

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 48:12-22, OUT OF BABYLON

Isaiah reveals once again some revelation concerning the return to Israel out of the Babylonian captivity, but there are also references to the end times restoration of the Israelites from the Babylonian world system of the end times. The earlier is treated as a type of the latter; therefore, seeing them together is not unusual in Isaiah.

God once again called Israel to listen to Him, the only true God.

Isaiah 48:12-13 ¹²“Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called [קָרָא]; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. ¹³“Surely [כִּי] My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand [עָמְדוּ] together.

This verse is quite similar to the first verse of the chapter, but the emphasis differs. In the first verse, the emphasis is on the identity of the Israelites, but in this verse, the emphasis is on the identity of God. Here, as in the first verse, the mention of both Jacob and Israel is a reminder of the long history of the nation, created by God for God's purposes.

This is not the first time in Isaiah that Israel has been instructed to listen or to hear to what God has to say to the nation; in fact, “hear” or “listen” have been frequent commands in the book. Israel's response to those commands, whether indifference or outright disobedience and rebellion are beside the point. They were told and they were supposed to hear, which implies obedience to what is heard, but that did not happen. In this paragraph, the nation is summoned to “hear” in verse 1 and to “listen” in verses 14 and 16. In this paragraph, Israel is called to hear based on the fact that God is the Creator, and He alone controls history. In the near term, He has predicted the rise of King Cyrus who will free Israel from Babylon and allow them to return to the land. He is ready and willing to bless them if they would only be faithful to obey the dictates of the Mosaic Covenant as they promised to do at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:3).

Called, קָרָא, means to be officially summoned. Exodus 19:5-6 marks the point in time where the nation was officially notified that the purpose for Gods' creation of the nation was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” That represents a covenantal relationship between the parties, and that call or summons has not changed. Through Isaiah and the other prophets, God was continually calling Israel to return to Him, but the nation refused. This verb is intensive in form, meaning God is intensely calling Israel and it is in the passive voice; God is doing the calling. His summons to Israel will only finally and completely be fulfilled once Israel recognizes and accepts Her King, calls out to Him for deliverance, and enters the Kingdom as the head nation of the world. In Isaiah 41:9, Israel was identified as God's servant nation.

“This sovereignty of the divine calling proves that Israel cannot fail of its purpose either. As *first* the Lord was not under any external compulsion to do what he did (either in the creation of the world or in the calling of Israel); as *last* he stands at the end unchallenged by any force that might have tried to oppose him, bringing to triumphant conclusion (for

the world and for Israel) what he started" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 303).

The triumphant conclusion Motyer identifies was not completely fulfilled when Cyrus delivered Israel out of the Babylonian captivity. That will only happen at the end of the Tribulation when God's mediatorial Kingdom program is inaugurated.

Calling Himself the first and the last is a reference saying the same thing as the Lord's proclamation that He is the Alpha and the Omega in the New Testament (Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13). Including this verse, God referred to Himself as the first and the last three times in Isaiah (cf. Is 41:4, 44:6), which is the only book in the Old Testament that uses this revelatory term. God is who He is; He cannot change. He is eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He is the Creator, but He is not part of creation. Nothing is His equal. No one, no entity, or no thing can do what He can do. Nothing can successfully oppose Him or thwart His purposes. This is a claim only the Creator God can make.

The personal pronoun אנכי in these two verses (translated "I" five times, "Me" once, and "My" twice) are all specifically related to the Creator. We cannot ignore the similarity to Exodus 3:14, "I am Who I am" and to other verses in Isaiah that are "I am" statements. This is a definitive statement of self-existence, hence divinity.

Surely, וְכֵן, means also, surely, indeed, how much! It is used as a marker of emphasis. It expresses great intensity of feeling in this verse relating God's ability to create *ex nihilo* with the fact that He is the first and the last. "In both poetry and prose a previous statement is built into an *a fortiori* argument [for a still stronger reason, even more certain, all the more], 'how much more' (after a positive sentence), or 'how much less' (after a negative one)" [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. "וְכֵן," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 62-63]. God is emphatically stating that as the first and the last He is the Creator of heaven and earth.

