THE GRACIOUS, REDEEMING GOD

An Expository Development of Isaiah 55:1-13

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PERSONAL TRANSLATION

v.1 Ho! all of (the) thirsty come to the waters!
and (he) who has no money, come!
Buy and eat and come
Buy with no money and with no cost wine and milk.

v.2 Why will you spend (weigh) money on not bread
and your labor on not for satisfaction?
Listen, listen (carefully) to me and eat (what is) good!
so that your soul will delight in the fatness (richness).

v.3 Bend down your ear and come to me.
Listen!
so that your soul may live.
And I will cut (make) with you an everlasting covenant
(according to the) abiding faithful lovingkindnesses
(shown to) David.

v.4 Behold a witness to the peoples I gave him;
a leader and commander to the people.

v.5 Behold a nation you will not know, you will summon
and a nation (that) will not know you, to you they will hasten,
for the sake of Yahweh your God,
even for the Holy One of Israel,
because He glorified you!

TRANSLATION (continued)

v.6 Seek Yahweh while He is to be found.

Call on him while He is near.

v.7 The wicked is to abandon his way,
and a man of evil (nothingness) (is to abandon) his thoughts.
and he is to return to Yahweh,
so that He would have mercy on him.
even to our Elohim (he is to return),
because He will make great to pardon.

v.8 Because "My thoughts (are) not your thoughts
and neither (are) your ways, My ways"
Declares Yahweh.

v9. Because (just as) the heavens are higher the earth,
In the same way My ways are higher than your ways
and My thoughts (are higher) than your thoughts.

v.10 Because just as the rain comes down and the snow
from the sky and to there it will not return
unless it (first) makes the earth drink
and makes it bud, and makes it grow (sprout)
so that it gives seed to the one sowing,
and bread to the one eating;

v11. In the same way will be My Word
that will go out from My mouth
It will not return to me empty (w/out success)
unless it (first) accomplished what I desired
and it caused success (in) that which I sent it.

v.12 Because in joy you will go out,
and in peace you will be led.
The mountains and the hills will burst in front of you
(with) a song,
And all of (the) trees of the field will clap (their) hand.

v.13 Instead of the thornbush, a cypress will grow;
And Instead of the brier (nettle), a myrtle will grow;
Then it will be to Yahweh as a name,
(and) as an everlasting sign (memorial).
It will never be cut down (rooted out)!

INTRODUCTION

The prophet Isaiah, whose name means "Salvation is of Jehovah", is often called "the evangelist of the O.T." As a preacher of God's word, he faithfully proclaimed a message that had vital importance to the people of his day. As a writer of God's word, he, through the superintending ministry of the Holy Spirit, penned words of vital importance to the people of his day, as well as our day and the future to come.

The book of Isaiah naturally divides into 2 major sections. Chapters 1-35 involve a proclamation of judgment. Chapters 36-39 entail an interjected historical narrative. And chapters 40-66 involve a proclamation of comfort, with chapters 40-48 describing the greatness of God, chapters 49-57 proclaiming the salvation of God, and chapters 58-66 foretelling the kingdom of God.

Isaiah 40-48 is a section often called "Isaiah's book of comfort". This section unfolds some of the great themes of the Bible, and in these chapters all are tied inseparably to Yahweh. God is described as One Who is 1)sovereign, 2)the Only God, 3)opposed to Idolatry, 4)creator, 5)active in history, 6)the accomplisher of salvation, 7)concerned for all nations, 8)redeemer, 9)holy, 10)to one day use Israel as His missionary nation, and 11)anticipating future fulfillment of His promises.[1]

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1 [?]F.B.Huey,Jr., "Great Themes in Isaiah 40-66" Southwestern Journal of Theology, (Fall, 1968), p. 48-57.

Isaiah chapter 55 is in the midst of the section proclaiming the salvation of God. After the substitutionary provision for forgiveness (the suffering Messiah - Chapter 53) has been made, and the blessings that the Servant has obtained for His people have been set forth (in chapter 54), "now the invitation is extended to all that are in need to come and to partake of the salvation the Lord offers"[2] Just as "chapter 54 glimpses Israel's response to the gospel and restoration for Kingdom blessing, chapter 55 sees the gospel call going out to all the nations of the millennial earth"[3]

In a similar fashion as Jesus Christ told of a prepared wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-4, Isaiah now is about to describe a feast that is offered to everyone. "All things are ready; the guests are invited; and nothing is required of them except to come"[4]

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2 ?E.J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1977), p.374.

3 ?Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Commentary on the O.T., Vol. II (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p.1303.

4 ?F.Delizsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1950), p. 353.

