

Exegetical Paper Isaiah 55:1-13

OT 651: Isaiah (English Text)

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Isaiah 55:1-13

Historical Background:

The writer of the book of Isaiah was Isaiah, son of Amoz. Isaiah was called to prophesy to the leaders and people of Jerusalem and Judah in the year that king Uzziah died and served during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, (circa 740-686 BCE).¹ There is much debate among scholars as to whether Isaiah, the son of Amoz, wrote the entirety of the book of Isaiah or whether there were other writers. However, it must be of some significance that the New Testament writers, who quoted Isaiah more than any other prophet, all accepted that Isaiah was the sole writer of the book of prophesy.² Isaiah prophesied during the late part of the 8th century BCE, from 740-681 BCE,³ and the book is a compilation of the revelations that Isaiah had and they are for the most part in chronological order.⁴ The genre is primarily poetry, prophetic and eschatological. Isaiah 55 is prophetic poetry.

As Walker states most prophets address their own historical setting.⁵ However, Isaiah prophesied not only to the people of his own time, but also to the period of the Judean exile in Babylon, and the post exilic period after the return under Cyrus.⁶ The vision that Isaiah saw was so extensive that its relevance was far greater than only to the persons of his time, who in any event, ignored him and his prophesy⁷.

During the reign of Uzziah, Judah enjoyed a period of peace as the Assyrians, who were the primary power in the region, had their attention focused elsewhere and had undergone a period

¹ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 8.

² Constable, 1.

³ Constable, 9.

⁴ Constable, 16.

⁵ Larry L. Walker, *Isaiah, Jeremiah & Lamentations*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol 8 Philip W. Comfort (ed), (Carol Stream, IL, Tyndale House Publishers, 2005, Logos edition), 5.

⁶ John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

⁷ Oswalt, 38.

of decline. The accession of Tiglath-Pileser III to the Assyrian throne in 745BCE brought an end to that peace. As Assyria sought to expand her borders and authority and the region, both Judah and Israel, were under threat. Isaiah's ministry particularly addressed the impact of the Assyrians in the reigns of kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. King Ahaz chose to ignore the prophesy that the Lord sent thru Isaiah and looked to Assyria for help against attacks by Israel and Aram against Judah.-

It was during the reign of Hezekiah that Israel fell to the Assyrians and Judah was also attacked by Assyria. Hezekiah contemplated asking the help of Egypt against the Assyrians but having listened to Isaiah, Hezekiah saw the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians and the Assyrian leader, Sennacherib, was later killed at home by his sons. Hezekiah sought to impress the Babylonians when they came to visit him after illness and Isaiah prophesied the exile and what would happen to the exiles 150 years after the lifetime of Isaiah.⁸

The Babylonian exile ended with the Persian empire defeating the Babylonians (539 BCE) and Cyrus being used by the Lord, enabled the Jews to return to Jerusalem, just as Isaiah had prophesied (538 BCE).⁹

Chapters 40-48 speak to people of his time and to the exiles on their question, could God deliver the Israelites from the Babylonian exile, and would He do so? In these chapters they are encouraged to trust the Lord, He had not abandoned them and that He is willing and able to deliver them from the Babylonian exile. They are in exile not because the Lord had abandoned them but because of their sin and rebellion. But the Lord God of Israel, the Lord their God, their Creator is willing and able to deliver them, by his servant Cyrus. Just as he had done in the past when He delivered them from Egypt, He would deliver them from Babylonian exile.

⁸ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 248.

⁹ Constable, 11.