The work of the incredibly complex creation is characterized as nothing more than the work of His hands. In Psalm 8, the heavens are said to be nothing more than "the work of Your fingers" (Ps. 8:3). This is a metaphor suggesting how easy it was for the Creator God to actually create all that exists. Genesis 1 reveals that He spoke things into existence which was, to Him, nothing more than simple work that hands could perform. "As elsewhere, *earth* and *heavens* are used as polar opposites expressive of the whole: God has created the earth and the heavens and everything in between" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 275].

The specific referent to "them" ("When I call to them, they stand together") is unclear. It must refer to some aspect of the creation, earth and/or heavens. The reference to "stand together" sounds like it could be a reference to the heavenly bodies because it is presented in connection with the spreading out of the heavens. Stand, עָמַד, means to go up before, to stand in position, to stand respectfully before referring to standing in front of a superior as an offering or for evaluation. The point is that God calls them to order and they obey; He is in command of His creation. "He even summons the stars to stand in their place to demonstrate that he has the power to administer the inner workings of

every part of the universe so that they all work synchronistically together as one unit" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 327]. The purpose is to convince the Israelites that He is the all-powerful Creator God to whom they must listen and obey.

The next two verses are a reference to King Cyrus although he is not specifically named. God presented His credentials as Creator, and now He once again presents Himself as the only true God who can predict future events and see to it that they come to pass. Idols cannot do that which is an issue that God already expressed through the prophet (Is. 41:21-24, 45:21). It helps to understand the purpose of these verses when we remember that when Cyrus was first revealed to the people as their deliverer out of Babylon, there were Israelites who apparently did not like the idea of a pagan king doing God's will in rescuing them from captivity (Is. 45:9-10, 46:8, 12).

Isaiah 48:14–15 ¹⁴“Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he will carry out His good pleasure [רָצוֹן] on Babylon, And His arm *will be against* the Chaldeans. ¹⁵“I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and He will make his ways successful.

Who is this person who will carry out Yahweh's good pleasure? There cannot be much doubt that it is King Cyrus. That specific Medo-Persian king is the only man God used as His instrument to conquer Babylon and remove them from the world stage as a national entity. The Babylonian world system, which continued on, will be destroyed at the end of the Tribulation as well, but it will be accomplished by the Messiah King without human assistance. “Again Cyrus, the type in this protestation of God's love for him, prefigures the antitype, the Messiah, to whom alone it fully applies” [Merrill F. Unger, “Isaiah” in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1275].

The Israelites are summoned by God and they are to listen to what He has to say to them. The verb form is reflexive meaning they are to gather themselves to listen to Him. “Listen” is a command, but it is a command which the Israelites have a history of ignoring or rejecting. “Them” is a reference to idols. As previously discussed, idols cannot predict the future; they are worthless. “Who among them [the idols] has declared these things?” is a rhetorical question requiring the answer that none of the idols has declared what the future is going to bring in any situation and, in this specific case, what God is going to do to Babylon through King Cyrus.

“Yahweh loves him” is how the text reads, but there has been a lot of speculation about to whom this is referring, Israel or Cyrus. The link to carrying out His, Yahweh's, “good pleasure on Babylon” has to be a reference to Cyrus. The NIV translates this as “The Lord's chosen ally,” and the NET Bible “The Lord's ally,” but I can't really find support for that interpretation in the Hebrew text. Although it sounds good, if it isn't in the text, it shouldn't be translated to say it. This expression may relate to God's affection for Cyrus, if there is any, but that is hard to support in connection with a pagan king. It relates instead to God's choice of Cyrus to do His will. Earlier, God referred to Cyrus as “My shepherd” (Is. 44:28), “His [God's] anointed” (Is. 45:1), and “the man of My counsel” (Is. 46:11). The use of this concept relates to God's right to use whoever He wants to use to accomplish His purposes. In the alternative, if it applies to Israel, the meaning would be that God loves

Israel, which is an already revealed biblical truth, and by God's arm, through Cyrus, He will destroy the Chaldeans.