THE GRACIOUS GOD

I. GOD'S INVITATION (V.1)

God begins His invitation by gaining man's attention. God by saying "HO!" demonstrates that what He is about to say is extremely urgent. He uses this introductory particle because it "is mainly an attention-getting device, but it expresses a slight note of pity"[5] (cp.Is 18:1; Zech. 2:10). God exclaims "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." This is an invitation that is not restricted. God calls for every one to participate in His offer. This unrestricted offer proves that provision has been made for all!

Secondly, this invitation is for those in need to have those needs met. God calls for those who are "thirsty"(cp.John 4). "In Oriental countries where water is scarce, water is sold by a vendor, who calls out attracting attention to his ware. It is not physical water, however, of which Isaiah speaks; but like milk and wine, water is a figure of spiritual blessing, the water in particular signifying the spiritual refreshment that is offered"[6] (cp. Is. 65:13).

Thirdly, God's invitation is not optional. He uses an imperative and commands men to come. The command to "come" implies that those in need are not presently at the place of relief but need to come there. The apostle John closes the canon with a similar exhortation saying: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is **athirst** come. And whosoever will, let him take the **water of life** freely"(Rev.22:17).

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5 ?Young, p.374.

6 ?Young, p. 374.

God further explains his invitation by saying: "...and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Water is fittingly employed to picture salvation because it is necessary to maintain physical life. However salvation and the spiritual blessings of the gospel cannot be exhausted by water. Salvation is also like "wine" to cheer and exhilarate (Judg. 9:13), and like "milk" to nourish and strengthen (I Pet. 2:2).[7] It is important to note that God's invitation is to those who are poor. He invites those who have "no money". God's invitation involves a three step process: 1)"come", 2)"buy", 3)"eat". In order for one to benefit by God's offer, he must come to the Provider (God), he must obtain the provision (note how the word 'buy' is used in relation to food-Gen.41:57; 42:2,5; Prov.11:26) and he must internalize ("eat") the provision.

Because God's offer is granted "without money and without price", it is of grace and cannot be deserved. Because is free it cannot be earned. Salvation - whether spiritual redemption (which is in view in context) or physical deliverance - is always a "free gift of God." In Acts 8:20 (for example), Simon the sorcerer asked for a

gift from God by offering money; to which Peter replied; "...Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the **gift** of

God may be purchased with money." Although God's "water, wine and milk" is offered freely to man, there was a price paid. Man might have the salvation symbolized by these elements freely because the price has been paid by Jesus Christ the one who received "the chastisement of our peace" described two chapters earlier in the book of Isaiah (chapter 53). God's invitation to "buy...without money" seems paradoxical. It seems contrary to human reason. The reason God's

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7 [7]Unger, p. 1303.

offer is without money and without cost is because of the pricelessness of what is offered.

II. GOD'S INTERROGATION (V.2)

In verse two God interposes two questions by asking: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" After inviting men to participate in a free offer, God questions man to cause him to examine himself and think. God's questioning is stated in such a way that man would see his error (vanity). God in actuality enforces his invitation by calling on man to "carefully consider the foolhardiness of neglecting and refusing this great invitation."[8] By spending "money for that which is not bread" man is viewed as living for non-essentials. The words "spend money" literally mean "to weigh out". "Before money was coined, the precious metals were weighed, and hence to make a payment is represented as weighing out silver"[9] (cp.Gen.23:16).

Man's efforts in weighing out his silver for that which is not really bread reveal him to be a poor steward of that which was entrusted to him. This vain activity also reveals the potential for man to be fooled (if in ignorance he thought he was buying real bread), and it reveals the potential for man to be a fool (if he knew it was not genuine bread that he was paying for). God also questions man so that man will see the reason for his own emptiness and dissatisfaction: namely - that "money" (that which man has) and "labor" (that which man does) do not bring genuine satisfaction (they cannot meet man's desperate need of salvation). Man needs that which is essential and that which would give real fullness to life.

The Lord Jesus Christ in rebuking the Laodicean church said: "Because thou sayest, I am rich,

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8 ?Unger, p. 1304.

9 ?Albert Barnes, Notes on the Old Testament, Isaiah Vol.II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 298.

and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be (truly) **rich**!" (Rev.3:17-18).

III. GOD'S INSTRUCTION (v.2b-3a)

A. Listen to Instruction that is Important (v.2b)

After questioning man as to his foolish means of attaining that which is necessary to spiritual life, the LORD suddenly exclaims "hearken diligently unto me!". Literally the Hebrew reads "hearken! Hearken!" or "listen! listen!" (a qal imperative is followed by a qal infinitive absolute to intensify the command). Therefore the command to listen is urgent. The command to listen also has a specific object as God cries out "listen to me!"

