke in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. If not for G-d's mercy, the nation would have been completely obliterated, like Sodom and Gomorrah. (Isaiah even calls the Jewish people "leaders of Sodom" and "nation of Gomorrah.")

Isaiah continues: G-d doesn't want or need sacrifices. Sure, the people were great about bringing sacrifices, but then they'd turn around and wrong one another. A sacrifice from such a person is actually detestable to G-d. G-d no longer wanted them gathering before Him for Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh. When they spread out their hands to pray, it's as if they were covered in blood.

What the people need to do is to cleanse themselves of the taint of their deeds. Give up their evil ways. Do good, seek justice, look out for widows and orphans. If they repent, their sins which are red like crimson will become white like snow. (This should be a familiar concept from Yom Kippur.) If the people shape up, they will enjoy the best produce of the land. If not, their enemies will devour them with the sword.

Judah was formerly a righteous place, a residence of justice. Now it houses murderers. (Rashi on verse 21 says this refers to the murders of the prophets Uriah and Zechariah. We alluded to the murder of Zechariah in II Kings chapter 12 and we will read of the murder of Uriah in Jeremiah chapter 26.) Everybody cheats everybody else; the coins are counterfeit and the wine is diluted. Princes consort with thieves and everybody is running after payoffs. Therefore, G-d will purge and purify the nation, restoring it to its former glory so that once again it will be known as a place of righteousness. The wicked will be destroyed, ashamed for their idolatry. They will be like a dry garden, easily consumed by a spark with no one to put out the fire.

Chapter 2

Can I Have a "Word" With You?

After his "chazon" - the harsh prophecy of chapter 1 - Isaiah now has a "davar" - a "word" of consolation. At the "end of days," after the wicked are destroyed, G-d's House will be firmly established. All the nations will flock to Him, turning their instruments of war into farming implements.

Isaiah speaks to G-d and says that He had turned His back on the Jews because of their sins. The land became full of gold and silver, horse and chariots, and idols. G-d will not overlook the infidelity of those who turned to idols. The egotistical will be humbled and G-d alone will be praised.

There is a day when G-d will repay everyone according to their deeds. All the mighty and powerful warriors and governors, who liken themselves to cedars and oaks, will be brought down to their place. A person who takes pride in his material possessions will likewise be humbled. On the day of judgment, G-d alone will be exalted.

The idols will pass away. People will try to hide from G-d in caves, tossing their idols into ditches. (Of course, there's no hiding from G-d!) Don't listen to people who try to lead you astray. People's lives are fleeting moments and their handiwork - idols - are surely valueless.

Chapter 3

And What's Wrong With Women?

In this chapter, Isaiah speaks not of the Messianic era, but to people of his own generation. G-d is removing the supports from Judah and Jerusalem - soldiers and warriors, judges, prophets and elders. Instead, young and inexperienced people will lead, as will those who mock. People will be oppressed; young people will be disrespectful to the elders and lowly people will be disrespectful to honorable people.

A person will be selected to lead his family simply because he has a proper garment. The person will protest that he may seem to be in good shape, but he is just as impoverished as those who ask his leadership. Things will reach this state because of the people's sins, which they brazenly committed in public.

At this point, Isaiah says to praise the righteous for they are good and woe to the evil for they are bad. But is it not obvious that the righteous are good and the evil are bad? The Talmud says on this verse that it refers to both our actions towards G-d and towards other people. "Righteous" towards G-d and "good" towards people; "evil" towards G-d and "bad" towards people (Kiddushin 40a).

Isaiah then says that the people are led by scoffers and women rule them. What's wrong with women? Nothing, really. The prophetess Deborah was one of the greatest leaders ever. But the chapter is on the verge of detailing the sins of the women of the time. These women are unfit role models, not women in general. Another explanation is that the people allowed themselves to be controlled by their desires for women. (The Targum Yonasan, by the way, renders the word *noshim* - creditors - rather than *nashim* - women.)

So, the leaders have led the people astray and G-d is ready to judge. The leaders crushed and oppressed the poor in their legal proceedings. This far was the sins of the men; now Isaiah will discuss the sins of the women.

The women were as prideful as the men, walking with their necks stretched out and winking at the men. G-d will strike such women with *tzaraas* ("leprosy"), removing their fancy accessories. (Isaiah goes on to list them:



shoes, hats, jewelry, robes, purses, mirrors and many more.) In place of perfume, there will be decay. Instead of a belt, wounds. Men will fall in war and there will be mourning.

Chapter 4

Burning Sun is Bad Enough, But Burning Rain?

Our last chapter ended that many men would die in battle. So many would die that seven widows would each ask a man to marry them. They did not really need the support of a husband, but they needed to be at least nominally married so that they would not be molested by the Babylonian troops.

After the egotistical have been humbled, the sprout of G-d - possibly referring to the Moshiach - will be for beauty and honor. The righteous, who remain from the war, will be in Jerusalem and will be called holy.

G-d will wash away the filth of the women's sins and the blood of the men's with a spirit of purification. Then, the Temple Mount will be covered with a cloud of G-d's glory, as there was over the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Beis HaMikdash (Temple). There will be a shelter from sun and protection from rain, alluding to various other prophecies. (Malachi 3:19 says that the sun will burn up the evil like straw; Psalms 11:6 says that G-d rains on the evil like fiery coals. These sources are quoted in our chapter by Rashi.)

Chapter 5

The Disappointing Vineyard

Isaiah starts this chapter with the allegory of a vineyard. His beloved friend had a vineyard in a fertile field, which he fenced in and cleared of debris. He planted it and placed a watchman in it, but instead of grapes, wild berries grew there. This is like the people of Jerusalem. G-d cleared the land and planted the people, but His "crop" did not live up to expectations. Therefore, the metaphorical "fence" will be torn down and other nations will be able to trample over the "vineyard" that is the Jewish people. It won't be pruned or hoed and worms will run rampant, unchecked. G-d will not water the vineyard, which, beyond a metaphor, could also literally refer to a drought. In short, G-d is disappointed with His crop - He planted justice and righteousness, but what sprouted was injustice and cries for aid.

Next, Isaiah says woe to those who join houses or fields together in an effort to crowd the weak and poor out of their land. G-d says that these mansions will be emptied of their residents and these acres of land will produce a fraction of their proper capacity.

Isaiah also says woe to those who live to party. They get up early and start drinking and continue to do so until the night. They have all sorts of instruments playing, but they are unconcerned with G-d and Torah. People will be exiled for spurning G-d to pursue physical pleasures, dying of hunger and thirst as payment in kind. As they gobble up food and drink, the grave will gobble them up, humbling such haughty people.

When G-d executes judgment against such people, His name will be praised. The righteous, who are compared to lambs, will be free to “graze” as they please.

Woe to those who draw sin as one pulls carts with ropes. They question the prophets who remind them of G-d’s will, disbelieving that the time of their judgment will ever arrive. They are so confused, they think that good is bad and bad is good, light is dark and dark is light, bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter. They consider themselves wise and profound, but they’re not.

Woe to those who should use their strength in the defense of the needy, but who squander their energies on partying and woe to those who pervert justice for bribes. They will be consumed like straw in a fire for rejecting the word of G-d.

G-d has become angry with His nation and has hit them, causing the mountains to tremble. He will raise a flag signaling the other nations that they can attack the Jews. The other nations will enthusiastically leap at the chance, not stopping to rest during the day, nor taking the time to undress at night. The armies of the nations will be prepared to wage war on the Jews, with their weapons, horses and chariots all in peak condition.

The king of Assyria, who would exile the Northern Kingdom of Israel, is compared to a lion roaring and growling at the nation. Israel will look for aid, but only find darkness.

Chapter 6

Holy, Holy, Holy

This chapter contains Isaiah’s very first prophecy. It says that it occurred in the year that King Uziyahu died, but it is generally accepted that it means the year he was struck with tzaraas (leprosy). In his vision, Isaiah saw the throne of G-d. (This is an anthropomorphism; of course, G-d has no literal body or physical throne.) G-d’s “lower half” filled the Temple and sing-winged Seraphim were praising Him. The Seraphim would call to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts, the whole world is full of His glory” (which we say in Kedusha, from this source).

The doorways of the Temple shook from the voice of the angels and the Temple filled with smoke. Isaiah was frightened that he would die from seeing G-d’s Presence. One of the angels took a coal from the altar and touched Isaiah’s mouth with it, purifying him of his sins.

Then G-d asked whom He should appoint messenger and Isaiah volunteered. G-d told him to say to the people, “You hear, but you don’t understand; you see, but you don’t know. The people are becoming complacent and they’re ignoring the words of the prophets, so they won’t have to repent.” Isaiah asked how long the people will not listen and G-d replied until the cities are all exiled and empty. G-d will carry the people away and only ten percent will remain. Then they will be purged again, like trees that lose their leaves in several shifts until nothing remains but a bare trunk.

Chapter 7

What Virgin Birth?

Isaiah prophesied in the time of King Achaz of Judah. At the time, R'tzin, king of Aram and Pekach, king of Israel were teamed up against Judah. Achaz was worried, because each of these kings had defeated him alone and now they were combining their efforts.

G-d sent Isaiah and his son, Shor YOSHUV, to Achaz, to tell him to be calm because the aggressor nations would not succeed. Furthermore, in 65 years, the northern Kingdom of Israel would cease to be a nation altogether, because they'll be exiled by Assyria. Then, Achaz was told to choose a sign to prove the prophecy.

"I won't test G-d," Achaz replied. "Oh, please," said Isaiah, "you tire both man and G-d. Fine. I'll give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and will have a son, whom she'll call Immanuel. Before he's old enough to know good from bad, the land of the two kings that fear will be abandoned."

The prophecy to Achaz continues: Your kingdom will have a Golden Age like it hasn't seen since the nation split in two. G-d will signal the armies of Egypt and Assyria; He will remove the king, people and governors of Assyria like hair before a razor. A person will only have a few animals, but they will produce so much milk that everyone will live on the cream. Vineyards that had a thousand vines will be desolate. (Radak says that vineyards that were desolate will contain a thousand vines.) Mountains will not be tilled because of worms and thorns, but will be pastures for cattle and sheep.

There are famous non-Jewish sources that interpret verse 14 to refer to a future "virgin birth." Nothing in the chapter supports such a reading. (1) The word *alma* means a girl, but not necessarily a virgin. (*Besulah* is virgin.) (2) It also says that the girl "has conceived," not "will conceive." (3) The verse doesn't say "a girl" will have a baby, but "the girl," that is, one known to Isaiah and Achaz. Generally this is taken to be refer to one of their own wives and refer to either the birth of Achaz's son, King Chizkiyahu or Isaiah's own son, in the next chapter. (4) Perhaps most tellingly, the prophecy is that these attacking nations would be defeated while the child is still quite young. If it foretold the birth of a baby in Bethlehem over 600 years later, it would not be much of a sign to Achaz that he would win, as both the war and his life would be ancient history by then! From context, it had to be a baby Achaz would live to see!

Chapter 8

Mahershalachashbaz

G-d told Isaiah to take a large scroll and to write on it in plain script to hasten spoils and quicken booty (which really is the same thing twice, in different words). Uriah the Kohein (priest) and Zechariah the prophet were called as witnesses.

Isaiah and his wife had a son, possibly the one foretold in the previous verse, and G-d told Isaiah to name him Mahershalalchashbaz (or "hasten spoils, quicken booty," as on the scroll). G-d said that even before the child is old enough to call for his parents, the king of Assyria would carry off the wealth of Damascus and Samaria. G-d continued that, since the people of Judah would follow a rebellion (against King Chizkiyahu), preferring the ways of other nations' kings, then G-d will let them fall into the hands of Assyria, whom He compared to a rushing river overflowing its banks. Assyria (the "river") will reach up to the "neck" of Judah and the army, compared to wings, will spread out over the land. Even though they will be united, the enemy forces will ultimately be broken apart. Their plot will not succeed because G-d is with us "G-d is with us" = "Immanuel," as in the previous chapter.)

The prophet continues that G-d warned him not to join the rebellion, not following a majority to do evil, not fearing what they fear or ascribing any power to them; only G-d should Isaiah fear and He is Isaiah's strength. The rebellion will be a sign of what is to come for those who lead others astray.

G-d told Isaiah to seal the Torah in His students; Isaiah would wait for G-d, Who sometimes "hides" from Israel. When people say to turn instead to sorcerers, we should answer, "Isn't this a nation that follows G-d?" (Don't listen to them when they try and persuade you to do otherwise!)

Those who join the rebellions will suffer hunger and troubles, and will curse the king and their idols. They will look throughout the land, but only find darkness and oppression. However, those who do the oppressing - Assyria - will not tire. The first exile we got off (relatively) easy - only the Tribes of Zebulun and Naftali were exiled. The second wave would remove the two-and-a-half Tribes in Transjordan, but the third wave would be the harshest, exiling the rest of the Ten Tribes.

Chapter 9

"Like a Person Eating His Own Arm"

The people who walked in darkness - the people of Jerusalem, who lived under the threat of exile - saw a great light with Assyria's defeat. Those who lived in the shadow of death had light shine on them. G-d has raised the nation up, rather than their enemies, and they rejoice over Him as one does over a harvest or when dividing the spoils of war. The burden that Assyria placed on Judah is gone, broken in one night like Midian in the time of Gideon (Judges chapter 7). The sound of victory in battle rings and the garments of those killed in war are soaked in blood - no so here! The Assyrians died in a plague (see II Kings chapter 19). A child has been born who will bring about this salvation and he is called by G-d "the prince of peace." This child will increase G-d's authority and David's throne, supporting it with righteousness and zealously for G-d. (This is NOT a Messianic prophecy! The child in this verse has already been born. It refers to King Chizkiyahu.)