Pleasure, *נִחְמָה*, means delight, pleasure, desire, but in this context, it relates to affair, concern, business, or matter. The root idea is to incline toward something. In the noun form of the word, pleasure or delight do not seem to relate to the context as much as doing God's will relates to it. "Perform His purpose" (ESV), "perform His wish" (LEB), "carry out His desire" (NET Bible), "accomplish His will" (CSB), or "accomplish My purpose" (ISV) all seem to be a bit more accurate in terms of relating to the context of destroying Babylon.

God will use Cyrus as the human agent to accomplish His will, but it will be God who is the One actually accomplishing the mission. Arm is a metaphor for power. "The common instrument of strength and agency, the *arm* is often used in Scripture as the emblem of power. The 'arm' of God is only another expression for His might" [Merrill F. Unger, s.v. "arm," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 103].

Verse 15 begins with a very emphatic emphasis on God. It begins with two independent personal pronouns, "I, I" translated "I, even I," in the NASB. If you consider that the verb form translated "have spoken" has, built into the verb's grammatical structure, another personal pronoun, "I have spoken," there are three first person personal pronouns beginning this sentence. Finally, there is a another one built into the verb "brought" resulting in "I have brought ..." for a fourth personal reference to God in this verse. The first two are particularly emphatic. The use of the Hebrew word, *אֵלֶּה*, translated "indeed," is also a word denoting emphasis. We talked about this in connection with verse 13 where the word is translated "surely," and where it also could have been translated "indeed." A literal reading of the first clause in this verse would be, "I, I, I have spoken; indeed, I have called him."

"God is declaring to the disbelieving people of Israel in the strongest terms that the career of Cyrus will be wholly and only as a result of the hand of God at work in human history. It is neither accident nor the work of some idol-god. It is only because God has called him, just as he called Israel (v. 12), and just as he called the stars (v. 13), that Cyrus steps forward" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 277].

It is Yahweh who summoned King Cyrus to do His will. It is Yahweh who guided King Cyrus as he moved his nation and his army into position for doing God's will concerning Babylon. It is Yahweh who made King Cyrus successful. It took a powerful leader with a powerful army to conquer Babylon. Cyrus was able to do it only because God was ensuring His success up to that point in history. Even though Cyrus would later enshrine the account of his success on a cylinder and credit Marduk for it, it is God who established, empowered, and guided the pagan king throughout his life.

Suddenly it seems, the Servant reappears, although not called by name.

Isaiah 48:16 ¹⁶"Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first [*רֵאשִׁית*] I have not spoken in secret [*סֵתֶר*], From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit."

Again, the command is given to the Israelites to assemble and listen. God has provided information, first, to mankind in general, and then specifically to Israel. First, ראש, in this context, means the beginning referring to the beginning part, which is the first part or section of something. God has provided Israel with direction in the form of special revelation. What He has provided has not been something that cannot be understood. Instead, it has been specific and clearly meant to be understood. God has been involved in administering His creation, both the universe and Israel as a specially created nation.

Secret, סֵתֶר, means a hiding, something secret, clandestine, or hidden referring to secrecy, i.e., the condition of being hidden and concealed and so not publicly known.

God has spoken to Israel through the prophets and His revelation has not been veiled or obscure; it has been clear and understandable. The Israelites had the Mosaic Law and they knew the religious requirements it placed on the nation. They knew the blessings promised the nation for obedience and the curses promised for disobedience because they were clearly revealed to them (Lv. 26; Dt. 28). They had the prophets who God used to reveal information to them.

"In the words *in secret* there may be a reflection upon the esoteric nature of heathen soothsaying. Israelitish prophecy was not involved in dark, esoteric hidden mysteries, made known gradually only to the initiates. Rather, the Old Testament prophet appeared in the nation as a forthright speaker on behalf of the God of Israel" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:258]. In whatever manner the prophets received a message from God, it was revelation that was designed to be clearly understood.