B. Listen to Instruction that is Reasonable (v.2b)

God proceeds to implore man to "eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." This eating what is good is in contrast to "that which is not bread...and that which satisfieth not". This instruction implies that there is "food", or at least what appears to be food, which is not good. For example Jesus warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Mk.16:6,11). James proclaimed: "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..."(1:17). God through Isaiah commands all men (specifically the Nation of Israel) to listen carefully and to eat what is good so that (waw directive) your soul will delight (qal imperfect)
itself in "fatness". The word "fat" in the O.T. figuratively speaking means "faring on the very best, as the poor people of Bible times rarely had meat, much less fat, which was considered a

delicacy for the wealthy"[10] The "fatness" thus describes the best of luxuriant food, in contrast to leanness and nothingness. It reveals that the "good" that God offers is abundant, more than enough, and rich! (compare the riches of a believer "in Christ"-Eph.1). The "careful listening" and "good eating" which results in a pleased and full soul is in contrast with the first half of verse two which says that foolish spending and vain labor results in dissatisfaction. Just as careful listening to an expert in the field of nutrition, when followed by eating what is healthy, produces fitness and satisfaction

with a healthy physical body; God when carefully listened to, and

obeyed produces richness and a delighted spiritual soul. Man's way is "labor and spend", while God's way is "listen and eat" (partake) of the free provision that He offers. The result of Man's effort is dissatisfaction with nothing (poverty), while the result of God's gift is delight with abundance (true wealth and richness)!

C. Listen to Instruction that is Productive (v.3)

1. Careful listening produces responsiveness. God again gives a command by saying: "Incline your ear, and **come** unto me". The word "incline"( ) means to stretch out (Ezr. 7:28), or to bend or bow down (II Ki.19:16). It pictures (for example) a humble child submissively coming to his father to hear what is being said. God is basically saying place your ear in a position that it will receive what is being said, and thus avoid distractions. (note: certainly Israel had many other conflicting voices calling her away from God's voice).

2. Careful listening results in life. Verse three builds on verse two in that just as careful

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10 ?Unger, p.1304.

listening plus "eating" (from God's provision) would produce delight (pleasure) to the soul ( ), in verse three careful listening plus "coming" (to God personally) would produce life for the soul ( ). This life is a living that is both extended in time and prosperous in quality. Throughout the O.T. the provision of life is described as an intrinsic good; "all that a man has will he give for his life" (Job 2:4), and "a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Ecc.9:4). "Long life is in wisdom's right

hand" (Prov.3:16). Just as physical life originally came from God (Gen.2:7), God continues to be the source of life (Ps.36:9; 139:13-ff), and the LORD of life and death (Num.27:16; Deut.32:39; Job 12:10). In the N.T., the Bible reveals Christ as creator of life (Col.1:16), the sustainer of life (Col.1:17), and the intrinsic source of life (Jn.14:6). "The O.T. speaks of life as the experience of life rather than as an abstract principle of vitality which may be distinguished from the body. This is because the O.T. view of the nature of man is holistic, that is, his function as body, mind, spirit is a unified whole spoken of in very concrete terms. Life is the ability to exercise all one's vital power to the fullest; death is the opposite."[11] In this context of man's foolish endeavor to spend money on that which is not really bread, it is important to note that man's life (that is a life that is abundant and genuine) is not produced by physical "bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"(Deut.8:3; Mt.4:4; Ps.119:50,93).

IV. GOD'S AFFIRMATION (v.3b-5)

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11 ?R.L.Harris, G.L.Archer Jr., B.K.Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the O.T., Vol.I (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 279.

God in the first half of verse three promised that those who truly "hear" will live. Now in the latter half, God demonstrates that those who live will **surely** live! He now gives assurance (In v.3b-5) to base his promise of life (v.2-3a) upon.

A. The Promise of the Affirmation (v.3b)

God's assurance comes in the form of a covenant. For those who obey God's command to "hear" and "come" to Him, He promises "and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David". The word translated "covenant" is the Hebrew word ( ) which refers to a pledge or binding promise. This covenant is "made" or more literally "cut" specifically by God, as He says "**I** will cut with you an everlasting covenant". It is a covenant that is: 1) participated in personally ("with you"); 2) eternal in duration ( )(cp.II Sam.23:5; Jer.32:40); 3) undeserved by man; and 4) according to lovingkindness in expression. The word translated "mercy" (KJV) comes from the Hebrew word ( ) which basically refers to a loyal, unfailing love which demonstrates itself in kindness. The ( ) that God shows to man is not basically mercy (as the LXX frequently translates) but loyalty to His covenant obligations. Nelson Glueck argued that ( ) when used in man to man relationships indicates an "ethically binding relationship of relatives, hosts, allies, friends and rulers."[12] The root form ( ) is believed to be also the root of ( ) which refers to the bird known as the "stork". The stork is so called "because of its love (piety and kindness) it showed towards its young, of which the ancients made mention. On the contrary, the Arabs call