G-d sent a prophecy and it will be fulfilled. Everyone in the Northern Kingdom of Israel will know that they were wrong when they arrogantly said they would restore what Assyria destroyed with better. G-d strengthened the enemies of the king of Aram - Assyria. Aram in the east and the Philistines in the west both attacked Israel, but G-d will be with them until He finally sends Assyria to finish the job.

The people still haven't returned to G-d, even though He's been punishing them. G-d will cut off both important and simple people at one time - from the elders to false prophets. The leaders of the people have misled them.

G-d will not rejoice over the young people because of their sins and He will not have mercy even on widows and orphans because all have sinned, from the highest person to the lowest. They are hypocrites and they speak foul things. Yet G-d's hand is still stretched out to the people. Their evil will burn them like a flame and they will be trapped by the thick smoke. This smoke has reached the earth; nobody has pity on anybody else. They plunder from one another and it's never enough. They pillage from their own family members, like a person eating his own arm.

The Tribes of Ephraim and Menashe, even though they are brothers, will fight one another until they ultimately join forces against Judah. Despite all this, G-d still doesn't turn away from His nation.

Chapter 10

Please Note: Assyria's Gone and We're Still Here

People who forge notes to collect money not due to them, or who miscarry justice at the expense of the poor, widows and orphans - such people will get their comeuppance. What will they do when G-d comes to settle the score? Where can they run? And what will they do with all their ill-gotten gain? The people will be carried off as prisoners to a foreign land - and yet G-d is still with them!

It's not a good thing for Assyria to be the instrument of G-d's wrath. Israel needs to be punished, but that decision is not from Assyria, it's from G-d. However, Sancheriv, king of Assyria, actually thinks he has the kind of power to punish the Jews on his own! He says, "Who can resist me? Aren't my officers each as mighty as a king? Won't Samaria be conquered like Damascus? I'll conquer Judah and Israel just like all the other nations!" When G-d is through using Assyria to punish the Jews, He'll make sure that Sancheriv is taught the lesson of his arrogance. He thinks he is so strong, wise and clever, but he's just an axe - G-d is the woodsman wielding the axe. Since Sancheriv cannot recognize that G-d is over him, G-d will send the plague that humbles the Assyrian king by decimating his forces.

The Torah and those who keep it will burn Assyria, consuming their warriors and officers. Their armies will be consumed by a Heavenly fire, with few survivors, so few that any small child could count them.

At that time, when G-d judges Assyria, the remaining Jews will not rely on their oppressors, but on G-d alone. Those who remain will return to G-d, the righteous few washing away the destruction. G-d will have punished the evil and the rest will see and return to Him. G-d says: Have no fear. You'll be punished with the rod, but it will be over soon because Assyria (the instrument of G-d's wrath) doesn't recognize Him.

G-d will punish Assyria as He did Midian before them, and the Egyptians before them. Then the burden of Assyrian oppression will stop.

Here, Isaiah outlines Assyria's conquests on the way to Judah. Now they stand, poised on the outskirts of Jerusalem. G-d will cut them down to size, likening them to trees before a saw.

Chapter 11

Now THIS is a Messianic Prophecy!

In this chapter, Isaiah tells us about the Moshiach (Messiah), who will be descended from King David. What does Isaiah reveal? He will be wise, understanding and pious. He will be driven to do the will of G-d and will have exceptional powers of perception. He will judge fairly, not taking advantage of the poor as had been done by the leaders of Isaiah's generation. He will destroy evil with his mere words.

The righteous will surround the Moshiach. The strong will dwell in peace with the weak, rather than oppressing them. They are symbolized by the wolf and the lamb living together; there are those who take this literally rather than allegorically. There are many such metaphors in this chapter: the cow and the bear, the lion eating straw, children not fearing snakes, etc. The land will be as full of Torah knowledge as the sea is full of water.

When the Moshiach is established, the nations will turn to him for guidance. They will honor him and live in peace with Israel. Then, G-d will stretch out His hand to gather the exiles from Assyria, Egypt, Ethiopia and elsewhere. G-d will gather the scattered Jews from "the four corners of the Earth." The two Jewish nations, Israel and Judah, will be reconciled and reunited. (Israel is referred to as Ephraim, referring to the Tribe of their first king, Yaravam. According to Rashi, this verse also refers to the Moshiach ben David, from the Tribe of Judah, and the Moshiach ben Yosef, as Ephraim was a son of Joseph. Further explanation of the concept of two Messiahs is beyond the scope of this synopsis.) Together, the two Jewish nations will defeat their enemies.

G-d will dry up rivers and seas, beating them into streams with paths in between, to serve as highways for all the Jews returning from exile, like the Red Sea when the Jews left Egypt.

Chapter 12

"U'shavtem Mayim B'Sason MiMaynei HaYeshua"

A small chapter - only six verses! When Israel sees the other nations humbled, they will thank G-d, because He was angry with us but He turned His wrath away. He is the G-d of salvation; we trust in Him and do not fear. We joyfully draw water from the well of salvation (this verse comprising the song quoted in the title of this synopsis) and we thank G-d, publicizing His great deeds. Sing to G-d for all that He has done for us!



Chapter 13

Here's One for Babylonia

Now Isaiah shares a prophecy regarding Babylonia. Signal the distant people so that the invaders may enter and conquer Babylonia. G-d has summoned His agents (Rashi says Persia and Media) to do His will. There is a sound like crowds of people, like nations gathering; G-d appoints officers over the armies. The Persians and Medes come from far away to destroy the Babylonia. Woe to the Babylonians, for the day of G-d's judgment is near!

The hands of the Babylonians will weaken and their hearts will lose courage against the invaders. The Babylonians will be in great pain and panic. Metaphorically, G-d won't even permit the stars to shine on Babylonia, that's how black things will seem to them. G-d will then judge their sinners, the proud and the arrogant.

At that time, G-d will make a human being (Rashi says the prophet Daniel) more precious than all the gold of Ophir. (Ophir's the name of a place.) Heaven and Earth will shake from G-d's wrath. The Babylonians will be like sheep or deer, running aimlessly without a leader. Those who run or hide will fall by the sword. The Babylonians will see their children murdered and their wives violated. The Medes will stand up against Babylonia and they don't want money - they want vengeance! They won't pity children, even newborn infants.

Babylonia, the pride of the world, will be overturned like Sodom and Gemorrah. Babylonia will remain desolate; even nomads won't settle there. (The prophet uses the word "Aravi" - Arab.) Various animals will occupy the land - ferrets in the houses, cats in the palaces, snakes in the banquet halls. Babylonia's time is coming and they will not get an extension!

Chapter 14

No Fallen Angel

G-d will destroy Babylonia, then have mercy on the Jews and return them to their land, where they will rule over their former oppressors. On that day, the Jewish people will have relief from their sorrows. They will say to the Babylonians that G-d has broken the staff of those who would oppress others. Even the trees will rejoice with the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar, since they will no longer be felled for war.

Just as those above the ground feared Nebuchadnezzar, those below the ground (in the grave, possibly in Hell) will likewise dread his coming. But they will realize that Nebuchadnezzar no longer has any power. He has fallen from his lofty station to maggots and worms. The one who intended to ascend to the highest heights has been brought down to the pit (again, the grave, or possibly Hell). People will look at him in disbelief. "This is what we were all so afraid of? All the kings lay in honor, but he was cast out of his grave." (The commentators quote the Seder Olam that Nebuchadnezzar's body was exhumed and dragged as a rebellion against his decrees.)

G-d says, "I will rise against Babylonia and cut off his descendants" (including Belshazzar and Vashti). The land will be "swept with the broom of destruction." G-d has decreed it and nobody can thwart His plans.

This prophecy was made in the year King Achaz died (and the righteous Chizkiyahu assumed the throne): The Philistines should not rejoice that Achaz is dead, since his offspring will do even more damage to them. Israel will dwell safely, while the Philistines will starve, then Israel will destroy the survivors. Messengers will announce that G-d has founded Zion (Jerusalem) and the remnants of the "lost" Tribes will take shelter there.

Some view verse 12, "How you have fallen from Heaven, glowing morning star" to refer to a "fallen angel," whom they call Lucifer. Of course, this is not consistent with the text, nor with Jewish philosophy. The whole section is part of a parable beginning with verse 4, describing the downfall of the king of Babylonia. (It says so straight out: "You shall carry this parable about the king of Babylonia.") Additionally, angels lack the free will necessary to rebel; they are mere automatons, programmed to do G-d's will. In Judaism, one might as well speak of a fallen toaster, since both have the same capacity to rebel against G-d. (We will address the Jewish concept of Satan in the Book of Job, IY"H.)

Chapter 15

Moav's Turn

Now Isaiah addresses the nation of Moav. Two of their cities were destroyed at night, while they were sleeping and unprepared. The Moabites went to mourn in their temples; they shaved their hair and beards, a sign of mourning among them. They put on sackcloth and cried. Isaiah says that he feels the pain of Moav. The waters of Nimrim (a place) will dry up, and the plants will all die. (The plants are symbolic of their heroes and leaders.)

The people of Moav did many things to the Jews over the years, culminating in aiding Assyria in their conquests, so their enemies will conquer them. There will be weeping throughout Moav.

The river Dimon is full of blood of the conquered. The survivors, whom Assyria will leave over, will be captured by Nebuchadnezzar, who is compared to a lion, while the remnant of Israel will have the Moabites' land.

Chapter 16

More about Moav

Continuing speaking about Moav, Isaiah refers to the tribute of sheep that the king of Moav would send the king of Israel every year (see II Kings chapter 3). Since the Northern Kingdom of Israel was exiled, Moav should now send the tribute to the remaining kingdom of Judah. Moav will be like a bird driven from its nest. Isaiah advises them to "make a shadow at noon that is like night" in order to try to hide from their enemies and to

conceal the Jews who will pass that way on their way into exile. Moav should allow the exiled Jews to hide out there; the cattle and flocks and Moav will have been plundered by that time. By the time this happens, Assyria will have met defeat at the hands of King Chizkiyahu.

Moav has become very full of themselves, especially considering their origins (Lot and his daughter). Therefore, Moav will be humbled and will mourn for their casualties. Isaiah weeps for the fate of the various fallen cities of Moav, as if watering fields with his tears. The sound of plunderers can be heard over the produce of Moav. Joy will be absent from the fields and vineyards. The Moabites will mourn for their country and when they have tired of making war and want to pray, they will not be able to.

All this is what G-d foretold regarding Moav in the time of Balak and Balaam, hundreds of years earlier. Now G-d says that in three years, Moav will be brought down. Their survivors will be very few.

Chapter 17

Whither Damascus?

Next, Isaiah speaks a very harsh prophecy concerning Damascus, capital of Aram. Damascus will be so utterly destroyed that it will cease even being a city. Samaria will cease being the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel; Rezin, king of Aram, will be killed and his whole nation exiled, not just Damascus. Israel and Aram will share the same fate (exile). At that time, the glory of the Jewish nation will wither. Just like a farmer reaps standing grain, Sancheriv, king of Assyria, will “reap” the populace. And, just as the farmer leaves behind a small amount of produce, there will be a remnant left in Israel - the people of Jerusalem in Judah.

After the Ten Tribes are exiled, the righteous who remain will turn to G-d and not to idols and false gods. Cities will be abandoned and desolate because they had forgotten G-d. Using agricultural metaphor, Isaiah says that the Jews adopted inappropriate practices from other nations. They now reap what was sown: a harvest of pain.

Isaiah says woe to Sancheriv’s army of conquest. They rush like the sea to wash away their enemies, for which G-d will punish them. Isaiah compares the evil people to chaff, the most inferior thing, which is blown by the wind. At night there will be fear and when the morning comes, the enemy will be gone. (This refers to the plague that wiped out the entire Assyrian army in a single night, as told in II Kings chapter 19). This is the fate of Assyria.

Chapter 18

Oh, Gog

Next, Isaiah refers to the war of Gog and Magog, although the terms do not appear in this chapter (cross-reference with Ezekiel chapter 38). The nation on the other side of the rivers of Cush (Ethiopia) will send armies

by sea, telling them to go to Israel and see whether the Jews have, in fact, returned. All the people of the world will see and hear, because G-d has said that He will turn His attention to Israel like warm sunshine on the plants. G-d will punish the rulers of Gog and their allies; they will be left as carrion for the birds and beasts. The nations of the world will present the Jewish people as a "gift" to G-d, returning many of the exiles to their homeland.

Chapter 19

The Fate of Egypt

Now Isaiah discusses the fate of Egypt. The idols of Egypt will tremble in fear before G-d. The Egyptians will turn on one another, man against man, city against city and district against district. The Egyptians will be without wise advice; they will turn to their idols and sorcerers. G-d will deliver Egypt into the hands of Assyria. The waters of Egypt will dry up, as will the plants that depend on them. The fishermen will mourn the loss of fish to catch, as will those who make nets. Pharaoh's advisors will be revealed as fools, lacking credibility; they have misled their nation.