The other concern that remained for Isaiah's audience, both the Israelites that were concerned about the coming exile and the later Israelites who were in exile, was whether God could deliver them and reconcile them to himself despite their sinful state. This concern is what is addressed in chapters 49-55.¹⁰

In Chapters 49-53 the Lord makes plain how He is going to reconcile them to himself. How? Through The Servant. We encounter this messianic servant in chapter 42:1-9 but through chapters 49-53 more and more is revealed about the servant and what He is going to do and go through and it comes to a climax in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The Servant, who is the arm of the Lord,¹¹ (Is. 52:10 and 53:1) who is the Lord's chosen, His delight, who is faithful, obedient, a covenant for the people, who will bring Jacob and the world back to God as He will also be a light to the gentiles, who will be like a lamb to the slaughter and who will be their guilt offering. And there is nothing that they have to do. It is presented as done. This is the setting of chapter 55, and all that the people have to do is come and appropriate the salvation that has been offered to them. It is an invitation to accept that which has been promised.¹²

Isaiah 55 is set during the period of exile, and its purpose to encourage the Jews that the Lord God, the Almighty One is Creator of everything, the God of history, and the one true God that he, because of His love for them would be their redeemer. Having reassured them of this in earlier chapters. He speaks of them also as his servants and of the Servant that He would send to redeem not only the Jews, but also the nations who would come flocking to Jerusalem and to the Lord. Constable states that chapters 54 and 55 are invitations to come and participate in the salvation that has been provided by the Messianic Servant who has removed sin and restored

¹⁰ John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 545.

¹¹ Constable, 360.

¹² Constable, 381.

righteousness.¹³ In chapter 54 the invitation is to the restored Jerusalem and people of Israel. Chapter 55 there is an invitation to all who thirst, the people of Israel and the people of the nations, to come to the Lord and for the wicked to come seek The Lord while He may be found.¹⁴

Main Characters

There are several characters in this chapter, the faithful remnant of Israel, the faithful of the nations, the wicked and unrighteous, and the main character is the Lord.

Argument

The Lord has provided his redemption, his salvation come and accept it.

Purpose

The purpose of chapter 55 was to encourage the people of Judah and the exiles to recognise that Yahweh was able to and willing to redeem them and reconcile them to himself, despite their sinful state. Their God, the God of Israel would do this through the Servant. All they had to do was come and accept what the Servant would do for them. To encourage them to trust the Lord, wait on Him, and live in obedience to His way, Law and Word.

Key Verse

v. 6 Seek the Lord while he may be found,

call upon him while he is near.

Major Themes

The Lord is their Redeemer

¹³ Constable, 373.

¹⁴ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries vol 20 Donald J. Wiseman (ed) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 387.

The word of the Lord is sure

Come to the Lord and wait on Him

Trust the Lord

Interpretation and Exposition

Ch 55:1-13 through its poetry and use of metaphor, paints a picture of abundance, prosperity, joy, peace and restoration. Even nature, the very creation is restored, productive and full of joy. It starts with an image of good food and drink like a banquet to which all are invited and there is great celebration and praising not just by man but all of creation. It is a depiction of much blessing in contrast to what the people of Judah had experienced when they were under attack by the Assyrians and later, the Babylonians and for a long time in exile in Babylon. There is also the use of imperatives, that make the invitation very clear and unequivocal.

55:1 in the NRSV and the NASB both start with the word ‘ho’ or ‘hoy’, a term that normally is an expression of woe and a lamentation however Constable states that in this verse it is used as an attention getting device with a slight tone of pity.¹⁵ Weber, in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Twot) 485 states that the term here is used to introduce a positive invitation without money or price.¹⁶ In the NET Bible it is simply translated ‘Hey’

As one reads verse 1 one is reminded of 41:17 where the poor and needy search for water and there is none. The verse invites all those who thirst to come, in fact the verse uses the term come three times. Those who thirst must come to the waters and drink, and those without money, must

¹⁵ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 381.

¹⁶ Carl Philip Weber, “485, hoy”, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L Waltke (eds) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 212.

come and buy and eat and come and buy wine and milk. Waters, *mayim*, was theologically important and metaphorically God was the source of living water so the thirsty are being invited to come and drink from Him rather than the scarce commodity of physical water.¹⁷

Twot 1926b thirst, *same*, Israel a dry land with desert regions and hot summers so people could experience parching thirst and real distress. And the thirst mentioned here is not just the thirst for water but the thirst for God.¹⁸

Wine and milk were symbols of abundance and enjoyment.¹⁹

So, the thirsty were being invited to come and eat and drink out of abundance and they were to buy without money or price means for them its free which meant that it had already been paid for by another. The Servant has already paid the price.