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12 ?T.W.O.T., p.305.

the female ostrich an impious bird, on account of her neglect of her young"[13]

God describes this "lovingkindness" as being in a continuing state of "surety" or "faithfulness" by using a niphal participle. (cp.II Sam. 7:15). The word "sure" which is used to describe God's loving-

kindness is the Hebrew word ( ) which means "faithful, trustworthy, or dependable". It is used to describe that upon which all certainty rests, namely, God Himself (Deut.7:9) and His covenant (Ps. 89:28). The derivative "amen" or "verily" is carried over into the N.T., used to stress the certainty of a matter (Mt.5:18,26), and at the end of prayers & hymns of praise (Ps.41:13, 106:48; II Tim.4:18; Rev.22:20).[14]

C. The Pattern of the Affirmation (v.3c-4)

In the book of Isaiah "the prophet...draws on...three O.T. covenants - all covenants of sheer grace - those with Noah (Is. 54:9-ff), Abraham (Is.51:2), and (here) David (Is.55:3-4). For the use of these covenants confirms both the everlasting and unconditional nature of God's future relationship with His restored people, which is summed up in the prophet's transfer of the promise to David to the people themselves".[15] In verse four, God calls attention to the past (+ a perfect verb), and uses David as an example of one who did receive and will receive that which God promised (cp. II Sam.7:9-ff; Ps.89:2-4). Not only was David a

"leader" and "commander" (a fact that was obvious to the nation of Israel) but he was given by

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13 ?Samuel P. Tregelles - ed., Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 294.

14 ?T.W.O.T., p.52.

15 ?Dr.Anthony Phillips, "The Servant", The Expository Times, (September, 1979), p.371.

God to be a "witness" ( ).

A witness is "one who can testify personally to a fact or occur-

ance, in case of doubt (ex.Is.8:2), or one who gives corroborating testimony in court (ex.Deut.5:20), (and) one whose testimony is decisive in a legal case (ex.Gen.31:50)."[16] In this context David is called a witness or one who could personally testify to the fact that God's covenant is guaranteed. This covenant is absolutely trustworthy because it was provided by the Messiah, David's anti-

type (II Sam.7:16), and it was "made possible by His atoning death (Is.53:1-10), and sealed by His resurrection (Is.53:10; Acts 13:34)"[17]

The one who comes to God through Christ is guaranteed **life** because God's covenant is one that perpetually abides faithful in its lovingkindnesses.

C. The Product of the Affirmation (v.5)

The LORD in verse five goes a step further by calling attention to the future (+ an imperfect verb). "Prophecy is capable of foreshortening its predictions by leaping directly from the near to the far horizon without notice of extending intervening

events."[18] This projection is into the Millennial Kingdom and it is mentioned to provide proof that God's covenant will be fulfilled in accordance with the same faithful lovingkindnesses that were promised and shown to David. What God is about to proclaim, no

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16 ?William Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the O.T., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p.265.

17 ?Unger, p.1304.

18 ?J.Barton Payne, "The effect of Sennacherib's anticipated destruction in Isiaianic prophecy", The Westminster Theological Journal, (November,1971), p.38.

doubt, is related to Psalm 18:43-44 where David cries out: "Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known **shall serve me**. As soon as they hear of me, the shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me." This submissive "position, as thus idealized, is here (in v.5) enlarged and extended in a spiritual sense to Israel"[19] "God's gracious, life-giving, covenant-restoring action which had its beginnings in David...now is to be completed."[20] In the future (specifically - The Millennial Kingdom) Israel will call or summon (qal imperfect) a nation

( ) that she will not know (qal imperfect), and the nation which, likewise, will not know Israel, will hasten or quickly run to Israel's beckoning (cp. Is.45:14; 49:12,13,23). Even in the Great Tribulation (for example) during the time of "Jacob's

trouble" Satan (called "the Dragon") will persecute Israel ("the woman") who gave birth to Christ ("the male child"). Satan (figuratively speaking) will pour water like a river out of his mouth after the woman. However the earth (other nations) will help Israel (the woman) by opening up its mouth and drinking up the waters of persecution.(Rev.12:13-16) In the Kingdom (which is specifically the time period in view in verse 5) nations will quickly respond to Israel's call for the sake of ( ) YAHWEH, Israel's God; even out of regard for the "Holy One of Israel". The reason

Isaiah gives for this response is "because ( ) He (YAHWEH) has glorified you". In other

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19 ?J.Skinner - ed., Cambridge Bible "Isaiah" (London: The Cambridge University Press, 1910), p.144.