When Assyria overruns them, Egypt will lose their strength and they will fear G-d. They will recognize the G-d of Israel and be in awe of the land of Judah. There will be five cities in Egypt speaking Hebrew and worshipping G-d, one of them called the city of destruction. There will be an altar to G-d in Egypt, which the Talmud (Menachos 109b) attributes to Chonyo, the son of Shimon HaTzaddik (Simeon the Righteous). It will testify to Egypt about G-d and they will cry out to Him because of their oppressors. G-d will send them a savior, who will redeem them. The Egyptians will recognize G-d through this and serve Him with vows and sacrifices. G-d will plague Egypt but they will return to Him and He will heal them.

After Assyria's defeat and Egypt's redemption, there will be a highway between those two countries, which will be at peace with one another. Assyria will follow Egypt's lead in worshipping G-d. Israel will be elevated to the status of these two prominent nations and G-d will call Egypt His people, Assyria the work of His hands and Israel His heritage.

Chapter 20

Barefoot and Naked

During Chizkiyahu's reign, Sancheriv, king of Assyria (here called Sargon) sent his general to conquer Ashdod, then a Philistine city. At that time, G-d gave Isaiah the following instructions. Isaiah was to wear a sack loincloth and walk around essentially naked and barefoot for three years. (According to the Radak, Isaiah didn't actually do this, he saw it in a vision.) G-d said, just as Isaiah was naked and barefoot for three years, that's how Egypt and Ethiopia will be. The king of Assyria will lead the captives of those nations, young and old, into exile

naked and barefoot. The people of Israel, who relied on these nations for aid, will question how they can hope to escape Assyria's conquest.

Chapter 21

A Few More Nations Foretold

Now Isaiah returns to prophesying about Babylonia. Armies will come upon Babylonia like a massive storm that kicks up dust clouds in a dry land. Those who robbed and pillaged will themselves be robbed and pillaged. The nations of Elam and Media will march on Babylonia, relieving the world of their oppression. As usual, Isaiah is sympathetic to them for the fate they will suffer.

G-d tells Isaiah that one of his students (Rashi says the prophet Habakkuk) will eventually complain about Babylonia's enduring reign; Isaiah is to put him on watch to see Babylonia's downfall. He will see a chariot and a pair of riders, one on a horse and one on a camel, representing Persia and Media. The "lion" (Habakkuk) will say that he stands guard by day and watches by night. (Rashi points out that the Hebrew word *aryeh* - a lion - has the same numerical value as the name Habakkuk, which is why it's used as the symbol for him in this prophecy.) He will see the pair of riders coming and will proclaim Babylonia's downfall and that of their idols.

Speaking now of Edom, a prophet or angel calls from Seir, "Watchman, what's the story with the night?" The watchman replies that morning has come (for the righteous), and so has night (for the wicked). If you want to end the exile, repent and come!

Isaiah turns to Arabia: When the Jews were exiled, they begged the Assyrians to take them through Arabia, since the Jews and Arabs are cousins and they thought the Arabs might help them. They didn't give them water, but salty food and wineskins inflated with air. Therefore, Arabia will also be brought low, their proud archers (like their ancestor Ishmael) decreased in number.

Chapter 22

Eat, Drink and Be Merry, Because Tomorrow...

Next, Isaiah reveals a prophecy regarding the "valley of vision," which Rashi identifies with Jerusalem. "Why have you gone on to the rooftops?" the prophet asks. (Rashi refers us to the story in the Talmud, Taanis 29a, in which the Kohanim ascended the Temple roof to "return" the Temple keys to G-d.) Jerusalem was a happy, prosperous city that now mourns. They are starving in the streets; it would have been better to fall in battle! Tzidkiyahu and his officers fled before the archers; any who were captured were bound in chains.

Isaiah - or possibly G-d Himself - says to leave him (Him) alone so that he (He) may mourn over Jerusalem. It is a day of destruction, with Nebuchadnezzar breaching the city wall and people fleeing to the mountains for refuge.

Many nations - even the already-conquered Elam, will take up arms against Jerusalem. The enemy will destroy the Temple and the people will turn to the shields that King Solomon placed in the palace called the Forest of Lebanon (in I Kings chapter 10). The cracks in the walls of Jerusalem will grow and the people will gather to defend the spot most likely to be breached. Houses will be demolished so that the stones can be used to fortify the city wall, but the people don't think to turn to G-d.

G-d warned the people this was coming so they would repent, but they didn't listen. They lived for the present, saying, "Let's eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die!" (Rashi says they partied in this world because they had no share in the Next World.) Therefore G-d said that their sin would not be atoned for until they perished (in the Next World, says Rashi).

G-d told Isaiah to go to Shevna, the Temple treasurer, who was a hedonist. According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 26a), Shevna tried to betray King Chizkiyahu to the Assyrians. Isaiah was to ask Shevna why he bothered making himself a grave site in the royal burial grounds, to which he had no right. G-d will toss him through the air, around and around, to an empty place, where he would die - and he would not get to use his intended burial place of honor.

When Shevna is exiled, G-d will call upon Elyakim, son of Chilkiah, whom He will dress in fine clothes and appoint him a leader over the Jewish people. He will give him the keys to the Temple and the government and his position will be secure. Everyone will rely on Elyakim, while Shevna, who abused his position, will be removed and his people will be cut off.

Chapter 23

Getting Tyred

The next prophecy concerns Tzur (Tyre). A seaport economy, the ships will mourn the destruction of Tzur's cities, as will those who live on islands, for they will have no one with whom to do business. Egypt would bring trade to Tzur, which became a major trading market. Since the people of Tzur are gone, the sea will say, "It's like I never had children!" When people hear about what happened in Tzur, they'll react like people did when they heard about the Ten Plagues in Egypt, centuries earlier.

The people of Tzur (or, possibly those hearing about their fate) are advised to flee to Tarshish. A once joyful city of honored merchants has been exiled. This is part of G-d's plan to humble to arrogant.

G-d stretched out His hand over Tzur and summoned the nations to attack. He said that they would no longer rejoice because they're being exiled to the land of Kitim (possibly Cyprus). Assyria commandeered the land of Kasdim for fleets and towers, destroying the palaces there.

So the ships of Tarshish cry for their destroyed land. In seventy years, though, after Tzur has been forgotten, that they will start to return. They will begin to be remembered and G-d will return the people of Tzur to their land and their former status. The trade of Tzur will be made holy to G-d, not hoarded or left as an inheritance. It will benefit those who serve G-d.

Chapter 24

What Goes Down Sometimes Comes Back Up

G-d will empty out the land of Israel and scatter the residents. They will all share the same fate: slaves and masters, buyers and sellers, borrowers and lenders, etc. The land will be plundered and it will mourn. The land will not produce food because of the sins of the inhabitants. Swearing falsely in G-d's name was one of the severest sins leading to the exile.

The joy of wine and instruments has ceased. The city is broken and the houses are boarded up. Joy is gone. The people of Israel are scattered among the nations.

Eventually, they will sing with joy when they witness G-d's might, as He has promised. All over the world they will hear the songs saying that the righteous have been lifted and the wicked have been dealt with. The people who have been occupying the land during the exile will fall, either before the Moshiach ben Yosef, the Moshiach ben Dovid or the war of Gog and Magog. (Further exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this synopsis. We will address them in Ezekiel and elsewhere, as appropriate.) They will metaphorically fall into a pit, since the earth has cracked and sways like a drunken person, the weight of their sins pressing down until it falls.

On the day that G-d punishes the nations (and their "guardian angels" along with them), they will be cast into Hell like prisoners thrown into jail together. Their many sins will be counted against them. The sun and moon (or, according to Rashi, those who worship them) will be shamed when G-d reveals His glory.

Chapter 25

Happy Simchas Torah

Now Isaiah addresses G-d directly, saying that he will praise Him for His wonders and for the pact that He made with Abraham.

G-d has conquered mighty enemies for their evil deeds, their cities never to be rebuilt. The powerful nations will honor G-d, Who sheltered Israel in their times of distress. G-d will humble the large number of Israel's detractors; people will rejoice when the dictators are deposed. Those nations who take up arms against Israel, thinking it will be an easy conquest, will be sadly disappointed. G-d will destroy the protection of the aggressors. He will remove death from Israel. (Radak clarifies that this refers to death caused by the enemies, not that G-d will remove all death.) G-d will wipe away the tears and the shame caused by Israel's oppressors. On that day, the Jews will say, "This is our G-d, upon Whom we relied to save us... let us rejoice in His salvation!" (This verse is said as part of Atoh Horaiso on Simchas Torah. It's the one that starts, "V'amar bayom hahu...")

G-d will reveal His presence on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; the nation of Moav will be tread upon like straw. G-d will spread out His hands and put the arrogant in their place. G-d will bring down Moav, bringing their towers to the ground.

Chapter 26

A Song: Some Dead Will Live Again, Others Not

When G-d humbles Moav, the following song will be sung in Judah:

Jerusalem, which was our strength, will have salvation for support. Open the gates so that the righteous may enter. Those who relied on G-d will be shielded with peace for their faith. Trust in G-d forever because He is eternally steadfast. He brings down the high and mighty so that those who had been made poor (Israel) may walk over them. The path for the righteous is a direct route to their reward. We look forward to G-d rewarding the righteous and judging the evil. We longed for G-d while we were in exile (compared by Isaiah to night-time), asking for the day He would render judgment. Should the wicked, who didn't learn their lesson, be shown favor? They're too full of themselves to see G-d. G-d's hand has been taken away, so they do not see - let them see and they'll be ashamed! They will be jealous of G-d's relationship with Israel and their shame will consume them, like fire. G-d, please prepare peace for us because you have already paid us for our sins. We were ruled by "masters" other than G-d, but we only want Him. The evil will not see the Next World or the resurrection; they are utterly destroyed. G-d has added Torah and honor to Israel and He is honored in return. Even in bad times, we do not question G-d, turning instead to prayer. We were in pain like a woman in labor, but there was no salvation and the oppressors did not fall. May the righteous who died for G-d live again and praise Him. Look into your hearts and do introspection; do good deeds to protect yourself from G-d's anger. G-d is coming to pay the wicked for their sins. Mount Seir, the home of Esau's descendants, will reveal the blood of those whom they killed.

Chapter 27

"Yerushalayim!"

On the day that G-d judges, He will slay the two Leviathans, which Rashi says represent Egypt and Assyria. He will also slay the "sea serpent" (the kingdom of Tzur). When Israel is redeemed, they will be like a vineyard of rich wine that G-d waters and guards by day and night. He can have no anger against the nations because Israel also sins. If He were to wage war on other nations it would be inconsistent. (Alternatively, G-d has no anger against Israel.) If the Jews would hold fast to the Torah, G-d could strike the other nations according to strict justice.

The Jews went to Egypt in the time of Jacob and they flourished into a nation there. G-d repaid Pharaoh for the evil they inflicted on the Jews. When Egypt sent the Jews out, G-d repaid them measure for measure. As it was then, it will be now - Israel will be redeemed from their oppressors. They will be forgiven their sins if they tear down their idols and altars. When they do this, an Edomite stronghold will be abandoned and Israel will dwell there. When the merits of Edom run out altogether, they will be utterly destroyed by the weakest. Israel, however, does not recognize their relationship with G-d, so He is not looking out for them.

When G-d redeems Israel, he will gather all those who have been lost and assimilated thanks to the Assyrian exile. A great shofar will sound and those lost in Egypt and Assyria will return, bowing down to G-d at the Temple in Jerusalem. (This last verse is sung as the song "U'vau Ha'ovdim," with its chorus of "Yerushalayim!" repeated many times.)

Chapter 28

A Deal With Death?

Isaiah now criticizes the people of Israel for gluttony and drunkenness. They are like inferior, spoiled fruits; G-d will come down on them like a powerful storm. The drunkards will be cast down and walked on. Then, G-d will be a crown of beauty for the rest of His people, who are righteous. G-d will teach justice to the judges and He will be a source of strength to those who fight the battles of Torah. These people may also have been misled by wine, becoming corrupt and causing injustices. Their tables are full of sacrifices to idols, which are repulsive. Who can be taught the wisdom of G-d? Are small children, who are too young to understand, the only ones not corrupted? We must re-teach the nation as we do children: little by little, a piece at a time. The words of the prophets are like a foreign language to them; they can't understand. G-d told them that this was real rest, but they wouldn't listen. The word of G-d will be the law to them; they will stumble, fall and break. Therefore, listen to G-d and don't look down on His word. They may say "We made a deal with death (idols) and the coming troubles will not affect us," but it's not true.

G-d says, "I have laid a cornerstone in Jerusalem," (Rashi says this means that He has already established the Moshiach). "Those who believe will have faith, though it will take a long time. I will make justice and righteousness My tools. The 'deal' you think you made with idols will be null and void - you will be swept away by the very troubles you thought to avoid."

There is now a list of things that will befall Israel in enemy hands: harsh decrees, sheer terror for those who hear them, and more work to be done for the oppressors than can be accomplished. G-d will take action, doing strange things to deliver Israel into their enemies' hands, just as He does miraculous things when he redeems them from trouble. (Possibly, the strange thing is the very fact that He delivered Israel into their enemies' hands at all!)

Do not belittle, Isaiah says, because G-d has decreed total destruction on the land. Does a farmer plow forever and never sow? Of course not. Similarly, the prophets will not warn you forever without action ever being taken. G-d sends prophets and if the people refuse to listen to them, He will admonish the people. G-d gives, through Isaiah, further allegories of sowing cumin and planting grain - all of these are His ways of trying to nudge the people back onto the proper path.