Verse 2 starts with a question why spend your money for what is not bread and your labor for what doesn't satisfy, would suggest those things that are not important, that they don't have real and lasting value.²⁰

The verse continues by requiring those who should come listen carefully, *sama*,²¹ listen and obey the Lord and eat what is good and delight themselves in rich food, food with the fat.²² Listening was something that the people of Judah were told to do often for example one sees this word repeated several times in Isaiah 48:1-22 and also in us 50:4-51:8

¹⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, "1188 mayim", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 503.

¹⁸ John E. Hartley, "1926b same", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 768.

¹⁹ Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 220.

²⁰ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano TX: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 382.

²¹ Hermann J. Austel, "2412 sama", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 938.

²² Herbert Wolf, "457a desen", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 199.

In verse 3 they are told to incline their ear, and come to the Lord, and to *sama* so that they may live. Which would mean that this is not just the vain life that they had before, but life in relationship with, and obedience to the will of God. The word for you used there is the word *nepes* and the *twot* 1395a Waltke states that *nepes* means life, soul, creature, appetite or mind and suggests that in Is 55:3 it means soul.²³ Oswalt therefore states that this means that the invitation is not just in relation to bodily or physical needs, but one that speaks to the whole being of the person, to true life.²⁴ Once they listen to the Servant and come that is what they will enjoy. Life in and with the Lord which includes to everlasting life.

When they do this, the Lord says that He will make an everlasting covenant with them, his steadfast sure love for David. The Lord's *hesed* for David. The question is what does this mean? Oswalt states that this is referring to the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant which would be fulfilled in the future by what the Servant did in chapter 53, the new covenant.²⁵ It may be worth noting at this point that in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 the Servant is said to be made a covenant for the people. Wolf states that Luke quotes Isaiah 55:3 in Acts 13:34 to show that the resurrection of Christ was the fulfilment of God's promise to David, Jesus would rule forever.²⁶

In verse 4 the Lord says to them "behold" or see what He is saying. The question arises who is the 'him' that the Lord is talking about. On the face of it, it looks like the Lord draws their attention to remind them to what He had done in the past with his servant David. Constable is of the view that it is Messiah, the Servant.²⁷ Wolf says it's hard to know whether its David or Christ

²³ Bruce K. Waltke, "1395a *nepes*", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 587.

²⁴ John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 601.

²⁵ Oswalt, 602.

²⁶ Herbert M Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 221.

²⁷ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 383.

and is of the view that David being a witness to the people is reminiscent of Ps 18:43,49,50.²⁸ He states further that the term leader was used of David in 1 Samuel 13:14 and 1 Sam 25:30 and that the term was used of Messiah in Daniel 9:25 where Isaiah 55:3 is actually quoted. One also has to consider chapter 49:6-7. In those verses the Lord says of the Servant that he shall make him a light to the nations but he also says that kings will see Him and rise up and princes will see and bow down. This will be fully fulfilled in the millennium.²⁹

Verse 5 also starts with see/behold. The Lord tells them what shall happen in the future with the restoration of Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Nations shall be coming to them, like they did when David was king, because the Lord their God, the Holy One of Israel has glorified them. This is all a result of The Servant. They shall call out, qara, to nations, gentiles, they don't know and nations they don't know will come to them.

In verses 1-5 there were a set of imperatives, come to the waters, come buy and eat listen incline your ear and come, see. Now in verses 6-7 there are new imperatives; seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon Him, forsake ways and thoughts and, return to the Lord.

In verse 6-7 there is a warning. Seek, daras, the Lord while He may be found. Twot 455 explains that this means to seek with care, inquire, to know.³⁰ So, it is to diligently seek Him. Motyer states that to seek is not to look for something that is lost but to come with diligence to where the Lord may be found. It is about commitment, determination and persistence in seeking the Lord's presence.³¹ But, the verse also says to do this while he may be found which means that there is a

²⁸ Herbert M Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 221.

