

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 57:13b-14, PREPARE THE WAY

Israel has been in rebellion against God and largely forgotten Him, but there is hope of restoration. God, through the prophet Isaiah, has revealed over and over again the reconciliation that He is going to bring about between Himself and His wayward nation and her people. God has consistently condemned Israel's behavior, called the nation to return to Him, and promised to inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom at which time the covenant promises made to the nation's forefathers will be fulfilled with those who are God's faithful people.

Isaiah 57:13b ¹³“... But he who takes refuge [תָּחֹתַי] in Me will inherit [יִרְשֶׁהוּ] the land And will possess [יִרְשֶׁהוּ] My holy mountain.”

There are three aspects to this promise. The Israelites must take refuge in God and when they do, they will inherit the land and possess His holy mountain.

Taking refuge in God is a figure of speech referring to believing in Him and thereby obtaining eternal life by means of the new birth. Refuge, תָּחֹתַי, means to take refuge in or to seek refuge referring to going to a place where one will find safety, rest, or comfort implying that the place of refuge is a place to be trusted to keep one safe. Psalm 17:7 relates taking refuge in God to taking refuge in the Savior.

“Refuge” does not have to refer to justification salvation; it may refer to physical salvation that people need in terms of the prospect of physical harm in various ways such as wars, famine, plagues, droughts, and so on. In this context; however, the reference is clearly to justification salvation because no Israelite is going to inherit the land and possess God's holy mountain without being a believer. The consequences of belief are only positive and they relate to the fulfillment of the covenant promises God made to and with Israel. These covenant promises are unconditional; they are dependent on God alone for fulfillment, but individual Israelites must believe in order to access them in the national, Messianic Kingdom.

The Bible frequently refers to the concept that Israel's Land Covenant (Dt. 29:1, 30:1-10) is a promise that the people will inherit the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Kingdom realization of covenant promises is a prominent theme in Isaiah.

Inherit, יִרְשֶׁהוּ, means to get or take as a possession. Inheritance, of course, also pertains to the receiving of a transfer of property from a deceased parent or a living authorized source which implies that possession is legitimate according to proper standards. In this context, God is the authorized source for awarding possession of the land to Israel.

Possess, יִרְשֶׁהוּ, means to take possession of or to be an heir referring to gaining the possessions of an inheritance that is received by ancestral agreement or by means of some other arrangement. The sense of the word is to have ownership or possession of something including future endowments by claim of right. “The word is used usually in

connection with the idea of conquering a land. This verb is a theme of Deuteronomy in particular where God's promise of covenantal relationship is directly related to Israelite possession (and thereby foreign dispossession) of the land of Israel. This theme continued throughout Israel's history and prophetic message. Possession of the land was directly connected to a person's relationship with the Lord; breaking the covenantal relationship led to dispossession. But even in exile, Israelites awaited the day when they would repossess the land" [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "יָרַשׁ," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 478].

What does it mean that the nation is going to "possess My holy mountain?" This must be a reference to the fact that God will have His Temple and His residence in Jerusalem where God the Messiah King will be sitting on His Davidic throne for the duration of the Messianic Kingdom. The holy mountain, Mount Zion in Jerusalem, will be the location for the capital of the entire planet earth which is an extraordinary privilege indeed for Israel as a nation and for the Israelites as God's people. "This will occur in the Millennium when the Messiah will be reigning, Jerusalem will have prominence in the world, and Judah and Israel will be regathered to the land in belief and will be living according to the New Covenant" [John A. Martin, "Isaiah," s.v. "Isaiah 11:6-9," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1057]. This is not a reference to the return to Jerusalem from Babylon at the end of the Babylonian captivity, nor is it a reference to the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in 1948. This is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Israel that can only happen at the end of the Tribulation when the Messiah King comes back to earth to save Israel from annihilation at the hands of antichrist and his armies.