20 ?Walter Brueggemann, "Isaiah 55 & Deuteronomic Theology", Zeitschrift, 1968), p.193.

words, because God endowed Israel with splendor in keeping with His unalterable covenant, nations will come running to Israel's call. Zechariah stated it this way: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'in those days ten men from all nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, "let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" ' "(Zech.8:23). In the Millennium, nations will listen to, minister to, and provide for Israel for the sake of **"The Holy One of Israel because He has glorified you"** (Is.60:9). (note: same expression used as 55:5) The practical application relating to this truth is for believers of all ages! namely, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom.8:31).

THE REDEEMING GOD

I. GOD CAN BE APPROACHED (v.6)

Verse six builds on verses one to five and yet is a distinct unit of thought, as Isaiah returns from the future to the present, and moves from promises (v.3-5) to commandments (v.6-7). "The four verbs (seek, call, abandon, and turn) constitute an urgent appeal for a decision on the part of Israel (as well as everyone who will take heed), a decision to answer the invitation of verses one to five, to embrace life, to enter covenant and trust the Davidic promise."[21]

A. He Is Near (v.6a)

Isaiah begins to describe the approachableness of God by abruptly commanding man to: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found..." The command to "seek" is no option. The seeking in-volves a specific object - YAHWEH, as opposed to all other supposed help. This was especially applicable to Israel who continuously sought aid and protection from her surrounding nations. In Isaiah chapter thirty (for example) Israel independently planned without seeking the direction of God (v.1), to which planning God replied: "Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion." (Is.30:3) The seeking commanded is urgent: "...while He may be found".

The seeking that God is commanding is temporary. God uses a time indicator "while" ( ) to drive home the point that one day will be too late! Jesus Christ preached with similar urgency as evident by the words: "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest

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21 ?Brueggeman, p.193.

darkness come upon you"(Jn.12:35). The seeking everyone must do is not in vain because "...He is to be found". And the seeking is volitional, that is, Man's will is involved. God demonstrates this by using a passive verb - (niphal infinitive construct). The reason why God can be found is because He is "near", He is not remote, detached, or uninterested! James promised: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you"(4:8).

B. He Will Hear (v6b)

Verse six has two parallel constructions (2 qal imperatives + + Infinitive constructs) which reveal the "calling" to be just as important as the "seeking". This command to "**call** ye upon Him while He is near" is again not optional, involving a specific object (on Him), and is temporary ( ). This command to call upon YAHWEH is extremely urgent, because the time is limited to "while He is near". The Apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 and places emphasis on the urgency to call upon the LORD by the addition of the words "now". "For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, **now** is the accepted time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation" (ICor.6:2). This command to call is personal (no one can call on behalf of another), and the invitation is not limited (but is open

to **all**! (cp.Joel 2:32; Rom.10:9-13). God will hear because He is "near" or more literally "He has come near; He has approached" ( ). He is a God Who is accessible!

II. GOD CAN BE APPEASED (v.7)

A. He Demands Repentance (v.7a)

1. The negative aspect of repentance. God continues His line of appeal by calling on man to "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts..." He employs a qal jussive which has the force of an imperative (cp.Dt.15:3) and exhorts man to "forsake" ( ) his way. The word "forsake" means to abandon, leave or give up. First God deals with the man He calls

"wicked". The general meaning of the word "wicked" ( ) is to be impious, or ungodly as opposed to righteous ( ). The term more specifically points to a restless and unquiet state such as defined and described by God in Isaiah 57:20,21: "But the wicked

( ) are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. `There is no peace,' says my God, for the wicked." This word is descriptive of those with a violent, restless internal state that works its way out in overt sinful deeds.[22] Gesenius suggests that this word is related to ( )

which means to make a loud noise, and to be evil in the sense of rage and tumultuousness.[23]

It is interesting that God goes from the "wicked" man whose wickedness externalizes itself in his "way" (road, path, or lifestyle)

to the "unrighteous" man whose problem is an internal one ("his thoughts"). The word translated "unrighteous"(KJV) is a good

basic rendering; however, its usage, especially in relation to the word "thoughts", is more

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22 ?William Wilson, Old Testament Word Studies, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978), p.481.