The eternal Creator's omnipresence and His guidance in terms of history as it plays out according to His will is asserted. Everything that takes place, takes place in ways that facilitate His program. That includes His use of King Cyrus to get the Israelites released from the Babylonian captivity and back into the land of Israel.

The last sentence of this verse must be none other than the Messiah speaking. This Person is sent by the Lord Yahweh, אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, and He has the Spirit of God with Him. In Isaiah 42:1, the Servant is identified as having the Spirit upon Him. Later in Isaiah, the Servant passages are identified with One who has the Lord Yahweh empowering Him (Is. 50:4), directing Him (Is. 50:5), and helping Him (Is. 50:7). In Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon [Him]." Jesus applied Isaiah 61:1-3 to Himself in Luke 4:18-19.

This interjection is probably placed here as part of the "new things from this time" first spoken of in Isaiah 48:6. Cyrus will have completed his mission and the revelation of the Servant, eventually also revealed as the Suffering Servant, comes to the forefront in parts of the remainder of Isaiah. "... structure aids interpretation: former things (3-6b), new things (6c-7); Cyrus (14-15), the Servant (16)... The Lord is the sovereign ruler of creation (13); his rule of the flow of history is signally seen in Cyrus (14-15); but the Servant, as revealed by Isaiah, is the climax to which all history is leading... with 48:20-21 the significance of Cyrus had ended. But, for the problem raised by verse 22, the Servant is the appointed answer" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 305].

“Probably the Messiah, God’s Servant, is intended because of His association with the Spirit. Just as Cyrus would not fail in his mission, so the Messiah-Servant, sent by God with the Holy Spirit on Him, will not fail in His mission” [John A. Martin, “Isaiah” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1102-1103].

Unger ably responded to those who think this sentence represents Cyrus responding to God’s words. “But the type prefigures the antitype, the Servant of the Lord (42:1-4), who ‘did not come alone but ... his entire ministry was in the power of the Spirit, a definite Messianic concept’” [Merrill F. Unger, “Isaiah” in *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1275, quoting Young, 3:260].

Many people do not believe this is a reference to the Servant, and, if not, there are several alternatives presented by various theologians. They variously posit that it could be Isaiah, it could be God and Isaiah both, it could be Israel, it could be Cyrus, or it could be a verse that is out of place and belongs elsewhere in Scripture. However, the book of Isaiah includes some abrupt transitions from one person or situation to another, so the fact that this sentence makes a switch from one speaker to another is not unusual.

Yahweh next identifies Himself by using various titles that describe His relationship with the nation.

Isaiah 48:17 ¹⁷Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, “I am the LORD your God, who teaches [לְמַד] you to profit [יַעַל], Who leads [דֶּרֶךְ] you in the way you should go.

He is Yahweh, the self-existent Creator God of the universe who is also Israel’s Redeemer and the Holy God of Israel. “Redeemer” brings to mind the kinsman redeemer concept. All of these titles have been previously used in Isaiah. He is also the Teacher and the Leader of Israel. These titles indicate the great blessing that was Israel’s by having this type of relationship with Yahweh.

Teaches, לְמַד, means to learn, to teach, to be instructed in, or to train. Teaching implies the impartation of skills and/or knowledge to someone, in this case, to the nation. The teaching process refers to gaining information (or signals or cues) and responding properly to it with regular action, implying acceptance of, or submission to the information. The problem is that Israel was not particularly teachable.

Profit, יַעַל, means to excel or to be useful. The sense is to derive a benefit from the teaching that results in profit. It is meant to be beneficial resulting in success and betterment. The word is not a reference to money here, although we cannot discount the blessings promises for physical prosperity that would have been granted to Israel for obedience. In this context, it seems to be more about a life that is useful to God which results in a life well lived in fellowship with Him.

This clause could be translated, “I am the LORD your God, the One (intensely, continuously) teaching you in order to be useful ...”