Nor is this some sort of spiritualized promise relating to the church, which many erroneously think is the "new Israel." Oswalt, for example, applies the "ancient promises" to people in general who place their faith in God. This is an example of how not to interpret either Isaiah or the Bible. This theologian completely denies the literal truth of this Scripture. "It is never too late to abandon the worthless protection of these creations of human pride and fear. It is always possible to face reality and hurl oneself under the shelter of the Rock. Those who do so will find all the ancient promises to be true, but in a deeper sense than they ever imagined. Those who abandon the false supports they have created for themselves in their attempts to conquer the world will discover to their surprise that they have been adopted by the owner of the world and that they have become heirs to it. This is surely the meaning of Jesus' statement, 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth' (Matt. 5:5). The meek are those who have surrendered their power and their attempts to make the world serve them. The meek are those who have admitted they are not God, and who have thrown themselves beneath the protection of the one who is God. These kinds of people have a much better inheritance than those who crossed the Jordan at Jericho. They are the heirs of God's *holy mountain*, which is much more than the earthly Jerusalem. It is indeed the city of God" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 483]. This is a warning: be very careful what you read, and what you read, read very carefully with an eye on the Scriptures to ensure your reading material is accurate and according to the Word of God. That is a warning about Bible teachers as well. Be very careful about who you listen to in terms of Bible teachers and check what they are teaching you. Oswalt says some good things; I have quoted him a lot, but he is a replacement theologian, and his theology, as you can see in this quote, informs his interpretation of

the Scriptures—a fact which should be exactly the opposite. Our theology should be developed by the Scriptures; it should not be imposed on the Scriptures. This theologian's statement does a disservice to the book of Isaiah, to Word of God, and ultimately to the people of God who look to him as a reliable source of truth!

The phrase "holy mountain" is used 21 times in 21 verses in the Old Testament, including 5 times in Isaiah, which is more than in any other book. The holy mountain is God's dwelling place, and Zion is identified as the holy mountain.

Joel 3:17 ¹⁷Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, And strangers will pass through it no more.

Zechariah 8:3 ³"Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.'

Once again, the revelation is disclosed that there will be a way prepared back to the land for the Jews so that their return to inaugurate the Messianic Kingdom is facilitated. Isaiah has revealed the preparation of a road, a highway, and the levelling of mountains for the purpose of facilitating the return of the Israelites to the land of Israel for the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. Therefore, this is clearly end times revelation.

Isaiah 57:14 ¹⁴And it will be said, "Build up [מְסֻלָּה], build up, prepare [פְּנֵה] the way [דֶּרֶךְ], Remove [רִיב] every obstacle [מְכַשּׁוֹל] out of the way of My people."

Isaiah 40:3 ³A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

Isaiah 49:11 ¹¹"I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up.

Isaiah 62:10 ¹⁰Go through, go through the gates, Clear the way for the people; Build up, build up the highway, Remove the stones, lift up a standard over the peoples.

Build, מְסֻלָּה, is from the root סָלַל meaning to lift up, cast up, or build up which, in this context, is referring to building up a highway. "The theme of casting up a highway is utilized by the prophets. The figure, derived from building a road higher than the adjacent terrain, is natural. Cf. our English word *highway* which shows a similar semantic development.... Isaiah foresaw the time when all obstacles would be removed from the path of a repentant Israel, returning on the highway to Zion" [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. "סָלַל," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 626-627]. This word could be translated "build up a highway." The repetition of the words is a point of emphasis. Smith believes it is a spiritualized point of emphasis to "encourage people to action by figuratively repairing or reconstructing a new way of life" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 563, n. 149]. This Scripture is literal; spiritualizing it rips it out of context and destroys the meaning that is being expressed. The Israelites' way of life is changing for sure, but it is changing because the nation has become a nation of believers who are being brought from around the world back to Israel to enter into the Messianic Kingdom where they will enjoy the

realization of the covenant promises. They are not making themselves better through any action on their part; they believed in their Messiah and became a new creation in Him.

Other theologians also spiritualize this sentence and turn it into a metaphor applicable to mankind in total for preparing to return to God and dwell in His presence. This thinking ignores the fact that national Israel's salvation and restoration as a nation is the issue, and it instead makes mankind's sin the issue rather than Israel's national restoration. "The repeated encouragement for people to 'build up' calls for action that would metaphorically prepare the way for people to dwell in the presence of the holy and exalted God who will dwell with his people. This spiritual preparation involves the reorientation of their political, social, and theological way of life (their worldview) by removing 'obstacles, stumbling blocks' that were causing God to hide himself and his blessings from them.... Certainly the sinfulness mentioned in 56:9-12 and 57:3-13a identify some of the evil stumbling blocks that would keep people from enjoying the revival of a person's discouraged spirit and a sense of God's presence" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 563]. This thinking is simply not consistent with the context.