Chapter 29

“I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!”

Now Isaiah mourns for the altar, which is compared to a “lion of G-d.” Jerusalem, the city in which the altar can be found, will be besieged. The city and its people will be humbled, lowered to the dirt. Those who invade, the army of Assyria, will be consumed and will become like dust. G-d will save the altar through miraculous means, referring again to the plague that wiped out the Assyrian army in a single night. The multitude of nations surrounding Jerusalem will seem like a dream. A hungry person dreams he’s eating, but wakes up as hungry as ever - that’s how it will be with the nations that surround Jerusalem.

The false prophets were blinded to the truth and they blinded others to it. They were like drunks, without even drinking a sip. G-d made them fall into a deep sleep, covering their eyes. To them, the words of true prophets are like somebody trying to read a closed book, or someone giving a book to a person who can’t even read.

G-d says, “This nation honors Me with lip-service, but not sincerely in their hearts. They are acting out of rote. Therefore, I will take away sages, making My word more obscure and much wisdom will be lost.”

Woe to those who think they can conceal their thoughts and deeds from G-d. They think nobody can see them and nobody will know. Who understands a creation better than its Creator?

Soon, Lebanon will blossom into a fertile field and fertile fields will become forests. (This possibly refers to the Jewish king’s palace, which was called “the Forest of Lebanon.”) The deaf will hear the words of prophecy and the blind will see through the darkness. (This is a reversal of the obscuring of knowledge, above.) Those who previously suffered will rejoice in G-d; the tyrants are gone and the evil people have been destroyed. Now our Forefathers will no longer be ashamed of their children, who are following in their footsteps by following G-d. Those who were cynical will learn and understand.

Chapter 30

So Bright, You’re Gonna Need Shades

G-d says woe to His rebellious children, who take advice, but not from Him, and who appoint rulers over themselves that are not G-d-fearing. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, sent messengers to the Pharaoh in Egypt without G-d’s approval; in the end, he was punished by becoming a prisoner of the Assyrians. Thinking that Pharaoh’s aid would be better than G-d’s is shameful. All of it came to nothing. The Egyptians ended up being no help at all; they are full of pride, but for doing nothing.

Isaiah is now instructed by G-d to write this prophecy on a tablet in front of the people, and it will be for the last day. The people are like disobedient children, refusing to listen to G-d. They refuse to hear prophets what the prophets have to say, preferring to hear only what they wish to hear. They tell the prophets to leave the path they are on, preferring false prophecies.

Therefore, says G-d, because you prefer the false way, this sin will be like a falling wall, whose collapse comes suddenly. G-d will break it like a jug, without pity, there won't be a useful piece remaining. G-d offered salvation, but the people refused it! They preferred to rely on horses to flee, but their pursuers were fast. But G-d will be gracious and have mercy. He metes out justice, then rewards those who rely on Him.

In the future, a nation will dwell in Jerusalem and there will be no need for tears. When G-d hears us, He will respond. At this point, Isaiah says that G-d will give us a small amount of bread and water; this is a strange thing to say in a prophecy that is supposed to be a consolation. Perhaps it means that we are assured of having these things even in the worst of times. Continuing, our "Teacher" (G-d) will no longer be concealed from us; we will have clear instructions as to how to go. The Jews will strip the gold and silver plating off their idols and cast them out like waste matter.

G-d will cause it to rain so that we can plant and there will be plenty of food for our animals. There will be so much rain that, at the time of Gog and Magog (or possibly the fall of Assyria), the mountains will all have streams running on them. The moon will be as bright as the sun is now and the sun will be seven times brighter when G-d heals His people, Israel. (The Radak says the light is a metaphor for our joy.)

G-d, Whose Name was blasphemed by the Assyrians, is coming to fulfill what He said long ago. His "mouth" (metaphorically) is full of fire and anger. He will shake up the nations and lead them to their downfall. The Jews will sing as they do on a festival. G-d will make His voice heard and He will show His might in a display of fire, hail and thunder. Assyria, Israel's oppressor, will be broken by G-d's voice. Wherever G-d takes action against Assyria, it will be accompanied by the sound of musical instruments. Hell is ready for Sancheriv, the king of Assyria; G-d's "breath" burns in it like sulfur. (Radak says that all this is a metaphor for the harsh things that would befall Assyria.)

Chapter 31

If Assyria Can't Stand the Heat...

Isaiah continues to criticize King Hoshea of the Northern Kingdom of Israel for relying on Egypt, rather than on G-d, for help against Assyria. G-d knows the thoughts and deeds of man and pays them back accordingly. G-d told the Jewish people not to go back to Egypt (see Deuteronomy 28:68); since they went there voluntarily, He will bring them there again against their will. The Egyptians are just people; they have no ability to help unless G-d wills it. All He has to do is "turn His hand" and they will fall.

G-d is like a lion, poised to attack its prey (Assyria). The shepherds who oppose such a lion are of no consequence to it. G-d will spare and protect Jerusalem.

Isaiah urges the people to return to G-d, Whom they have ignored. When G-d destroys the Assyrian army, the people will realize that their idols are powerless and will regret turning to them in the first place. Assyria will fall by supernatural means (we saw it in II Kings chapter 19 and we'll see it again soon, in Isaiah chapter 37). Sancheriv, king of Assyria will flee, seeking refuge because of G-d's miracle. G-d's "fire" is in the Temple altar and His "furnace" is in Jerusalem.

Chapter 32

A Prophecy for the Next King

Achaz was a wicked king, but he would be succeeded by his son Chizkiyahu (Hezekiah), who was righteous. Chizkiyahu would be a source of merit and protection for the nation. In his day, people's eyes and ears would not be closed to the word of G-d. The people will understand and speak clearly, unlike the confusion described in chapter 28.

Evil and deceitful people would not be honored in Chizkiyahu's day. Insincere people plot evil, while speaking flattery and lying about what G-d sees or wants from us. (We still have this today: "Why would G-d care if we...?") Such people care only about themselves, even at the expense of the truly needy. But there are also generous people who will thrive because of their goodness.

Isaiah warns the nation not to be complacent. The people's sins are mounting up and payback is coming. They will cry and mourn for all the thorns that will come up in the fields. The palace - possibly referring to the Temple - will be abandoned, towers will become ruins. However, it will be great for donkeys, probably referring to the descendants of Ishmael, who is compared to a donkey in Genesis 16:12.

Eventually, however, the spirit of G-d will pour out on the nation and deserts will bloom into fields and fields will grow into forests. Justice and righteousness will reign in these places. The people will dwell in security and peace. Just as the lowly are raised, the arrogant - the Persian capital according to Rashi - will be humbled. The people of Israel are fortunate because the lands will be so fertile that they can plant and animals can graze anywhere.

Chapter 33

Kiruv in the Book of Isaiah

Now, Isaiah says woe to the nation that plunders and betrays, for they themselves are about to be plundered and betrayed. (Most commentators identify this nation with Assyria, although Radak in a second opinion says it might also refer to the unidentified "fourth kingdom" seen in Daniel's vision in the book that bears his name.) The Jews pray to G-d to be gracious to us, for we have hoped for Him. Nations scattered from before G-d when they saw their might was nothing before Him. The loot of the plundered nation will be gathered like grain by a plague of locusts. G-d is exalted above all, filling Jerusalem with justice and righteousness. The faith of the times will be strength, salvation, wisdom and knowledge. (The Talmud in Shabbos, page 31a, identifies faith, times, strength, salvation, wisdom and knowledge with the Six Orders of the Mishna: Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin, Tohoros and Kodshim, respectively.)

The messengers of peace cry in the streets over the destruction. Assyria has broken their treaty with the kingdom of Judah by attacking Jerusalem. The land mourns; Assyria has disgraced Lebanon and emptied other

nations, as well. G-d therefore says, "I will arise and take action. You, Assyria, will create chaff and fire, in effect destroying yourselves."

G-d tells both "far-off" Jews (meaning those who have followed His word for a long time) and "close" ones (meaning those who have only recently turned to Him) to listen and know His strength. (The prophet uses the word "kiruv," meaning Jewish outreach, much the same way we do today - see Rashi on verse 13.) Jewish sinners were scared: how could they repent? Who can stand against the eternal flames? One who walks in righteousness, speaks honestly and despises bribes and other forms of evil. Such a person will dwell safely, as in a tower, not worrying where his next meal is coming from. They will see G-d in His glory and they will wonder what happened to those tyrants who formerly ruled. They will no longer be ruled by foreign nations.

Jerusalem will be rebuilt with innumerable towers, a place of peace that will not be moved. It will be a place of rivers, but no invading army will enter. G-d is our King, Who will save us. The ropes of the enemy ships are so loose, they won't hold the sail or the mast properly; their loot will be divided among many nations. Israel, who were formerly sick and weak, will take their share. No longer will they be sick, for their sins have been forgiven.

Chapter 34

Mother of Demons?

Isaiah calls the nations of the Earth to listen as he foretells the downfall of Edom. G-d has judged the nations and allowed them to be destroyed, their dead unburied. The Heavens will (metaphorically) be rolled like a scroll - either those nations will be "erased" or they will be in "darkness," as in a rolled-up scroll. G-d's "sword" is full, from the kings and governors of Edom (compared to sheep and goats), for He has made a great slaughter in Edom and Batzra. (Batzra was a city in Moav, but they were cohorts of Edom - see Genesis 36:33 in which a man from Batzra became king of Edom.)

The kings of other nations (compared to oxen) will fall alongside the princes of Edom because it is a day of judgment for G-d, Who hears the cries of the Jews. The streams of Edom will become like tar and the dirt will become like sulfur (the Radak says like Sodom and Gemorrah). Smoke will ascend by day and night, it will be a wasteland for generations. Night birds and predators will inherit it. The palaces will grow thorns and become a home for jackals. (There's more here that we'll discuss at the end). The owl lays her eggs and vultures gather.

Isaiah implores the people to read the story of Noah in the book of Genesis and see how no animal was excluded. Here, too, no animal will be excluded. (That's Rashi's interpretation. The Radak says that Isaiah is telling them to read THIS book and see that all the animals he names are present. Yet another opinion quoted by Radak is that the book is Leviticus, which lists all the non-kosher birds, none of which will be absent.) G-d casts lots for all the birds and animals and gives each their share of the land of Edom to inherit.

Now, among the list of animals and birds - and we have not listed them all - verse 14 refers to a sa'ir and to lilit. These are often translated a satyr (a mythological half-man, half-goat) and Lilith (the mother of demons). I'm not going to say that these translations are wrong - even Rashi says that these two words are types of demons -

but many commentators translate sa'ir as a wild goat and lilith as a nocturnal bird, possibly the screech owl. Not only are these easier concepts for us to handle, but from context - a list of birds and animals - a goat and a screech owl just make more sense than demons.

Chapter 35

Happy Days

Jerusalem will rejoice over the downfall of Edom (described in the previous chapter). It will bloom like a flower, singing because of the glory of the Temple and the beauty G-d has given them.

Isaiah encourages the Jews to strengthen others (see the grammatical Rashi on verse 3). Tell those frightened by the troubles preceding the salvation to be brave because G-d is coming to save us. Then the "blind" (from fear) will "see" and the "deaf" (to the words of the prophets) will "hear." Israel, who are now lame, will jump like a deer; Israel, currently muted among the nations, will sing because of G-d's salvation. They will blossom like a desert upon receiving springs of water. Those who long for salvation will be saved - compared to dry places becoming pools of water.

There will be a highway leading to Jerusalem for the "blind," "deaf," "lame" and "mute" described above. Even fools will not get lost on it. Neither our enemies nor wild animals will approach us on this road. The redeemed will return to Jerusalem in song, with the "joy of the world" on their heads. (Rashi says this refers to the ancient joy of the salvation from Egypt.) Happiness and joy will pursue them, while sadness and mourning will run away from them.

Chapter 36

A Twice-Told Tale

This chapter is the first in a series re-telling incidents from II Kings from a different perspective and with different details. Compare this chapter with II Kings chapter 18. (We will also see some of these incidents described in II Chronicles, when we get there.)

In the fourteenth year of King Chizkiyahu's reign, Sancheriv, king of Assyria, attacked the cities of Judah. He sent messengers to Chizkiyahu, who called to him. Elyakim, Shevna and Yoach, three members of Chizkiyahu's court, came out to speak with them.

Ravshakeh, the representative of Assyria (who was an apostate Jew) said to them, "You've relied on Egypt for aid, but they've done more harm to you than good! And if you say you rely on G-d, your king has removed the private altars to Him!" (Since the Temple was built, private altars were supposed to be abolished in favor of the one communal altar, but Chizkiyahu was the first king to actually enforce this. Ravshakeh was spinning this to make it appear as it had been an affront to G-d.) "Tell you what," Ravshakeh continued, "my king will give

you 2,000 horses if you have enough riders to put on them! How can you look down on the lowest officer of Assyria, who commands more men than your entire force? Do you think Assyria is destroying this land against G-d's will? G-d sent us!"

Chizkiyahu's men asked Ravshakeh to speak in Aramaic rather than Hebrew, so that the passers-by shouldn't understand their conversation. Ravshakeh refused. "My king didn't send this message just for you - all these people will suffer along with you!" Ravshakeh then called out to all the people around them, "Don't let Chizkiyahu fool you! The king of Assyria will just move you to another land, but it will be at least as good as this one! Chizkiyahu says that G-d will save you, but the 'gods' of the other nations couldn't save them!" The officers of Chizkiyahu's court did not reply because they had orders not to answer him. They returned to Chizkiyahu - with torn garments, because Ravshakeh had blasphemed against G-d - and told the king what the Assyrian delegate had said.