The sense of this verse reveals that Yahweh has been intensely and continuously teaching Israel in many, varied ways to be the nation He created them to be and to fulfill the

purpose for which the nation was created, which was to “be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5). The actual history of their relationship as a nation with Yahweh was instructive. They were the recipients of signs, miracles, and wonders that formed them into a nation in Egypt, delivered the Law to them on Mount Sinai, and preserved them as a nation for centuries. They had the Torah (instruction), the Temple, and the priesthood. They were the recipients of special revelation from God through the prophets. Temporal divine discipline was also meant to be a teaching device. “This means that Israel had enough knowledge of what she was supposed to believe and do in order to fulfill the role God gave her and receive the blessings God had awaiting for her” [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 330].

Lead, *לָדַד*, means to tread, to tread down, to walk out from. It has the sense of leading or guiding in order to take or guide somewhere. It is used here as a metaphor to refer to God as He leads the righteous in straight paths. At least that is the intent of God for the nation, but the nation was reluctant to be led down the straight path. This verb is in the causative form meaning it is God who leads them in the way they should go. The problem for Israel is not the leader; the problem is the nation's refusal to be led.

The next two verses relate to what could have been for the nation, but they would not listen and obey. The feeling of disappointment from God's standpoint is quite evident in these words. It has the tone of a lament.

Isaiah 48:18–19 ¹⁸“If only you had paid attention [*קָשַׁב*] to My commandments! Then your well-being [*שְׁלוֹמֶךָ*] would have been like a river, And your righteousness [*צְדִיקָה*] like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹“Your descendants would have been like the sand, And your offspring like its grains; Their name would never be cut off [*כָּרַת*] or destroyed [*שָׁמַד*] from My presence.”

“Here is an expression of the Lord's deep sorrow over Israel who has deprived herself of countless blessings by failing to obey the LORD, and deprived herself of the peace which He had in store for them. The missed blessing is described in striking terms. Oh, if Israel had only obeyed” [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 378].

These are the same kinds of blessings for obedience to the Covenant that Yahweh promised the Israelites in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 before they ever entered the Promised Land. The reference to commandments is a reference to the Mosaic Covenant, which is a conditional covenant, and not to the Abrahamic Covenant, which is an unconditional covenant. As long as the nation is unfaithful to the conditions of the conditional covenant, Israel cannot enjoy the promises made in the unconditional covenants. Once the nation turns to God in faith, those covenant promises will be fulfilled.

Pay attention, *קָשַׁב*, in this causative verb form, means to listen attentively, to give heed, or to obey referring to heeding as a result of listening, hearing, or paying close attention to usually accompanied by a response in conformity to what was heard. In this context, it refers to the obedience that was expected of the nation after hearing the Lord's commands as presented to them in the Mosaic Law. To give close attention to something is to obey what was heard, in this case, God's Word as it was presented in His commandments.

Well-being, שְׁלוֹם, means completeness, soundness, welfare, peace, and wholeness. This word represents right relations among men, right relations between God and man, and inward peace that man can experience when the fullness of life that God intended them to have is experienced. In this verse, among the English translations, this word is variously translated peace, prosperity, and well-being (NASB) which I think is the best interpretation in this context. Well-being is what Israel could have had if they had only been obedient to the covenant stipulations. Instead, as God's curses for disobedience promised, they were beset with the difficulties that made life difficult and stressful. This state of well-being is compared to a river that never dries up and is continually flowing representing the abundant provision of the resource.

Righteousness, צְדָקָה, means righteousness, justice, blameless conduct, and integrity pertaining to being in a state of doing what is required. If Israel had been rightly related to God by means of fidelity to the covenant and faith in Him, righteousness would have been the nation's natural state of being. That state is compared to the waves of the sea which are powerful, ever-present, and rhythmically steady. The Lord promised to make Israel fruitful (Lv. 26:9) and establish them as a holy people (Dt. 28:9) if they would be an obedient, faithful nation.