23 ?Gesenius, p.781.

specific. The word "unrighteous" ( )
literally means nothingness or vanity, especially in the moral sense. This word is related to the word ( ) which is the Hebrew word for "not" or "nothing". Hence this word describes an unrighteous man who pursues that which is vain and false.[24] Isaiah uses this word in 1:13 where God cries out: "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to me..." This word is used with an emphasis on an emptiness which moves to idolatry. In Isaiah 66:3 the word became a label for idolatry; In a context
describing Israel's hypocritical, dead, ritualistic, vain worship to God, the Bible declares: "He who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol ( )." Isaiah 41:5 in a context revealing the idolatry and the absence of spiritual leadership (preachers) in Israel, cries out: "Behold, all of them are false ( ); their works are worthless, their molten images are wind and emptiness." (N.A.S.V.) In Amos 5:5 the word ( ) seems to denote non-existence. Ezekiel ties ( ) with ( ) meaning "to think"
as God says: "Son of man, these are men who devise ( ) iniquity ( ) and give evil advice in this city." (Ez.11:2)

The word "thoughts" comes from the verb ( ) which means to "think" and more specifically to "meditate, invent, purpose, or plan" or in an evil sense to "plot".[25] For example Psalm 36:4 says: "He plans ( ) wickedness ( ) upon his bed." (For more references where the word

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24 ?Wilson, p.481.

25 ?Gesenius, p.311.

"wickedness" ( ) is tied to "thoughts" and "words" see: Prov.17:4; Is.32:6; Ez.11:2; Is.59:7; Jer.4:14).

By going from "wicked" ( ) to "unrighteous emptiness or vanity" ( ) and from "way"( ) to "thoughts"( ), God places the emphasis on the internal emptiness which results in external wickedness, and on the internal plans & meditations of man's idolatrous, void-of-God heart which result in an external evil way (path in life). Just as a wicked man is characterized by his wicked lifestyle or "**way**" so a vain-unrighteous man is characterized by vain "**thoughts**". Another interesting note is that God exhorts man to leave his "ways" which are external and **undeniable**
before He gives the exhortation for man to leave his "thoughts" which man could try to **deny.**

God, by commanding man to abandon his present internal and external state, indicates that the "way" (path, road, or lifestyle) of the wicked is the wrong one, and the "thoughts" of the unrighteous (empty, vain) man are wrong. God further demonstrates this fact by contrasting man's "ways" and "thoughts" with His own in verse eight.

2. The positive aspect of repentance. God now moves from the negative "turning from" (abandonment) self (ie.his way & his
thoughts) to the positive: "turning to" God. Both aspects are
vitally essential to true repentance! (cp. the repentant Prodigal son who returned to his father when he had turned from his own way (Lk.16:11-32).

B. He Rewards Repentance (v.7b)

The reason man is told to turn from sin to God is twofold: "...and He will have mercy upon him;...for He will abundantly pardon". The appeals to repent are supported by comforting assurance.

1. YAHWEH will be merciful. The word translated "mercy" is the Hebrew word ( ) which literally means to be soft, to cherish, to sooth, to have a gentle emotion of mind. In other words to behold with tenderest affection, and to be compassionate.[26] The word is used of the love of parents toward their children: "can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb?"(Is.49:15). It is also used of the compassion of God towards men: "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate"(Ps.116:5). The word is related to ( ) which refers to the inward parts of a person and especially of the womb of a woman (cp. Job 31:15; Jer.20:17).

2. Elohim will abundantly pardon. The word ( ) means to pardon or forgive. This word is solely used of God in the Bible. Never does this word (in any of it's forms) refer to people forgiving each other. "So exciting was the openness of this offer of forgiveness that Isaiah (55:7) featured it as the heart of his invitation to salvation. So ready (willing) was their Lord to forgive, that Isaiah's listeners must forget all notions based on the reluctance of men to forgive each other"[27] God declares: "My ways are not your ways". Gesenius suggests that the primary idea of the word translated "pardon" seems to be

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26 ?Gesenius, p.765.

27 ?T.W.O.T., p.626.

that of "lightness" or "lifting up"(cp. ,).[28] This "lifting up" would picture the removal of God's hand of judgment for sin, which is said to be "stretched out" against Israel.(cp.Is.5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4; 14:26,27)

For those who refuse God's pardon, it can be evidenced that: "The **way** of the transgressor is hard"(Prov.13:15). However for those who receive God's pardon, it can be said that they are completely and sufficiently forgiven. God's pardon is not limited! "For He will abundantly pardon, or more literally "He will make great with pardon." "He will forgive much!( )" When a repentant sinner is pardoned, he is multiplied or greatly increased with God's forgiveness. In other words, When God forgives, He **totally** forgives! "Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound"(Rom.5:20). Just as 1 + 1 = 2; turning from sin & self + turning to God = God's compassion and forgiveness.