Prepare, פָּנֶה, means to prepare, to make ready referring to taking actions of any kind to make an event or a state possible. In this context, the preparation is for the return of the Israelites to the land in a state of belief for the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. This verb is an intensive command. The sense of the word is to prepare by making ready, suitable, or equipped in advance for a particular purpose or for some use, event, or other purpose.

Way, דֶּרֶךְ, means a way, a road, a route, or a highway referring to a thoroughfare to physically get from one place to another. Context determines the size of this right-of-way which may range from a narrow path to a major thoroughfare. The sense is that of the path that is traveled; an open way that is used for travel and transportation. In this situation, the road must be a substantial thoroughfare to facilitate not only the return of the Jews to the land, but to ensure speed and safety in so doing.

These three verbs are all commands. A literal translation of this verse could read: "You build up the highway! You build up the highway! You make ready [the] road!" "Build up, build up a highway! Clear a road!" [TANAKH].

Emphasizing the point, the prophet issues God's command to remove any obstacles that hinder the return of the people to the land.

Remove, רוּם, means, in this context, to remove something which abolishes it. To take away by removing an object and take it to another place. It may refer to removing something concrete by lifting, pushing, or taking off, and it may refer to removing something abstract. This is a command and it is causative. "You cause to remove ..."

Obstacle, מְכַשּׁוֹל, means a stumbling block, an obstacle which, in this context, may be literal or figurative. It could be a reference to an object which can be tripped over of any shape or size, in a figurative sense, a cause for failure of an event which is represented by an object which a person could trip over.

It is also significant to understand that this is personal to Yahweh; He refers to "My people," but this is not about some general movement of all believing people, Jew and Gentile, around the globe at the end of the Tribulation; it is about the Israelites. It is about a literal people group, the Israelites, being gathered together to enter into a specific land, Israel, by means of specific highways that have been built to facilitate the return. It is not about the church; it is about the believing remnant of Jews, who are believers, but who not part of the church at this point because the church age was completed at the Rapture and the church is forever complete at that time. Tribulation saints are obviously believers, but they are not part of the body and bride of Christ which was completed at the Rapture.

Replacement theologians and those who are not dispensationalists simply cannot understand what is taking place here. For example: "What is to be done? That is what this final section is about. The people are helpless, so God must act. The centrality of God's action is seen in the recurrence of the 1st person pronouns referring to God. God promises to revive, lead, heal, and encourage his people, doing in them what they cannot do in themselves. He is not talking here about saving them, restoring them to himself. Rather, he is talking about enabling them to be the righteous people he has called them to be" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 485-486]. At this point, the believing remnant has been identified. Restoration and the fulfillment of the covenant promises is exactly the point here. The following verses are background to explaining how this has come about.

The words used here are used in both literal, which presumes there will be a literal road, and in a figurative manner in order to encompass whatever method or methods are used by the Israelites to get back to the land at the end of the Tribulation, and to describe whatever obstacles there are along the way, literal or figurative, that need to be removed because they could otherwise hinder the return of the Israelites to the land. Whether the road is literal or only figurative, the literal meaning is clear. The way will be made by God and His angels to return the believing remnant of Israelites back to Israel. The question is, will the people be supernaturally returned to the land by God and His angels, or will God's servants, the angels, lead the people back in various ways necessitating a literal road on which to lead them? We do not know the answer to that, but that answer will reveal whether or not the road is literal or figurative or both. I believe the text reveals that a road will be somehow constructed, probably supernaturally, and that road will facilitate the return of the Israelites to the land.

There are a number of other prophecies that tell us this regathering of the nation is going to take place. Isaiah 57:14 is a prophecy of the second and final worldwide regathering of Israel back into the land, and Isaiah specifically predicted that event earlier in his book.

Isaiah 11:11 ¹¹Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the second time with His hand The remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea.

The text does not identify who is being commanded to build up the highway, prepare the road, and remove the obstacles that hinder the return. The world is going to be a mess during the time in question which is taking place at the end of the Tribulation. When

the Lord returns and rescues them, the Israelites will need to be placed in the land right away to begin enjoying the covenant blessings of the Messianic Kingdom. It seems unlikely that human beings, with nearly everything on earth in ruins, could clear a highway in a short time. Then who? Perhaps both Moses and the Lord gave us a hint of that in the Olivet Discourse.