²⁹ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 328.

³⁰ Leonard J. Coppes, "455 daras", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 198.

³¹ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries vol 20 Donald J. Wiseman (ed) (Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2009), 389.

limited time within which to do this, the implication is that there will come a time when he cannot be found. Constable states that this could be read as while He allows himself to be found.³² Not only are they to seek him but they are to call upon, or call out, to Him while He is near. Constable states that seeking the Lord and calling out to him represent reaching out to Him in faith.³³ So, they need to respond to the invitation of the Lord while it is available. Twot 2063 states that to call upon or call out to him, qara, Him while He is near, connotes calling one to a specific task. In Isaiah 55:6,13 the covenant people are admonished to pray and God will reverse the curse. It states further that in the eschaton Gods people will be those that the Lord calls to Him, including gentiles and they will run to him as in 55:5.³⁴

But then the verses go further, and there is a change in who the invitation addresses. Previously it was addressed to those who were truly seeking the Lord, those who were thirsty for Him. Now in v 7 the invitation is addressing those who are wicked and unrighteous inviting them to forsake/leave their ways and their thoughts and return, to the Lord so that He can have mercy on them and abundantly pardon them. Constable states that ways and thoughts refer to actions and attitudes.³⁵ Motyer says that they refer to lifestyle and the mind that lies behind it.³⁶ They are called to turn away from their evil ways and thoughts and return to God and His thoughts and ways. To the ways of thinking and living in accordance with the laws of the Lord. If they will do this then the Lord will have mercy on them and forgive them. It is a call to repentance and redemption. The reasons that they should do this is given in the following verses which also speak to the transcendence of God.

³² Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 384.

³³ Constable, 385.

³⁴ Leonard J. Coppes, "2063 qara" *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 810.

³⁵ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 385.

³⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries vol 20 Donald J. Wiseman (ed) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 389.

Verses 8-11 speak completely about the transcendence of the Lord and His ways, thoughts and His word.

Verses 8-9 state His ways and thoughts are higher than those of man. Just as the heavens, samayim, are the physical heavens, but they are also the abode of God are higher than the earth, so are the thoughts and ways of the Lord higher than that of man or man's ability to understand Him. That is why they need to return to the Lord and to His ways. The Twot 2407a states that from his abode in heaven God can reach out in judgement or salvation. But as it is part of his creation, He is above it all and able to dwell with those of a contrite and humble heart.³⁷

Verses 10-11 Just as the rain and snow come down from heavens, samayim, from the abode of God, and do not return there until they have performed their purpose, that of watering the earth and causing plants and fruit to come forth just so will the word from the Lord successfully accomplish His purpose. Constable, states that snow and rain are both forms of water are sent by God from heaven and they both result in blessing as they nourish the earth.³⁸ They don't fail. Similarly, the Lord when His word goes forth will accomplish His purpose. What He says will come to pass. It will not fail. Snow was otherwise regarded as a sign of purity or as a simile for leprosy however that is not the way it's being used in this context.³⁹

Verses 12-13 the result of turning to God and will be joy and peace on the part of all who come to him and also creation will celebrate. What is clear here is the allusion to the Exodus with the redeemed being led out of their Egypt of sin, with joy and led into their promised land, Zion, with peace. All this because of the work that The Servant, The Lamb of God will do for them.

³⁷ Herman J. Austel, "2407a samayim", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L Waltke (eds) (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 936.

³⁸ Thomas L. Constable Dr., *Notes on Isaiah* (Plano Tx: Plano Bible Chapel, 2021), 386.

³⁹ John D. Barry (ed), "Snow", *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016, Logos Edition).