Chapter 37

2 Kings 19 from Another POV

This chapter continues "parallel text" with II Kings, in this case, with chapter 19.

Chizkiyahu's officers reported Ravshakeh's message to the king, who likewise tore his clothes upon hearing the blasphemy. He sent for Isaiah, saying that the position of the nation is like that of a woman in hard labor. He asked Isaiah to pray to G-d for Jerusalem, as the other cities had already been captured. Isaiah replied that G-d says not to worry; He will cause Sancheriv to fall by the sword in his own land.

Sancheriv was waging war in a place called Livna, when he received word that Cush (Ethiopia) was attacking Assyria. Sancheriv left temporarily to deal with their threat, but he sent letters to Chizkiyahu saying, "Don't think I'm done with you. The gods of other nations didn't save them and yours won't save you!" Chizkiyahu took the letters to the Temple and spread them out and prayed. He asked G-d to see the blasphemies that Sancheriv had written. "Yes," Chizkiyahu said, "Assyria has invaded the other lands and burned their idols, but they're not really 'gods.' Please save us so that the world may see that You alone are G-d."

Isaiah sent word to Chizkiyahu that G-d said the following: "The people of Jerusalem laugh at Sancheriv, who thinks he will conquer them. He has blasphemed and he sent Ravshakeh to blaspheme, thinking that he could conquer the Temple." Isaiah then addresses the prophecy to the king of Assyria. "Don't you, Sancheriv, know what G-d does? You're not the strong one, G-d is. You can sit in your counsel of war, but G-d knows all your plans. But because you provoke G-d, you will have a bridle placed in your mouth and a ring through your nose, to be led like an animal back the way you came."

Isaiah then gave Chizkiyahu a sign: Even though the Assyrian army had destroyed the vegetation that Jerusalem relied upon for food, they would have enough to eat just from that which grew wild. The rest of the country may have been overrun, but those in Jerusalem, who remained true to G-d, will remain. Assyria will not enter, nor mount a siege against the city; G-d will protect it for His own sake and for the righteous King David.

While the army of Assyria slept, a plague struck them. 185,000 died - only Sancheriv, his two sons, and Nebuchadnezzar survived. Sancheriv returned to the city of Ninveh. While he was serving his idol, two of his sons assassinated him. They ran away, leaving another son to reign in his place.

Chapter 38

Chizkiyahu's Illness, Recovery and Psalm

This chapter parallels II Kings chapter 20.

King Chizkiyahu became ill and Isaiah went to visit him. Isaiah told Chizkiyahu to get his affairs in order, because he was going to die. Chizkiyahu turned to wall and prayed and cried. G-d told Isaiah to return to the king and let him know that his prayers were answered; G-d has granted him another 15 years. Furthermore, He would save the city from the onslaught of the Assyrian army. (This incident occurred before the plague wiped out the Assyrian army, as described in the previous chapter.) As a sign, the shadow cast by the sun went back ten steps. (Compare the description of this event with that in Kings.)

After his recovery, Chizkiyahu wrote a psalm of thanks. In it, he said that he had despaired that he was going to die, missing out on the rest of his years. No longer would he be able to serve G-d on Earth, as he would be in the Next World, separated from his people. The more he strengthened himself, the weaker he would become. Chizkiyahu moaned in his illness like the sound of a bird, praying to G-d to "steal" him from the hand of death - and He did! So how can Chizkiyahu ever repay G-d for the gift of extra years? G-d will ultimately resurrect the dead and he renewed Chizkiyahu's life in advance of that. Even tidings of peace were bitter, for he expected to die, but it pleased G-d to let Chizkiyahu live, despite his sins. The dead are not able to thank G-d; that's the domain of the living, like Chizkiyahu today. ("Today" meaning when he wrote his psalm, not when you're reading it.) As thanks to G-d, Chizkiyahu's psalms would be sung in the Temple for the rest of his life.

Isaiah took a cake of figs and pressed it on Chizkiyahu's boil, healing it. From this, Chizkiyahu knew he would be healed and would be able to continue to serve G-d.

Chapter 39

"What Was THAT All About?"

This chapter, like the last one, corresponds to events in II Kings chapter 20.

When he heard that Chizkiyahu had been ill and recovered, the king of Babylonia sent messengers with a gift to him. Chizkiyahu was excited to have these guests and he gave them the "grand tour" - his treasury, the palace, even the Temple. He showed them all the wealth of his kingdom.

Isaiah went to Chizkiyahu and asked, "What was that all about?" Chizkiyahu replied, "I had some very important guests from Babylonia - I showed them everything!" His response was little too proud. He should have taken the opportunity to praise G-d to his guests, rather than to show off. Isaiah said, "You blew it. All the stuff you showed them will be carried off by Babylonia, as will your sons, who will be officers in the court of the king of Babylonia." (Rashi says this refers to Chananya, Mishael and Azariah, also known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the Book of Daniel.)

Chizkiyahu acknowledged that G-d's word is just, and he was relieved to hear that this would not come to pass in his lifetime.

Interlude:

Isaiah and the Haftarah

The haftarah is a weekly portion from a book of Neviim (the Prophets), that is read after the Torah reading on Shabbos and on many other special days. Typically, the haftarah has a thematic connection to the Torah reading, as it was originally introduced as a substitute for the regular reading at a time when public reading of the Torah was banned by the secular authorities. Despite the similar-sounding names, "haftarah" is not related to the word "Torah." ("Haftarah" is spelled with a Hebrew letter tes for its "T" sound; "Torah" has a taf.)

More haftaros come from the Book of Isaiah than from any other Book of Prophets. Out of 54 parshiyos, 15 are from Isaiah (according to Ashkenazic tradition). Additionally, the haftaros for Yom Kippur morning, the last day of Pesach, a Rosh Chodesh that falls on Shabbos, and fast days at Mincha are all from Isaiah.

In the summer, we have a long series of haftaros that come from this Book. These are called the shiva d'nechamta, the seven of consolation. They begin with the Shabbos following Tisha B'Av, which is called Shabbos Nachamu. The Shabbos actually receives its name from the haftarah, which begins, "Nachamu, nachamu, ami," "Be comforted, be comforted, my people." This comes from Isaiah chapter 40, which is read as the haftarah for parshas Va'eschanan. The following weeks are from the subsequent chapters, although not in strict chronological order. They are:

- * Eikev - from the middle of chapter 49 through the start of chapter 51
- * Re'eh - middle of chapter 54 through the start of chapter 55
- * Shoftim - middle of chapter 51 and most of chapter 52
- * Ki Seitze - the first part of chapter 54
- * Ki Savo - chapter 60
- * Nitzavim - the end of chapter 61 through the start of chapter 63

(It may be curious that haftaros frequently start and end mid-chapter. The chapter and verse system was invented by Christian scholars. It's a very useful tool, but it doesn't always jibe with our tradition as to where topics start and end. That's why aliyos and parshiyos frequently don't line up with the chapter breaks a verse or two off.)

Unlike most haftaros, the "seven of consolation" do not relate to the content of the weekly Torah reading. They are meant to comfort klal Yisroel after the sadness of Three Weeks commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Temples. They are all taken from Isaiah, as the last third of his book focuses heavily on the theme of consolation.

Chapter 40

Nachamu, Nachamu Ami

This chapter is the famous "Nachamu," read as the haftarah the Shabbos following Tisha b'Av. Often translated as "be comforted, My people," Rashi informs us that such is not really the case. Grammatically, G-d is speaking to the prophets and telling them, "comfort My people." This is a prophecy for Messianic times, or for the return following the Babylonian exile.

"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem," G-d says, "because her punishment is over. She has paid for her sins and then some!" A voice calls out that there is a clear path in the desert, by which the exiles may return. The mountains and valleys will be as if smoothed out in order to make travel easier. People are like grass which ultimately cut and dries up, but the word of G-d endures forever. Ascend to Jerusalem and call out to the nation "Behold your G-d!" G-d comes with a strong hand and He's bringing reward for the righteous with Him. G-d is like a shepherd, caring for His flock and carrying the lambs. He measured out the waters, the Heavens and the earth; He put His word in the mouths of the prophets. If He can do all that, He can surely keep this promise!

All the nations are like a single drop that falls from a bucket, like dust in the wind (that is, they are insignificant). All the forests of Lebanon are not enough for the fire on G-d's altar and all the animals are not enough for His sacrifices. All the nations combined are nothing compared to G-d.

What can be compared to G-d? Idols are the product of a workman's hand - worship the One Who made the world! G-d sits above the world and people are like insects before Him. He stretches out the Heavens like a canopy over us. He reduces the haughty to nothing, as if they were never planted or sown. They're like a tree whose trunk never took root; He can just blow them down. They're blown away like straw in a storm.

To whom will one compare G-d? He created the stars in the sky. He calls them by name and none of them are absent. (This means that they last for extremely long periods of time, unlike human beings.) Don't think that G-d is unaware or that He ignores the reward of the righteous. G-d is everlasting and untiring - there's simply no way we limited beings can understand His ways. He gives strength to the weary. Those who put their faith in G-d will have renewed vigor, as eagles' wings. They will walk and run back to the land without tiring.

Chapter 41

"Worm of Jacob?"

G-d now tells the nations to be silent in order to hear His words. After that, they may approach and speak if they wish to appeal their judgments. G-d was the One Who sent Abraham, who preached righteousness, from the East. Abraham confronted the four kings (in Genesis 14) and G-d caused Abraham to rule over them. Their weapons were ineffective against him. Abraham pursued them unerringly, despite the unfamiliar path. G-d did all this for him; He was the first to act with Adam and is also the last, with us in latter days.

The nations will see the deeds of G-d and shake with fear. They will gather together to make war, encouraging one another with faith in their idols. The various craftsmen - carpenters, metal smiths, etc. - whose work makes the idols encourage one another that that it is good. Israel, however, are the descendants of Abraham, who loved G-d. G-d took Israel from the other nations to serve Him. Israel shall not be afraid because G-d is with them. He encourages, strengthens and supports Israel. Those who gather against Israel will be thwarted. Go look for them, but you won't find them, because they'll be reduced to nothing.

Isaiah tells us that G-d metaphorically holds Israel's hand, telling us not to fear. He has always helped us. He has made us like a new, sharpened tool; we will raze mountains (referring to mighty rulers). We will crush them fine and they will blow away in the wind. We will rejoice in G-d.

The "poor" seek "water" and don't find it. (Water is a metaphor for Torah as in Amos 8:11, "not a thirst for water but to hear the words of G-d.") G-d will answer them. He will open rivers of Torah in a spiritual desert, causing all kinds of "trees" to grow. (Rashi says the trees represent wisdom, goodness and peace.)

The nations will see all this and they will understand that it was G-d Who did it. They will be invited to come and present their case. Their false prophets will speak their words and we'll see how right they are. They're nothing; they only mislead people. G-d motivates rulers, like Cyrus of Babylonia who rebuilt Jerusalem. (Still a future event when Isaiah wrote this.) He will trample princes underfoot. What "prophet" of Baal ever gave a true prophecy? Not one. Cyrus will start the redemption (though he won't finish it) and Chagai and Zechariah will encourage Darius to build up Jerusalem. No prophet of Baal will ever give a true prophecy. They've got nothing and their idols are nothing.

One odd phrase in this chapter is calling Israel the “worm of Jacob” in verse 14. That seems rather harsh in a chapter that praises and consoles Israel! Rashi explains that a worm has no strength, except in its mouth. As the Radak points out, worms can bore through the mighty cedars of Lebanon! Similarly, Israel only has strength through G-d, Whom they beseech and praise through the power of prayer.

Chapter 42

“That Deaf, Dumb and Blind Nation...”

G-d says: My servant Israel is not like the other nations. Israel is My chosen one, upon whom I have placed My spirit. They will serve as an example to the nations. They will neither weaken nor tire before establishing justice in the land.

This is the word of G-d, Who created Heaven and Earth and Who gave life to humanity. He called Isaiah and will strengthen him in his mission; G-d made him a light to the nations. (In this case, Rashi says the “nations” means the Tribes of Israel.) People have become spiritually “blind,” like prisoners sitting in the darkness of a prison. Isaiah will enlighten them.

G-d is the only One; His praise is not to be shared with idols. The promises He made to Abraham came true, now G-d shares more promises of the future exile and redemption.

Sing a new song to G-d from the ends of the Earth. The desert and cities will raise their voices to Him. Deserts now occupied by tents will become permanent settlements and the deceased, who are currently under the ground, will praise G-d (an allusion to the revival of the dead). G-d will go forth to redeem Israel like a mighty warrior, overpowering Babylonia. For a long time, G-d restrained Himself; no more. Now He will destroy all His foes as one. He will destroy mighty kings and rulers (compared to mountains and hills) and all their followers (compared to the grass that grows on these mountains and hills).

G-d will lead those who had been spiritually “blind” on a new path, making the darkness into light and straightening the crooked road. Those who worship idols will be ashamed. Those who were “deaf” to G-d’s word will listen and those who were “blind” will see. The people will claim that it is G-d’s prophet who is blind and deaf. There is much to see and hear, if people would only be receptive to it! G-d wants us to be receptive for the sake of His righteousness; He increases Torah and magnifies it. (This verse is the closing phrase of the prayer “U’va L’Tziyon.”)