Deuteronomy 30:1–5 ¹“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, ²and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴“If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. ⁵“The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

Matthew 24:31 ³¹“And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

“Verse 31 describes the national regathering of Israel’s elect following the second advent. This saved remnant (the unsaved will have been purged during the Tribulation) will form the nucleus of the millennial kingdom. They constitute ‘all Israel’ that will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Their regathering to Palestine will be effected by angelic administration” [Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Commentary on the Gospels*, 169]. “... from the four winds” and “from one end of the sky to the other” are referring to the extent of the regathering which will encompass the entire world. “The two phrases are synonymous parallelism, meaning ‘the whole earth’” [Mark L. Strauss, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark*, 592].

These Scriptures suggest that there will be some sort of supernatural intervention by the Lord and by the angelic realm into the affairs of the Israelites at the end of the Tribulation in order to facilitate the return of the Israelites back to the land of Israel. The Matthew text says nothing beyond the fact that angels will gather the Israelites together and get them into the land, and the Deuteronomy text says nothing beyond the fact that God will regather them. We have two entities, both of whom operate in the supernatural realm, who are identified as the responsible parties for seeing to it that Israel will be gathered back and settled into the land.

The way that Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27 read, once the Messiah King returns and vanquishes His enemies (Rev. 19:19-21), all the other believers who are going to enter the Messianic Kingdom will only then be resurrected. This includes Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:2) and Tribulation saints, which must include Jew and Gentile Tribulation martyrs (Rev. 20:4). Some theologians believe that Gentile Tribulation saints will be gathered to the Lord at that time, but they will not be living in the land; therefore, they have no need to be taken into the land of Israel. Instead, they will be spread around the earth to settle it and repopulate it [cf. Thomas L. Constable, “Mark” in *Thomas Constable’s Notes on the Bible, Volume VI*, 6:386]. The point is, I am not so sure the Gentile Tribulation saints have need to

be gathered in the same way the Israelites must be because they will all participate in the land inheritance that is specific to the boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant.

There is no need to see the Church in either Matthew 24:31 or Mark 13:27 because the Church, the Bride of Christ, will return with the Messiah King (Rev. 19:14) and, having already been in His presence for over 7 years, Church saints have no need of being gathered to Him. The Church is found wherever He is (John 14:1-3) and that will be the situation from the Rapture on.

Some theologians believe these two Scriptures are referring only to Israel, and that is a strong possibility. We have already noted that the Olivet Discourse and the prophet Isaiah are only about Israel. Unger and Toussaint represent this group. If we think about it, do angels really need to gather those who are being resurrected? It seems likely that when God resurrects the Old Testament and Tribulation saints, that they will be placed right where they need to be without any need for some sort of gathering together. God will sort that out. That is a supposition; the text does not say anything about their resurrection other than the fact that it occurs. What we do know is that the angels gather the believing Israelite remnant after the Lord conquers antichrist and His armies (Rev. 20:1-2) and after Satan is locked up for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:20-21) and then, after He accomplishes His mission, He resurrects the other believers so that they may enter into life. Some of this is not fully explained in terms of time and methods; we only know that these things will take place, but we do not necessarily know the timeline and the way it will be done.

Another prophecy that this event is fulfilling is the fact that at the return of the King Messiah, Israel will be considered as being established in a day.

Isaiah 66:8 ⁸“Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons.

Many people believe that this is a prophecy about the state of Israel's birth as a nation on 14 May 1948, but the context of Isaiah 66:8 precludes that thought. Israel as the nation is presently constituted was not born suddenly in what could be called a “day.” The Zionist movement started in the late 19th century and took decades to bear fruit in the form of national Israel as we know the nation today. “Of course, the remarkable thing will be the ‘birth of a nation’ as Israel takes center stage on the international scene. The return of the Jews to their land will be as swift as the birth of a baby. Israel's ‘travail’ will be ‘the Day of the Lord’ or ‘the time of Jacob's trouble when God will purify His people and prepare them for the coming of their messiah. Political Israel was born on May 14, 1948, but ‘the new Israel’ will be ‘born in a day’ when they believe on Jesus Christ” [Warren W. Wiersbe, “Isaiah” in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Prophets* 71].