III. GOD CAN BE BELIEVED (v.8-13)

A. His Way is Distinct (v.8-9)

In verse eight God gives a reason ( ) why man needs to repent and why God can be so merciful and abundant in pardon. It is because God's thoughts and ways are not equal to man's. In this verse God contrasts His thoughts with those of the empty man, and He contrasts His ways with those of the wicked man. He declares: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." They

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28 ?Gesenius, p.588.

are diametrically opposed to each other; they are opposites. Man thinks vain "thoughts" and produces wicked actions (ways), while God thinks with compassion (mercy) and produces abundant pardon (forgiveness). In the previous immediate context, "thirsty" (needy) man thought to spend & labor to bring satisfaction in life, while the gracious (giving) God planned for man to come and eat freely! This reveals a difference between man's thinking and God's. In the present context, vain man

meditates with thoughts that lead to a wicked lifestyle, while God is compassionate in heart and offers man a life of forgiveness.

Man might think it impossible to be forgiven with such magnitude (since he himself would seldom forgive such offenses if committed against himself), yet God promises to abundantly pardon.(v.7)

The main thought of the entire passage, however, is that man's ways and thoughts are **vain** (unproductive & useless), while God's

(in contrast) are **productive & purposeful**.(v.9-11)

In verses 9 - 13 two reasons ( ) are given as to why God's

thoughts and ways are not equal to mans'. 1. God`s thoughts and ways are **higher** than man's. (v.9); 2. God's thoughts and ways (as evident by His word) are **productive** (effective).(v.10 - 13)

Verse nine says: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Just as there is a "great gulf" between the

heavens and the earth, in the same way ( ) God's ways and thoughts are **"higher"**( ) than man's. God uses the same imagery of the heavens being higher than the earth in Psalm 103:11:

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him." The reason God's thoughts & ways are higher than Man's is because "The LORD (Him-self) is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens. Who is like the LORD our God, who is enthroned on high?"(Ps.113:4,5).

B. His Word Is Effective (v.10 -13)

God in showing a distinction between His thoughts & ways and man's, explained what He meant by the word "not"( )(v.8) with the word "higher" in v.9. Now in verse 10 God goes a step further in illustrating what He means by "higher". By using the word "for" ( ), God gives in verses 10 -13 a reason why His thoughts & ways are higher than man's. Man's thoughts are vain and his ways wicked, but God's in contrast are productive and successful.

1. It is always fruitful (v.10-11). Verses 10 - 11 can be summarized as follows: Just as water (v.10) does not return to the sky (from which it fell) unless it produces a physical harvest, in the same way God's word (v.11) will not return to Himself (from which it was sent) unless it produces a spiritual harvest.

"For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto

me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

In verses 10 & 11 God is basically comparing water (rain & snow) with His word. Deuteronomy 32:1-2 specifically illustrates this comparison: "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, and the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Note the

parallel comparisons between verses 10 & 11: 1) Just as water comes down ( ) from the heavens (sky)(v.10), in like manner God's word goes out ( ) from his mouth (v.11). 2) Just as water will not return ( ) void of success (v.10), in like

manner God's word will not return( ) void of success.(v.11).

3) Just as water causes (hiphil) the earth to drink, bud, & sprout

(v.10), in like manner God's word produces what He desired as it

achieves (hiphil) success (v.11).

(The opposite is also true; just as nothing grows on earth without rain from above, nothing is produced in the heart of man without the word from God's mouth (cp.Rom.10:17). And 4) Just as water will result in a harvest of seed and bread (v.10), God's word will result in a fulfillment of His promised Millennial Kingdom (v.12-13). In verse 10 God build's His case in describing a natural law

that 1) water goes into the earth (gives it a full drink - ( )

hiphil perfect) then it 2) produces growth (causes it to bud and sprout) and 3) results in fruit (seed and bread). This illustration provides an example of a spiritual law that 1) God's word goes

into

the heart of man (an implication - see Mt.13:23 where the word goes into the heart and produces fruit) then 2) produces God's will and achieves prosperity for the purpose it was sent, and 3) results in fruition (The Promised Kingdom, v.12-13).

In verse 10, it is important to note that it is God who sends the rain for seed and bread (see: Is.30:23; II Cor.9:10), just as

it is God who sends His word (v.11).

In verse 11, God speaks of the word coming out of His mouth.