One of the blessings promised the nation was numerous descendants in the line of the patriarchs, which was an amplification of the Abrahamic Covenant promise to multiply Abraham's descendants (Gen. 15:5, 17:2, 22:17).

Leviticus 26:9 ⁹“So I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you ...

Deuteronomy 28:11 ¹¹“The LORD will make you abound ... in the offspring of your body ... in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.

If they had been obedient, the nation never would have been cut off or destroyed. We know that Israel cannot be totally destroyed, because God promised over and over to preserve and restore the nation. However, Israel could be cut off from fellowship with God, and the nation could be destroyed for a time. Israel was destroyed as a nation by Assyria, although many of the people in the north had taken up residence in Judah and were therefore preserved. Judah was destroyed in 586 BC, but was restored some decades later. Israel was again destroyed in AD 70 and finished off in the first century during the Bar Kochba revolt. Now, Israel is being restored in unbelief in preparation for the Tribulation judgment, and the nation will be restored for the final time to enter into the Kingdom blessings.

Cut off, כָּרַת, means to cut off or cut down, to kill, to destroy referring to severing an object from its source, or cut into parts, which implies a violent action. “[T]here is the metaphorical meaning to root out, eliminate, remove, excommunicate or destroy by a violent act of man or nature” [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. “;” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 456-457]. The word is used figuratively here as a reference to severing fellowship between God and Israel. The verb is passive in form meaning it is God who will do the cutting off. The relationship between God and Israel can never be destroyed. Israel is the party that actually breaks fellowship by means of

disobedience, but when God removes them from His presence the act of cutting off takes place. The word also means to enter into a covenant, but that is not the context in this verse. The covenant has already been cut and ratified; the issue is fidelity, or the lack thereof, to the covenant stipulations through which the nation remained in a right relationship with God.

Destroyed, דָּמָה , means to be exterminated or destroyed, annihilated or decimated referring to being in a totally ruined state which can include the death of a person or extinction of an entity. This verb is in the passive form meaning that it is God who will destroy the nation to the extent the curses for disobedience allow according to His Word. This word usually signifies destruction that comes suddenly in warfare or in mass killing.

Dispensational Theology is the only system of theology that understands the cutting off and restoration promises God made to Israel. "[T]he kingdom is not a present reality since first-century Israel never satisfied the condition of faith in Christ. Until this future national conversion transpires during the Tribulation, the kingdom will remain in a state of postponement rather than in a state of present fulfillment" [Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom: What is the Kingdom and How is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church?* 78].

Oswalt erroneously thought it was (and is) a real possibility that Israel can be permanently destroyed. "As had happened to many other peoples, they could simply be absorbed into the faceless masses that peopled the great empires. By contrast, if they would listen, they need not fear that awful prospect" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 283]. It is true that many people groups have been absorbed into other people groups and subsequently lost to history, but God has providentially seen to it that never happens to Israel. Israel's existence after 2,000 years of the *diaspora* is nothing short of a miracle, and the miracles aren't done yet!

Young, an amillennialist, believes, also erroneously, that Israel as a national entity has been cut off from God and the true Israel is now all believers in Christ, Jew and Gentile together. He does not believe in a literal Messianic Kingdom during which the nation will realize the fulfillment of the unconditional covenant promises. There is no Rapture of the Church, there will be only the Second Coming, a general judgment of mankind—believers and unbelievers together—and then eternity begins. "The glorious theocracy, with all its wondrous prerogatives, is to go into oblivion and to be thought of no more before God; and Israel will continue a dull existence as a nation until the fullness of time comes, when the age of shadow and type shall pass away and the great King of Kings appear upon earth to gather together His people" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:262]. This of course, completely unbiblical and false; the nation will always exist.

Next, a command is issued to go forth out of Babylon and return to the land.

Isaiah 48:20–21 ²⁰Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob." ²¹They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts.

He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock and the water gushed forth.

The question is, are these verses referring to the return from the Babylonian captivity, or are they referring to the return to the land in belief at the end of the Tribulation, or both?