The people have been robbed and plundered; they have been hiding in dungeons, with nobody coming to save them. Who will now hear the promise of future redemption? Who gave Israel over to their enemies? It was G-d, because we refused to listen to His Torah. He poured out His anger; it burned all around them, but they refused to listen.

Chapter 43

Waterproof and Fireproof

Now G-d says to Israel not to fear; He is the one Who redeemed them and they are His. When they pass through waters, they will not drown and when they pass through fire, they will not be burned. (Sadly, we know that this was not literally true of individuals. The prophecy refers to the nation as a whole.) G-d is the Savior of Israel, allowing Assyria to overrun other nations in their place. This is because the Jewish people are special to G-d.

Again G-d says not to fear. He will gather the exiles from the four corners of the Earth. The people were spiritually "blind" and "deaf" when they left Egypt, too, but they became able to "see" and "hear." If all the nations of the world were gathered together, which of their prophets could foretell the future? Let them present their case so we can see whether it is true. The Jewish people are G-d's witnesses, testifying to the fact that He alone is G-d; there was none before Him and there will be none after Him. Besides Him, there is no Savior. Since Creation, He is G-d, and the fate of the world is His call alone. Nobody can thwart His will.

G-d says that because of our sins, He exiled Israel to Babylonia, but He will disable the ships. He made a path in the sea when the Jews left Egypt, demolishing Pharaoh's army in the process. But don't focus on the troubles of the past; soon, we will have the future redemption to occupy our thoughts. G-d will do something new; He will make a road in the desert and rivers in the wilderness. The animals of the wastelands will honor G-d for turning desolation into a place of settlements for the sake of His people.

But Israel did not call upon G-d. Instead, they turned to idols. They didn't sacrifice to G-d, but to false gods. G-d made it easy to serve Him - a handful of meal, a pinch of frankincense - but they still ignored Him. Instead, they tired Him with their sins. But G-d will erase those sins for His sake and will not recall them. (This verse is part of the Amidah prayer on Yom Kippur.) G-d encourages the Jewish people to remind Him of the reward earned by the Forefathers. Even Abraham erred when he asked G-d for a sign and nobody speaking on behalf of Israel is free from sin, which is why G-d allowed the nation to be isolated and scorned.

Chapter 44

Cook with Half, Worship the Other Half

G-d tells Israel to listen: the One Who made us and formed us in utero, He will save us. He will pour His spirit upon us like water on the thirsty. The Jews will "sprout" from it like willows by the water. They will identify themselves as being for G-d and part of Israel. (According to Rashi, the various names they use to describe themselves refer to varying levels of righteousness.)

G-d is the first and the last; beside Him there is no other. Who besides G-d can lay out the path of future events? Don't be afraid or discouraged, for G-d told the Jewish people at Sinai that we are His witnesses and there is no power except that given by Him. Idol makers come to nothing. The idols are a testimony against their worshippers, who pray to lifeless lumps. They will all end up ashamed of this.

A blacksmith has to work until the job is done, despite tiring muscles and thirst. (If he stops working before the work is finished, the iron will cool and harden “as is.”) The carpenter makes a figure of a person to sit in a pagan temple. He takes wood and uses half of it to warm himself and cook his food. The other half he uses to make an idol, which he prays to. Where’s the sense in that? He uses half for fuel and worships the other half? Ridiculous! He has been deceived and is trapped in the lie.

Israel is told to remember this, for they are G-d’s servants. He made them a nation to Him, so they must remember Him, even when the other nations forget. He erased Israel’s sins like a cloud dispersing, so they should return to Him.

The Heavens and Earth will sing that G-d has done this. The mountains and forests will sing that G-d has redeemed Israel. G-d alone made the universe, spreading out the Heavens and the Earth. He thwarts the predictions of astrologers and necromancers, revealing their “wisdom” as nonsense. On the other hand, G-d fulfills what He said to His servant (Moses) and His messengers (the prophets Chagai, Zechariah and Malachi). G-d says that Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah will be restored to their former glory. He dries up Babylonia’s wealth and power (compared to rivers). He calls Cyrus, the future Persian King, to do His will in rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. (Cyrus is called by name, even though he was more than two centuries in the future. We’ll read more about him in the next chapter.)

Chapter 45

A Prophecy for Cyrus

G-d now speaks to Cyrus, who is called an anointed one. While the Hebrew word for an anointed person is *moshiach*, not every one refers to what we would call in English the Messiah. (The Talmud in Megillah, page 12a, interprets the verse to say that G-d spoke to Moshiach about Cyrus.)

G-d gave Cyrus (or, from the perspective of Isaiah, will give Cyrus) the ability to flatten other nations and break the strength of kings. The gates of Babylonia will open wide before him. G-d will go before Cyrus, straightening the path that lies ahead of him, breaking copper doors and iron bars. G-d will give Cyrus the hidden treasures of Babylonia so that Cyrus will know that it is G-d Who is directing him. For the sake of Israel, G-d calls to Cyrus, whom He know, even though Cyrus has not yet been born. G-d will strengthen him, even though Cyrus does not yet know Who He is. People will know from one end of the world to the other that G-d is the only One. He creates light and darkness, good and evil, not like the Zoroastrian belief in two opposing gods.

The skies will rain righteousness and salvation will grow from the ground; this is from G-d. A person who questions G-d’s ways is like a lump of clay that questions the potter about how he makes a jug. G-d says that we can ask Him about the signs we see in the Heavens and on Earth, but not to question Him about Israel; He has already prepared salvation for them. G-d made Earth and planted man upon it. He aroused Cyrus to do His will; Cyrus will rebuild Jerusalem and return the exiles, not for ransom, but to do G-d’s will.

The wealth of Egypt and other nations will be given to Israel. These nations will come before you in chains and say that only in Israel is there a true G-d Who has power to save. They will be ashamed, including the master craftsmen of idols. (This section may refer to the Assyrians in the time of Chizkiyahu, rather than to the Babylonians in the time of Cyrus.) Israel will have eternal salvation and they will never be disgraced. This is the word of G-d, Who made Heaven and Earth.

G-d did not give the Torah in secret. He didn't tell us to seek Him for no reason. G-d tells the survivors of the nations to assemble and to bring their idols. Go ahead and confer - see if any of their idols predicted the fates of Assyria and Babylonia. Only G-d is a living G-d; there is no other. Turn to Him and be saved

G-d swore by Himself and righteousness came from Him, not to be retracted, to accept all who return to Him. Every person in the world will ultimately recognize only G-d. Even so, Israel will maintain their unique relationship with G-d. Those who were G-d's "opponents" will be ashamed of it, while Israel will "shep nachas" (feel pride) for recognizing G-d before it was universal among the nations.

Chapter 46

Really Unclean Idols

Bel and Nevo, the idols of Babylonia, metaphorically soil themselves. They are like animals that "do their business" anywhere. They couldn't get the job done and they have gone into captivity.

G-d tells Israel to listen to Him: He carries them from cradle to grave. G-d "gets the job done," unlike those idols. Who is like G-d? People take silver and gold and turn them into an idol to worship. They carry it from place to place because it has no power to move. They call out to it, but it has no power to answer and it cannot save them.

Remember this and take it to heart: G-d is the only One, from beginning to end. His will alone will be done. He called Abraham (compared here to an eagle) from the East and He calls Cyrus. What He says, He will do. So, listen to G-d; salvation is en route and will arrive in its due time.

Chapter 47

H*rry P*tt*r and the Wrath of G-d

Isaiah says that the people of Babylonia should "sit on the ground" rather than on a throne. (This means that they are going from being conquerors to being the conquered.) They will no longer enjoy pleasures and delicacies. Instead, they will be engaged in hard labor, losing their dignity in the process. The whole world will witness their shame. G-d will pay them back for their treatment of Israel and He doesn't need anyone's permission to do so. G-d is the Redeemer of Israel.

G-d tells the Chaldean people to sit quietly in the darkness, so that people won't see them in their punished state. They will no longer enjoy their prestigious status among nations. When G-d became angry with Israel over their sins, He allowed them to be conquered, but that doesn't excuse the conquerors acting so cruelly. They especially oppressed the elderly, who were unable to bear the hard labor. They thought there would never be any payback for their deeds, but they were wrong. Now, they are like a widow. They will lose citizens and their king in one stroke.

They will also be punished for their sorcerous ways (or perhaps it means that their sorcery won't save them). They performed their magic in secret, thinking no one could see them. They were perverted by these practices and they considered themselves wise and powerful. Now punishment is coming and they are powerless to prevent it. Go ahead, try your sorcery and see if that helps. Let the astrologers, fortune tellers and necromancers do their best. They're like straw in the fire - they can't even save themselves! Nothing remains from them because they've been utterly consumed. You supported these magicians, but they're no good to you in this time of need. They're deserting you, leaving you to fend for yourselves.

Chapter 48

No Peace for the Wicked

Isaiah speaks to the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who are fated to be exiled to Babylonia. They say they rely on G-d, but they are not truthful about it. They are called by the name of Jerusalem, the Holy City, and they express faith in G-d, but deep inside, they have doubts.

G-d foretold earlier events - the redemption from Egypt and the salvation from Assyria in the time of Chizkiyahu - and they happened. But the Jewish people is a stubborn nation. G-d foretold these things so they would know that He did it and not some other power. Just as these past things came true as foretold, so will future events, such as those involving Cyrus. The people have not listened to the words of the Torah and they might think that these events are unfolding naturally.

When G-d saved the Jewish people in Egypt, He knew they would ultimately sin; the capacity for sin is inborn. But G-d puts off His anger for them. He purifies the people in a "furnace of affliction," through exile and poverty. G-d does this - punishing the Jews rather than destroying them outright - so that His Name will not be profaned. Listen to G-d, for He is the Eternal One.

G-d established the Heavens and Earth, causing them to interact with one another. Because G-d loves the Jewish people, He will carry out His mission in Babylonia, to restore the nation through Cyrus. G-d called Abraham from the east and made him successful. The Torah was not given in secret. Now G-d sends Isaiah as His messenger. G-d teaches us for our own benefit; He leads us the way we should go.

If the Jews would but obey the Torah, their peace would flow as constantly as a river and their merits would be as powerful as the crashing waves. Your descendants would be as plentiful as the sand of the beach and

the nation would never be destroyed. (Even though they have sinned, the nation will never be destroyed, although they will be exiled.)

Return from Babylonia, singing in joy that G-d has redeemed His nation. They will not thirst when they return through the desert; G-d will care for their needs as He did when they left Egypt.

G-d says: There is no peace for the wicked, referring to Nebuchadnezzar and his successors.

Chapter 49

Unforgettable... That's What You Are...

Isaiah calls to various nations to pay heed. This was the job G-d had for Isaiah since before he was born. G-d gave Isaiah a mouth "like a sword," with which to rebuke the wicked. G-d covered Isaiah with the shadow of His hand, so that those he rebuked would not be able to harm him. Isaiah is like an arrow in G-d's arsenal against evil. Isaiah is as precious to G-d as the entire nation of Israel, in Whom He takes pride. When Isaiah despaired that people did not change their ways, despite his prophesying, G-d knew that it was not that Isaiah was lazy, but that the nation was stubborn. Now, G-d made Isaiah His messenger to bring Israel back to Him in repentance. Israel will return to G-d and Isaiah will be honored in G-d's eyes.

G-d said to Isaiah that it's no small thing to be His servant, bringing Israel back to Him. But G-d added even more to that, as Isaiah also prophesied to the other nations, as well. Isaiah's prophecies would be a "light unto the nations" so that G-d's salvation would reach the ends of the world.

G-d spoke about Israel, who are despised among nations. Ultimately, kings will rise before them and princes will bow down because they are the chosen people of G-d. G-d says that He answered and saved Israel, and He will watch them and make them an eternal people, rebuilding their desolate land. The exiles will be released from their captivity; on their return, they will graze along the road, not hungry, nor thirsty, nor suffering from the heat, because G-d will lead them by springs of water. Mountains will be leveled to smooth roads and overgrown highways will be cleared. The exiles will return from far and wide. Heaven and Earth will rejoice in song that G-d has had mercy on His people.

The land weeps that G-d has "forgotten" her, but that would be like a mother just forgetting her baby. And even though there may be such neglectful mothers, G-d still won't overlook the land. It's as if the land of Israel were engraved on G-d's "hands" - that's how unforgettable the land is to Him. The exiles are anxious to return. The wicked who cause the exile will depart. Look up and see the exiles returning; they are like a bride's jewelry to the land. Those places that had been destroyed and emptied will be crowded with residents. The inhabitants for whom the land cried will tell each other "Move over and gimme room!" When the land sees Jerusalem so overflowing with activity, she will ask where they all came from, seeing how she was all alone for so long. G-d will reply that He will raise His hand to the nations, signaling the return; the nations will assist with the return,

affording Israel great honor in the process. Kings and queens will be like nurses and nannies to you. They will bow down and you will know that it is G-d Who has caused this.

G-d says that He can take captives from the mightiest rulers and He will rescue us. Those who oppress Israel will be so distressed that they will become physically ill. Everyone will know that it is G-d Who has saved Israel.