This truth supports the assertion that "all Scripture is God-

breathed"(II Tim. 3:16 -). The fact that God's word (written & spoken) comes directly from His mouth shows that "the origin of this propositional revelation is God Himself"[29]

In verse 11, God positively declares that the word that goes out of His mouth will not return to Himself empty. Just as rain never descends in vain, so God's word never goes forth from His mouth in vain. The word "vain" ( ) is used in the sense of "without success (in II Sam. 1:22, Jer. 50:9), and in the sense of "empty handed" (Gen. 31:42) or "without a gift or offering".

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29 ?Young, p.384.

God actually personifies His word as a messenger that has been sent ( ) who will not return ( ) to his master empty handed without first accomplishing His desires. (see - God's personification of His word as a messenger in Isaiah 9:8; Psalm 107:20; 147:15.) God in Isaiah 45:23 makes a binding oath with Himself in stating: "I have sworn by myself, the word had gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and will not turn back, that to me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance" (N.A.S.V.) (cp. Phil. 2:10). The word of God is "alive and powerful" (Heb.4:12), and It will never "fail" (Lk.16:17)

God's word accomplishes success, it achieves prosperity in fulfilling the purpose for which He sent it. In Isaiah 46:10-13, the unique (one & only God) is the only One who foretells the future:

"Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure...truly I have spoken, truly I will do it...My Salvation will not delay. And I will grant salvation in Zion, and My glory for Israel."

2. It is always fulfilled (v.12-13). God's word will achieve what it promised! Therefore God can be trusted and His word believed. Man's "way" is a promise but seldom a fulfillment. God's "way" is a promise with definite fulfillment.

God closes the section (v.6-10) in the same way that He ended the previous one (v.1-4). He again points to the future Kingdom to demonstrate His faithfulness. Just a God exemplified the faithfulness of His lovingkindness by calling attention to the Kingdom (when nations would run to Israel's call; v.5), He now exemplifies the faithfulness of His word by again calling attention to the
future Kingdom (when mountains will sing to Israel and trees will applaud God's redeemed; v.12). In verses 12-13 God gives a last reason why His word can be believed, that is, believed to be
productive. One day the redeemed Israel will go out in Joy (as opposed to sorrow), and will be led (passive) by the Messiah their leader (Is.52:12; Micah 2:12,13) in peace (as opposed to trouble)
(cp.Is.54:10). The mountains and hills will ecstatically burst (break or shatter -) in front of their faces with a song (cp. Is.52:9,
42:13; Lk.19:40) and all the trees will clap (applaud with joyfulness - cp. Ps.98:8) with their hand for God's redeemed. This is the exact opposite action from the present description found in Romans
8:22, which says: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain."

In God's Kingdom the curse of the fall (Gen.3:17-19) will be reversed, as evident by a transformation even of the desert. A cypress ("fir tree") will grow instead of the thornbush and a myrtle instead of a brier. "Thus the noble trees take the place of useless and offensive plants,

and (it is likely)...the verb "will come up"

( ) hints at rapid growth"[30] This transformation will serve as a name ( ) (cp. Is.63:12,14; Jer.33:9). "It will be a name...in that it will ever call to mind and exalt the Name of it's Author."[31]

This transformation will also serve as an everlasting sign ( ) or memorial (Cp.Is. 56:5) to the greatness of God. Emblems of the curse of sin will be replaced by symbols of the power and grace of God. This magnificent change (depicted by the trees) will stand as a memorial forever. "The language may have royal overtones. Human kings and conquerors erect memorials to testify of their mighty deeds. The king of kings also has a memorial, the redemption of creation. The inscriptions of human kings are often

destroyed, or their letters become blurred like the inscription at the mouth of the Dog River in Syria. No later king, however, will ever undo the deeds of Israel's king, nor will any later conqueror ever erase His words."[32]

"This sign will serve as a perpetual commemoration of the Lord's glory in consummating His plan (His thoughts & ways; v.8-9) and in keeping His word (v.10-11)."[33] It (the transformation

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30 ?Young, p.385.

31 ?Young, p.386.

32 ?Young, p.386.

33 ?Unger, p.1306.

of the trees) will be a memorial that will never be cut down or rooted out!( )

CONCLUSION

Isaiah 55 begins with the thirsty and their need for God's water and ends with the Kingdom and God's replacement of trees in desert places as a sign of His greatness. In the same way Isaiah 41:17-20 describes the fulfillment of this proclamation by promising abundant water for the thirsty (v.17-18), and pleasant trees in the desert (v.19). Then verse 20 concludes it all by stating the purpose for God's marvelous working: "That they may see and recognize, and consider and gain insight as well, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it."

Truly it can be said: God is "**the gracious, redeeming God!**"

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