Peace, salom, is described as denoting wholeness, harmony, wellbeing, wealth, physical health, security, a state of satisfaction and ease. It includes relationships of friendliness and communion⁴⁰ so this peace is far wider than the 21st century idea of peace as absence of war and being safe. The Twot 2401a defines salom as peace, prosperity, health, completeness, safety and states that salom includes unimpaired relationships with others and the fulfilment in one's undertakings. It further states that this salom is the result of God's activity in covenant and the result of righteousness⁴¹

The mountains and hills burst into song. Sandy states that the imagery of mountains was used in a variety of ways in the Old Testament and in the Prophets, some of these ways could be quite contradictory for e.g., they could represent blessings or they could represent wrath. They could refer to the land of the covenant, temple mount or the city of Jerusalem. One of the ways mountains are used is in times of hope, they are personified and called on to sing.⁴² And that is why the mountains sing in 55:12 and we also see this in chapters 44:23 and 49:13. Here in this verse we find both the mountains and hills, and the trees being personified as the trees are called to clap their hands. This is a time of hope for those who will come to the Lord in repentance and take hold of the salvation that He has made available to all. Not only do the mountains and hills sing in these verses but the trees will clap their hands, the briers and thorns are replaced by cypress and myrtle. Walker states that the removal of the briers and thorns symbolises the removal of the curse that is the result of sin. And they are replaced symbols of life.⁴³ This is an image of restoration and so the briers and thorns are removed and replaced with pleasant

⁴⁰ T. S. Hadjiev, "Peace, Rest" ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 574.

⁴¹ G. Lloyd Carr, "2402a Salom" *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 931

⁴² D.B. Sandy, "Mountain Imagery" ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 555.

⁴³ Larry L. Walker, *Isaiah, Jeremiah & Lamentations*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol 8 Philip W. Comfort (ed), (Carol Stream, IL, Tyndale House Publishers, 2005, Logos edition), 243

vegetation.⁴⁴ And this restoration of creation shall be a memorial to the Lord, and an everlasting sign that won't be cut off. Twot 41a Alden, states that a sign either signifies the unusual event itself or points to that unusual event. It can point backward to a historical event or forward to such a promised event like the thornless future world.⁴⁵ So this would be a memorial to God and a sign that pointed back to God that showed what He had done, No one else but God could do this through The Servant.

It is an image of complete restoration. Even creation will praise God as the people of God leave their Egypt and enter their Eden, their Zion and creation is itself restored.

What one has here then is an invitation to the faithful, and the wicked, an invitation to all to come and participate in the salvation that the Servant of the Lord would make available by His suffering as described particularly in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This would result in salvation from sin, reconciliation with Yahweh. It would result in joy and peace, and complete restoration of Jerusalem and the Israelite nation and the gentile nations, and the very creation itself. This has been partially fulfilled with the birth and death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ but it will not be completely fulfilled until the millennium with the second coming of the Lord when we will see the restoration of Zion and the restoration of creation as figuratively described in verses 12 and 13. One cannot help but notice that apart from the imperatives that say come and come now, what they shall see in relation to the nations and the renewal of creation is future. They shall happen, but in the future, and we here can see that they have yet to happen.

Application

⁴⁴ M.G. Klingbeil, "Floral Imagery", ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 251

⁴⁵ Robert L. Alden "41a ot", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer & Bruce L. Waltke (eds) (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, Logos edition), 18

What was said of the Servant not only in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 but in the other servant songs and elsewhere in Isaiah was fulfilled by Jesus. The implication then is that He can still be found. So those who are here now can and must diligently seek Him, while He may be found, whether we are the faithful, or we are the wicked and unrighteous, that we may be saved.

Like the faithful, the thirsty were instructed in verse 1 to come, we need to come to the Lord and take the gift of salvation that is offered to us, but paid for by the blood of Jesus the Messiah. And also do as the Israelites were being encouraged to do, look to the Lord and trust the Him, even through our hardships, and to wait on Him.

We must recognise that God is the God of history whose ways and thoughts are far superior to anything we can understand and His word is sure. It will not fail. He has made provision so that we can be reconciled to Him and redeemed from our Egypt of sin and through His Servant, The Messiah, we can experience his grace, his joy and peace and look forward to the new Jerusalem and restoration of all creation. Additionally, we can, like they were told they shall do, be calling out to others about the Lord so that they too can come and to the waters and drink.

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