“It is going to be this way because in one day, the nation as a nation will be saved.... Suddenly the nation is reborn, all Jews are saved in one day, and the rebirth of Israel happens with tremendous speed. That this applies to the whole nation is made obvious by the term ‘Zion.’ No sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her child” [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: The Book of Isaiah*, 694].

“Such a reverse order of things seems incredible. Nevertheless, Israel would come (back) into existence quickly and painlessly. This would be a supernatural work of God. It will happen at Messiah’s second advent. He will recreate Israel as a nation after Antichrist and the combined Gentile nations of the world have sought to destroy her” [Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah” in *Thomas Constable’s Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:189].

The nation will be saved in a day when the Lord returns and the Jews still alive at that time will believe in Him and be saved. Exactly how long it will take to regather them back into the land is not revealed, but terminology used in the text suggests that it will happen in a very short period of time. Another clue that this will take place in a short period of time, is the fact that the unbelieving Jews will also be removed to the lake of fire in a short period of time.

Matthew 13:41–42 ⁴¹“The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴²and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It should be obvious that there will be a tremendous amount of supernatural activity involving both the saved and the unsaved at the point in time when the Messiah King returns to save all Israel.

Some people want to understand the use of the term “elect” as a reference to all believers, but this is only about the Israelites. For example: “‘His elect’ in Matthew 24:31 refers to people on earth, Jews and Gentiles, who have trusted Christ and been saved” [Warren W. Wiersbe, “Matthew” in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, vol. 1, 1:89]. “... [E]very follower will be gathered from everywhere and will be caught up to be with the conquering King.... There is no need, a some have done, to separate believing Jews from Gentile Christians. Both are united to constitute the church” [Grant R. Osborne, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, 895, 895 n. 6].

“The purpose of the coming of the Son of Man is given in this verse. He will send his angels to gather his ‘elect,’ those who believe in him, from throughout the world.... The extent of this gathering is described by two phrases: ‘from the four winds’ and ‘from the end of the earth to the end of heaven.’ The dual description emphasizes that no believer anywhere will be forgotten and miss out on this great event. All will be gathered and share in the great messianic banquet” [Robert H. Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark*, 615]. This is untrue; the elect is a reference to the believing remnant of Israelites.

“Here God’s elect are Jesus’ followers, those who have remained faithful to the Son of Man. All the emphasis is on their vindication and deliverance. No detailed eschatological schema is set forth with reference to events often associated with the end, such as the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the wicked, and the consummation of kingdom. This is likely because the discourse has focused primarily on the disciples and their coming trials and vindication” [Mark L. Strauss, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark*, 592-593]. This is also untrue for the same reasons.

“Those who relate these verses to the destruction of Jerusalem rather than to the end of the age identify the gathering of the elect with the missionary expansion of the gospel in the first century. The ‘angels’ then would be either human ‘messengers’ of the gospel or angels viewed as supporting missionaries in the task of world evangelism” [Mark L. Strauss, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark*, 593]. This is also untrue for the same reasons.

In Isaiah 57:14, the prophet is obviously only dealing with the return of the Israelites into Israel, and the Words of the Lord in the Olivet Discourse were likewise dealing only with Israel; therefore, the idea that Gentiles and/or the church are part of this prophecy is disproved.

Why do so many theologians have such a difficult time understanding the fact that the believing Israelite remnant is going to be taken into the land at the end of the Tribulation? Part of this problem is replacement theology which denies the existence of a literal Kingdom Israel and replaces the nation with the church. This is a problem that is facilitated by the refusal to keep Israel and the church distinct. Part of the problem are the various systems of Eschatology that fail to understand the absence of the church during the Tribulation, if they even believe in a seven-year Tribulation period at all. Part of the problem is that people misunderstand the nature, timing, literal existence, and purposes of God's mediatorial Kingdom for the governance and history of the world. Part of the problem is the misunderstanding of the definition of what it means to be among the elect. There are other issues as well, but the most important issue is the abandonment of literal hermeneutics that are replaced by theologically influenced hermeneutics which keeps theologians from properly understanding God's dispensationally differing methods of conducting His business throughout the ages.