There is a comparison being made here with the first Exodus, but the signs, miracles, and wonders that accompanied the Israelites coming out of Egypt are not to be found in the historical/biblical records of the return from the Babylonian captivity. Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle difficulties, adversaries, and sin rather than joy. Isaiah has already identified many of the miraculous events that lead up to the Second Coming and Israel's redemption and then beyond to the regathering of the Israelites into the land in belief.

The "end of the earth" suggests something more than the limited geographical area of the Middle East which, in turn, suggests that this is a type of the complete return to the land at the end of the Tribulation. "The publication of their joyful deliverance even to the end of the earth demonstrates that mystical Babylon is meant antitypically. Then the testimony of the redeemed remnant of Israel, the nucleus of the millennial nation will be that the Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob. The wonders wrought redemptively and otherwise at the first Exodus will be repeated. In announcing the joyful news of their deliverance from the Antichrist and their foes, the returning exiles of the future speak of it in terms of a new exodus that will far eclipse the scope and wonder of the old" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1276].

"They are to go out of Babylon, and with speed and joy to leave the land of slavery and idolatry far behind.... And what Jehovah has done to them, is to be published by them over the whole earth; the redemption experienced by Israel is to become a gospel to all mankind" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:467]. This obviously did not happen when some of the Israelites returned to Israel out of the Babylonian captivity, but it will happen when the Kingdom is inaugurated.

Oswalt summarized these Scriptures, and his description is also more applicable to the inauguration of the Kingdom rather than to the return out of the Babylonian captivity. He does not see that, but it is what he describes. "What is the message to be declared? ... *The Lord*, the God who has challenged the very being of the gods of Babylon, *has redeemed*, has delivered, close family members from the clutches of the gods and restored them to health and dignity and freedom. He has redeemed *his servant Jacob*, the people who, in spite of sin and rebellion, have not been cast off, but have been delegated to be the living evidence of the incomparability of the Lord" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 284].

There are 6 commands in these verses: go, flee, declare, proclaim, send, and say. Did these things happen during the return to Israel from the captivity? I don't think they did, at least not to the extent this Scripture reveals. Not all that many Israelites actually returned to Israel from Babylon which means the vast majority of them disobeyed this command at that time. That will not happen when the King returns to inaugurate the Kingdom. Every Israelite will be taken into the land to enjoy the fulfillment of the covenant

promises (Mt. 24:31). Certainly, Israel did not proclaim anything to the ends of the earth at that time. The promises of blessing and restoration simply did not happen the way these Scriptures describe them when the Israelites returned to the land from the Babylonian captivity.

The Israelites returned to the land from the Babylonian captivity as spiritually bankrupt as they left decades earlier. It was bad enough, serious enough, faithless enough that nearly seven centuries later the nation was cut off again for nearly 2,000 years until the regathering in unbelief began. "It [wicked] writes an epitaph to the Babylonian experience. They went because of sin; they stayed without moral reform or even the recognition of need; they return as they went. They come back to Canaan, but they still need to be brought back to the Lord" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 307].

None of the Israelites were to presume that they would be saved simply based on genealogy. The return to the land is predicated on faith. Was the nation faithful when it was redeemed out of Babylon? No, but it will be when it is redeemed at the Second Coming.

Isaiah 48:22 ²²"There is no peace for the wicked," says the LORD.

"The return from Babylon and the return to Palestine for Kingdom blessing is reserved for the redeemed nation of Israel, regenerated by faith in the returning Messiah" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1276]. I do not agree with Unger that the return from Babylon was made in faith, but I do agree that will characterize the national restoration of the end times.

The Israelites who fail to obey the standards of the Mosaic Covenant and who continue to rebel against God are wicked or evil, and they will not enjoy the well-being that God has promised the nation for fidelity to the covenant. In the end, those who believe in the Messiah, the prophet God will raise up who is like Moses and to whom they should listen (Dt. 18:15), will enjoy the *shalom*, the well-being they are promised for obedience.