Chapter 50

The Moth-Man Prophecy

G-d says that, despite their sins, He has not “divorced” the Jewish people. (This seems to contradict Jeremiah 3:8, which says that He did. However, Jeremiah was prophesying to the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom - the now “lost” Tribes - while Isaiah was speaking to the kingdom of Judah.) Why does G-d call for us to return, but no one answers? Is the exile so long that you think He is unable to save you? Whenever He wishes, G-d could dry up the sea, as He did the Red Sea when the Jews left Egypt, or stop a river from flowing, as He did the Jordan when the Jews entered Israel. He dresses the Heavens with darkness and covers them with sackcloth.

G-d gave Isaiah the ability to teach the weary the word of G-d. G-d rouses Isaiah every day, energizing him to hear His teachings. G-d appointed Isaiah His prophet and Isaiah accepted the job without any hesitation, unlike many other prophets. He did his appointed task, despite the insults and abuse his detractors would heap upon him. G-d gave him the strength to carry on with his task.

Soon, Isaiah says, he will be vindicated - let those who wish to debate him step forward! G-d will help him and his opponents will wear out like moth-eaten clothes. Who fears G-d and heeds the words of His prophets in darkness? Let such a person rely on G-d! But those who do not listen ignite the fire of G-d’s anger and are thereby burned accordingly. This is payback and these people will have no strength before their enemies.

Chapter 51

Passing the Cup

Isaiah tells the righteous to listen to him: Look at the rock from which you were cut and the hole from which you were dug - referring to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was a lone person when G-d called him and G-d blessed him to become multitudes. G-d will console Israel, turning wasteland into gardens. Rejoicing will be found in the land. Words of Torah will shine forth and G-d’s judgment will be a light to nations; they will have rest from war.

G-d’s righteousness is near; salvation is on the way. G-d will chastise the nations and they will rely on Him. Heaven and Earth may eventually pass away, but G-d’s righteousness will last forever. So listen to G-d and

don't worry about what people may say. Their criticisms are worthless; they will be consumed like a worm does to wool.

Elijah prays for G-d to "awaken" His might and take action, as in the "olden days" in Egypt, when He dried up the sea. The exiles will be redeemed and return in song, heads held high. Sadness will run away from them.

G-d replies to Isaiah that He is the One Who consoles. Why fear a mortal man who withers like grass? People forget G-d, Who created the universe, and they worry about humans, who are here today and gone tomorrow. Your oppressor is mortal; he has no power to harm you. It is G-d who moves the sea and who put words of Torah in our mouths. He sheltered us and preserved us to be like the stars of Heaven and the sands of the shore.

Awaken, Jerusalem! You have finished drinking from the cup of G-d's punishment. The Jews in exile were directionless. How will Jerusalem be consoled? Her children have fainted in the streets. Listen, you afflicted people, who are "drunk" from your troubles. G-d says that we will no longer drink from the cup of punishment - He will pass it to those who oppressed us.

Chapter 52

G-d's Got Your Back

Isaiah tells Jerusalem to "get up and get dressed," because invaders will no longer be permitted to enter. Shake off the dust, get up off the ground and sit on your throne. Take off your bonds - you were sold as slaves but you're not being redeemed for money; you repented and returned to G-d.

G-d says that Egypt oppressed the Jews, but at least they hosted the Jews prior to that and felt "owed." Assyria didn't even have a weak justification! The Jews were exiled for their sins, but they were abused and G-d's Name was blasphemed. Now that He redeems them, His Name will be recognized.

Isaiah praises the footsteps of the messenger who ascends the mountain to announce the salvation. The watchmen of the cities will sing when they see G-d restore the Jews to Jerusalem. The ruins that were left from the exile will rejoice in Jerusalem's restoration. G-d has revealed His might - all the nations will see His salvation.

Leave the places of exile. Purify yourselves to carry the vessels of the Temple. (This refers to the Levites, who carried the vessels of the Tabernacle in the desert when they left Egypt.) You won't hurry as you did when you left Egypt, because you won't fear anyone's attack; G-d is guarding your backs. Israel will prosper and be exalted. Many people wondered about how beat down the Jews were; now kings will shut up when they see the Jews because it's just so unbelievable!

Chapter 53

What, Me Suffer?

In this chapter, Isaiah tells us to look at a particular “servant” of G-d, who is being afflicted. (We will see to whom this refers.) While in exile, he had no form or appearance, so how could we desire him? He was universally despised and considered worthless. He carried all our pains, but we considered him afflicted by G-d. He was injured because of our sins and we were healed with his wounds. We went astray like sheep, but G-d accepted his prayers on behalf of all of us. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, without protest. He was taken from prison; he was exiled from the land. A plague afflicted the people because of their sins.

This poor, afflicted individual (if it even is an individual!) allowed himself to be buried among the wicked of the nations, even though he had committed no crime. G-d punished him so that he would repent; if he would make amends, he would enjoy a long, prosperous life, seeing the fruits of his labors. This servant would vindicate G-d to the masses and bear their sins. G-d would therefore give him a portion among the nation, dividing spoils (perhaps dividing THEM as spoils!). This is because this servant of G-d risked his own life to intercede on behalf of the sinners.

So who is this servant? Let’s examine.

Isaiah 53 is what missionaries call the “Suffering Servant.” The servant in question was despised and rejected, not held in esteem. He took up our ills and wounds, but we blamed G-d rather than ourselves. His punishment brought us peace we are healed by his wounds. He was afflicted, but he didn’t open his mouth, being led like a lamb to the slaughter. There’s more, but that’s the basic idea. Unlike the inaccurate “virgin birth” source in chapter 7, this chapter is generally quoted pretty accurately, although some liberties are taken with the Hebrew. For example, verse 5 says the servant was punished BECAUSE OF our sins, not “for” our sins. It’s a small, but significant difference.

However, even if the translation is essentially correct, who says this chapter is a messianic prophecy? Most commentators say the “servant” is Israel. Israel is called G-d’s servant throughout the Book of Isaiah; look at the chapters leading up to this one - Isaiah 41:8-9, 44:1-2, 45:4, 48:20, 49:3 – they all overtly call the nation of Israel the servant. (This list is hardly exhaustive; there are many other examples. These are just the ones in the immediate vicinity of Isaiah 53.) Israel is called the servant in many other places, as well. See Psalms 136:22 and Jeremiah 30:10. Now look at Jeremiah 30:17, just a few verses later, speaking of Israel as being afflicted – it’s thematically the same as Isaiah 53:4 because they’re talking about the same thing - the nation of Israel!

So Israel is called G-d’s servant in many places and the messiah is called a servant... pretty much no place! Ezekiel does use the phrase “My servant David” to refer to the messiah, who is the descendant of David, but David is clearly the servant in those verses.

Chapter 54

Family Reunion

Isaiah compares Jerusalem to a barren woman, but he tells her to rejoice because the barren one has more children than the fertile one (referring to other nations that were not overrun). Jerusalem is told to make room for all her children, who are coming. They will spread out east and west, taking back other cities that had been abandoned or occupied by enemy forces. No longer will Jerusalem be ashamed, as she was in exile; her “widowhood” is over.

G-d is the Master of the world. He redeemed Israel and he will be recognized as G-d by the whole world. Israel is not really like a widow, because their “husband” (G-d) still lives. They were merely “separated,” but now they are reconciled. G-d was angry with the Jewish people for but a short time; now He gathers them with great mercy and everlasting kindness.

This is like the flood in the time of Noah, during which time G-d swore never again to flood the Earth. Now He swears never to punish the Jews like this again. Mighty mountains will eventually be eroded away, but G-d’s kindness and His covenant of peace will be with us forever.

Israel is like one who has been tossed about by a storm. G-d will pave our floors and gates with precious gems, not only in the Temple and Jerusalem, but throughout the land. All our children will study the ways of G-d and they will have great peace. We will be firmly established because of our righteousness, not fearing oppression. Those who are not with G-d will fear. Those who oppose Israel will fall before them (or, perhaps, will come to side with them).

G-d created the entire concept of metal work. A smith forges implements of war, but we need not fear those who wield them. Any weapon held against Israel will fail; anyone who speaks against them will be defeated. This is the reward of those who have served G-d.

Chapter 55

I Can’t Begin to Imagine What G-d’s Thoughts Must Be Like!

Isaiah tells all who are thirsty to go to the water and all those with no money to go buy food - it will not be an impediment. (As in many places, the food and drink are a metaphor for Torah.) Why should you work and pay for no food? Listen to G-d and eat your fill of goodness. Turn towards Him and live, enjoying an eternal covenant.

David’s descendant (Moshiach - the Messiah) will chastise the nations and rule over them. You will call a nation you don’t know and they will come because they’ve heard about the miracles G-d has performed for Israel.

Isaiah tells the people of his generation to look for G-d while He can still be found - meaning before the judgment of exile is passed. Evil people will give up their bad ways - and their bad thoughts - and return to G-d, Who will forgive them.

G-d says that His “thoughts” are not like our thoughts and His ways are not like our ways. G-d’s “thoughts” (whatever that means) are as far away from ours as Heaven is from Earth. Just as rain and snow fall from the sky and they do not return without watering the Earth, the word of G-d doesn’t return to Him without first “watering” those who hear it, spiritually speaking.

You will go forth from exile in joy and return to your land in peace. The mountains and trees will rejoice in song on your behalf. The wicked (compared to thorns) will be replaced by the righteous (compared to trees). This will be a permanent sign of G-d’s redemption of Israel.

Chapter 56

A Prophecy for Converts

G-d says to keep justice and to act charitably because His salvation is near and His righteousness will be revealed. Happy is the person who holds tight to Shabbos, being careful not to profane it. Let no convert think that G-d will keep him separate from the rest of the nation and let no eunuch think that life is pointless because he cannot have children. Because they keep Shabbos, G-d will give the eunuchs a better reward than sons and daughters; they will have an everlasting name (meaning that their merits will last forever). The converts who love G-d and join Him, keeping Shabbos and Torah, will be brought to the Temple, where they will rejoice in G-d’s acceptance of their prayers and sacrifices. The converts from the other nations will surpass the mightiest of those nations.

The leaders of Israel cannot see what is right in front of them, in order to encourage the people to return to G-d in time. They are silent, sleeping. They just want to satisfy their urges; they don’t understand what is coming. Each one does his own thing, partying today and expecting bigger and better partying tomorrow. (It won’t last!)

Chapter 57

The Pursuit of Pleasure and STILL No Peace for the Wicked

Isaiah says that a righteous person - Rashi says like King Yoshiyahu - has perished, but nobody cares. Nobody understands that the righteous are being taken away because of the evil that is to come. It’s better for the righteous to sleep with their ancestors than to witness the tragedies to come. Those remaining should come close. They are the adherents of sorcery, adultery and promiscuity. Since they turned their backs on G-d, who can they rely upon for their good times? They mocked G-d’s word and His prophets; they are children of sin (or, perhaps, they gave birth to sin). They pleasure themselves under every tree and sacrifice their children to idols. They will inherit the rocks they sacrificed to idols upon - Rashi says this means that they will be stoned with them! Given their abominations, why should G-d prevent this fate?

They served idols brazenly, in public places. The idols are like an adulterous woman, outside whose door they eagerly awaited. Even though the nation is "married" to G-d, they got out of bed and took lovers (the idols).

G-d had previously graced the nation, who would greet the king with gifts. Messengers would return with tribute from other countries and those countries were humbled before Israel. (Conversely, perhaps it means that Israel sent gifts to the king of Assyria and that they were the ones who were humbled.) But the people strayed, following their desires, which they did not drop in favor of Torah and mitzvos. Since people were successful in their pursuit of pleasure, they were not discouraged from continuing in this path. The people forgot G-d - in favor of who? G-d is eternal and overlooks many of our sins, but they ignored Him. G-d recounts their righteous deeds (such as they are), but they won't help the people now. When they go into exile, see if their idols save them. The idols and their adherents will be wiped away, but those who trust in G-d will inherit the land and Jerusalem. (This refers to Chizkiyahu and his followers, who successfully defended Jerusalem against the Assyrian invasion.)

The prophet will say in G-d's Name to clear a path and remove any obstacles to the people's return to G-d. G-d says that, though He "lives" among the lofty ones (stars? angels?), He is also with the humble and downtrodden people, whom He revives and invigorates. He does punish people for their misdeeds, but His wrath does not last forever. G-d relents when a person humbles himself and returns to Him.

G-d became angry about the sin of theft and He punished people accordingly. They continued in their bad ways, turning to idols. Some then return to G-d completely, others only partially improve their ways, others not at all. But G-d takes note of their paths, He takes them in and heals them. G-d will put words of peace in the mouths of all who live for those who were always righteous and those who have returned to Him. But the evil are turbulent like the sea, which cannot rest. They will have no peace.

Compare the last verse in this chapter with chapter 48, verse 22. There, the same idea is expressed using G-d's Name of mercy. The verse here is identical, except that it uses G-d's Name of justice. This indicates that this prophecy of peace, except for the wicked, will come true no matter what attribute G-d uses to redeem the Jewish people.

Chapter 58

"Shouldn't Talk About It on Shabbos"

G-d tells Isaiah to call out to the people of his generation, like a shofar, informing them of their sins. They seek G-d with their words, but not with their deeds. They ask to know G-d's will, but they do not intend to fulfill it. The people complain that they pray and fast, yet G-d does not answer their prayers. This is because, while they go through the motions of fasting, they are also pursuing their business and doing their regular daily transactions, collecting debts. They fast leading to arguments and trouble - how can G-d accept such a fast? He can see what's in people's hearts. He won't accept fasting or other forms of repentance unless they're accompanied by the proper motivations. One has to give up their bad ways and act charitably to those less fortunate. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked - don't pretend you can't see them!

If you actually change your ways, then you will be prosperous and successful. G-d will heal you and your merits will go ahead of you into the Next World. If you turn away from evil, G-d will answer your prayers. If you are charitable to those in need, your times of darkness will be as bright as noon. G-d will always lead you and you will never lack, like a well-watered garden. Just as your bad deeds led to destruction, your good deeds will cause the world to be built up for generations to come.

If you refrain from doing your business on Shabbos, in word as well as in deed, then you will rejoice with G-d, Who will reward you.

These last few verses are the source of not running on Shabbos (except to shul or a mitzva), not doing “un-Shabbosdik” things (like preparing on Shabbos for after Shabbos) and “shouldn’t talk about it on Shabbos.” (These principles are respectively known as hiluchecha, cheftzecha and dabeir davar). Halachos derived from Navi are even more authoritative than Rabbinic laws and some say they’re as authoritative as actual Torah laws. This synopsis is not the place to go into these halachos with any depth. It’s just something to think about the next time you hear someone say, “Shouldn’t talk about it on Shabbos!”

Chapter 59

Snake Eggs

Isaiah tells us that G-d’s “hand” is not incapable of saving us, nor is His “ear” incapable of hearing us. It is our sins that keep Him from doing so! The people’s hands are full of sin and their mouths speak falsehoods. Prayers are insincere, court judgments are biased and injustices multiply. Isaiah likens things to poisonous vipers’ eggs - if you eat one, it’s poison. If it hatches, it’s a viper. No good can possibly come of this. Isaiah also compares the people’s deeds to spider webs - wholly ineffective for making a protective cover.

The people run to do evil; all they think about is doing bad things. They have ingrained evil in themselves so deeply, they wouldn’t know justice if it jumped up and bit them. (That last metaphor was my choice of words, not Isaiah’s.) They hope for light, but they walk in darkness. They have to feel their way, as if they were blind. They cry out like a bear’s growl and a dove’s wail, but there is no reply; the people’s sins testify against them and they know it.

The people have rebelled against G-d, acting as if He wasn’t there. They are so steeped in oppression and falsehood that truth and righteousness keep their distance. Things have gotten so bad that people assume an honest person must be insane! Naturally, G-d is not pleased by this situation. There’s no righteous person to stand up. Since the people were not worthy of being saved, G-d had to save them for Himself, rather than for them.

G-d metaphorically “put on” his armor of righteousness and salvation, along with garments of vengeance to those who oppose Him. He repays them according to their deeds. East and west, they will fear the Name of

G-d and honor His glory. A savior (Moshiach - the Messiah) will come to Israel and to those who repent of their sins. (Remember how we had the closing phrase of the prayer "U'va L'Tziyon" in chapter 42? Well, this verse is the opening line of that prayer.) G-d's covenant with the Jewish people is that the Torah will not be forgotten from them or their descendants, forever.

Chapter 60

Embiggened

Isaiah tells Jerusalem to arise, for their light has come. Darkness will cover the Earth, but they alone will have light. The other nations will follow their light to G-d. Isaiah says to look around and see the crowds who have gathered - either referring to the people of other nation from the previous verse or to the exiles, who have returned. Jerusalem will be startled by the abundance of goodness she will have, and be enlarged by it.

Caravans will come to Jerusalem, carrying wealth and precious goods, as well as praise of G-d. The sheep and rams will be sacrifices to G-d, which He will accept and which will inspire the nations to serve Him.

The Jews will return from exile swiftly, like a cloud carried by the wind and doves returning to the coop. Ships will return the Jews to their land, along with silver and gold. (This may mean the wealth that was pillaged during the siege, or that the nations will send wealth as gifts to the Temple.) The people from other lands will help build up the city and kings will serve the nation because G-d had punished the nation for their sins, and now He has had mercy on them.

Because there will be peace, the gates of Jerusalem will be open 24 hours a day and wealth will pour in. Nations will follow the Jews' example and serve G-d or they will cease to be. The best trees of Lebanon will be used in the Temple, as they were in the time of Solomon and the descendants of the Jews' oppressors in exile will recognize the holiness of Jerusalem and its connection to the Jewish people. Instead of being despised by the nations of the world, Israel will be admired. Israel will enjoy the wealth of nations and know that this came from G-d.

Instead of copper and iron, the Jews will enjoy gold and silver. (This means that they will be rewarded many times more than the amount they were punished.) The rulers of the land will be guided by peace and righteousness. Violence and oppression will be a thing of the past. They won't need the sun and moon for light because G-d will be their everlasting light. (This is a metaphor; light represents Torah.) The people, all of whom will be righteous, will inherit the land forever and the smallest of families will be extremely prolific. It is G-d who says this and He will make it happen.

Chapter 61

"I Didn't Say It - G-d Said It!"

Isaiah relates that all the good things he has foretold are from G-d, Who placed His spirit on Isaiah in order to deliver His message. Isaiah's mission is to announce freedom from the captivity. He declares a year of redemption and a day of vengeance (Radak says this refers to Gog and Magog). The mourners will be comforted and they will have glory instead of ashes, oil (for anointing, which is not permitted during mourning) and praise. They will be like huge trees of righteousness, planted by G-d.

The ruins will be rebuilt and desolate cities will be restored. People will come from other nations to tend the Jews' sheep and work their fields. The Jews will be considered priests and servants of G-d; the other nations will bring tribute to the Temple.

Instead of profound shame and disgrace, the Jews will have eternal joy. This is because G-d loves justice. He does not accept offerings that were made from stolen property. He will pay the Jews their much-deserved reward and they will have an everlasting covenant. The Jews will be known among the nations as those whom G-d has blessed. Jerusalem and the nation will rejoice that G-d has wrapped them with garments of salvation and righteousness, adorned like the happy couple on their wedding day. G-d will cause righteousness and praise of Israel to sprout like the flora of a garden.

Chapter 62

Ah, Yerushalayim!

G-d says that for the sake of Israel and Jerusalem, He will not be silent and He will not "rest" until their righteousness and salvation burn brightly. Nations will see Israel's righteousness and they will be called by a new name, which G-d will designate. (Radak says Hephzibah - "My desire in in her" - as in verse 4 of this chapter.) The Jews will be G-d's "crown jewel." No longer will Israel be called forsaken and desolate. Instead, they will be called Hephzibah - "My desire is in her." (See? Told you.) G-d loves the people and wishes for the land to be inhabited.

The Jewish people will start a new life, like a young couple, and G-d will rejoice over them like a groom over his bride. G-d has placed 24-hour guardians on the walls of Jerusalem. Rashi explains that this refers to angels, who will constantly remind G-d of the merits of Israel. (This verse is sung as the song "Al Chomosayich, Yerushalayim," with its refrain of "Ah, Yerushalayim!") These guardians will not relent until G-d restores Jerusalem to be the place of glory on Earth. G-d promised that He would no longer allow Israel's enemies to pillage their fields and vineyards. Rather, those who toiled will enjoy the fruits of their labors in the Holy Land.

Pass through the gates, clear the way, pave the road ahead and raise a flag! G-d calls out to the ends of the world that Israel's salvation has come! G-d has brought the reward of the righteous with Him. Israel will be called the holy nation, redeemed by G-d, desired and not abandoned.

Chapter 63

The Good Old Days

Someone is coming from Edom, which is Rome, wearing clothes soiled in battle, and from Batzra girded in strength. It's G-d, who said previously (34:5) that He would personally take care of Edom. Why are His clothes red? From "treading the wine press" of Edom by Himself. The day of vengeance was in G-d's heart and the year of redemption has arrived. G-d trampled nations in His anger and brought them down to the ground.

Isaiah says he will praise G-d for His acts, reminding Israel of all the good that He has done for them. G-d saved them because they are His children. He redeemed them and carried them in the old days. However, they rebelled against Him and antagonized Him. The people remembered the old days, when Moses led them through the desert without stumbling. In those days, G-d guided the people.

Pray for G-d to look down upon us from Heaven. Where are His mighty deeds? He is holding back His love for us. Only G-d is our Father, as the Patriarchs did not live to see our generation. Why does G-d let us go astray and harden our hearts to Him? We only inherited the land and had the Temple for a short time before it was destroyed and we were exiled. (The Temple stood 410 years.) We became like a nation that never had that unique relationship with G-d. If G-d would come down to save us now as He did in Egypt, mountains would melt before Him!

Chapter 64

The Potter and The Clay

Like fire, which makes things boil and melt, G-d will make His Name known to the nations, who will tremble before Him. G-d performed wonders for the Jews, which we didn't deserve. When He descended on Mt. Sinai, mountains melted away. No one ever heard of deeds like G-d did for Israel and no one ever saw a "god" besides G-d perform miracles for a nation.

But we sinned and made G-d angry, so He allowed the righteous among us to perish; we used to be saved because of those righteous, but now we can only be saved because G-d does so for His own sake. Since we've lost the righteous like a discarded garment, we are all like a spiritually unclean person. We are like a dry leaf and our sins toss us around like the wind. Nobody summons up the strength to overpower temptation and return to G-d since He has hidden Himself from us.

Even now, G-d is still our Father. We are like clay and He is the potter. We ask that G-d not be angry and recall our sins forever. Jerusalem and other cities have become deserts; the Temple has been burned. G-d has managed to restrain Himself through this. We pray that He will not remain silent and allow us to be subjugated for much longer.

Chapter 65

Holier Than Thou

G-d says, "I encouraged the Jewish people to return to Me by sending them prophets, but they wouldn't listen. I said, 'Here I am!' but they wouldn't turn to Me. I spread My hands out to them, but they continued to go in their bad way. The people continue to antagonize Me and they sacrifice to idols. They try to summon forces of necromancy, they eat pork and other forbidden foods. They tell the truly righteous, 'Keep away from me because I'm holier than you!'" These people really anger G-d.

G-d will not rest until He has paid them back for their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They denied G-d and worshipped idols; that's why they were exiled and that's the sin that will be punished first. But G-d will not completely destroy the nation. He will remove the righteous and they will inherit Jerusalem and the Temple, to live there. The Sharon (a region in Israel) will become a place for sheep and the Valley of Achor will be a place for cattle - this will be a blessing for those who actually sought G-d.

Those who turned their backs on G-d, however, will fall to the sword because G-d called them and they refused to answer. They did whatever they wanted, not what G-d wanted of them. G-d's faithful will eat, but the faithless will go hungry. The former will drink, the latter go thirsty. The righteous will rejoice while the wicked will know shame. The wicked will be used in a curse; people will say, "May it happen like it did to..." Conversely, the righteous will be used for a blessing.

In the Messianic era, everyone in the world will swear in the Name of G-d and there will be no wars because we'll all be on the same side. There will be a "new Heaven and a new Earth" meaning a whole new order - the lowly will be exalted and the arrogant will be humbled. G-d will make Jerusalem a place of rejoicing - crying will not be heard there. Everyone will live their full life span because there will be no wars. 100 will be considered an early death, caused by one's sins. The people will build houses and plant vineyards that they will enjoy themselves, rather than dying and having others inhabit. People will have long lives, outliving the buildings they erect.

It will be that G-d will answer them even when they have not yet called upon Him. The wolf and lamb will dwell together and the lion will eat straw like cattle. Snakes will cause no harm. (These are metaphors for peace - aggressors will put down their weapons and cease their hostile activities. There are those, whoever, who take it literally to mean that G-d will change nature itself so that lions eat straw, etc.)

Chapter 66

Homecoming

G-d says, "Heaven is My throne and Earth is my footstool. What building is sufficient to hold My presence? I made Heaven and Earth as I wished, but I still look upon the downtrodden people who do My will. Those who offer sacrifices without repenting are actually making things worse for themselves; they chose their path and

they prefer abominations. I, too, will choose a path of destruction, bringing their worst fears upon them. This is because they did not return when I called, preferring to indulge their desires.”

Listen to the word of G-d and tremble. Your own brothers tossed you out as if you were unclean, thinking they would be the ones to glorify G-d. When they see your joy, they will be ashamed.

A sound comes from Jerusalem and the Temple - it is G-d punishing His enemies. The redemption will come quickly, like a woman who delivers before labor even begins. Did anyone ever see such a thing? No, but the exiles' return will be that sudden.

Everyone who loves Jerusalem and mourned for her can now rejoice in her renewed splendor! Peace will flow like a river and you will enjoy the wealth of nations. G-d will console the nation like a mother consoles her son. You will see and rejoice when G-d reveals Himself to His faithful and punishes His enemies.

G-d will arrive in fire, fanning His wrath with flames. G-d will execute judgment with His sword and many will die, idolaters among them. All the nations will gather and see G-d's glory.

Those who survive will be sent to the nations, to distant places that never heard of G-d, to share His glory with them. They will return the Jews scattered in their lands to Jerusalem and G-d will restore the Kohanim and Leviim among them to His service.

The new way of the world is already before G-d and the Jews will never again be exiled. Every Rosh Chodesh and every Shabbos, all humanity will bow down to G-d. They will see those who rebelled against G-d punished forever.

The closing note of all humanity bowing before G-d on Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh brings the Book full circle, as chapter 1 started the Book by saying that Rosh Chodesh and holidays had become tiresome to G-d thanks to the insincerity of His worshippers. After the punishment and the redemption, the situation will be rectified and G-d will happily accept service offered with a whole heart.