

THE REIGN OF CHRIST: AN EXEGESIS OF ISAIAH 2:1-4

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Introduction

Encouragement – we all need it. We need to be encouraged in our Christian walk, and in our Christian witness. The prophet Isaiah gave some encouraging words to the nation of Israel in Is 2:1-4. God was punishing Israel for their disobedience, but, in the midst of this punishment, Isaiah spoke words of encouragement to Israel. Isaiah prophesied of a time of great blessing for Israel and the world. A close look at this prophecy will encourage us all. May this study be a challenge to walk in the light of the Lord (Is 2:5b).

Text of Isaiah 2:1-4

We begin our study by providing a translation of the passage directly from the original Hebrew text. Most of the passage is written as poetry, and this is reflected in the appearance of the translation.

Translation of Isaiah 2:1-4

^[1]The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

^[2]And it will happen in the last days,
the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established
higher than the mountains,
and it will be lifted up above the hills,
and all nations will flow to it, ^[3]and many peoples will come.

And they will say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us His ways
that we may walk in His paths.”
Because from Zion instruction will go forth,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
[4] And He will judge between the nations,
and He will decide for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning knives.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
and they will no longer learn war.

Relation to Micah 4:1-3

Except for minor differences, Is 2:2-4 is identical to Mic 4:1-3.¹ Since Isaiah and Micah ministered together from approximately 750 BC to 680 BC in Jerusalem and Judah, the question of original authorship arises.² Did Isaiah quote Micah?

There is evidence that Micah was the original author. First, Micah’s use of “strong” and “afar off” (Mic 4:3) do not seem like additions, but, rather, omissions by Isaiah.³ Second, Mic 4:1-3 fits well with 3:9-12, while Is 2:1-4 does not flow well from its preceding context.⁴ Third, Micah’s text is regarded as superior, based on the scope of the few textual differences in both passages.⁵

There is equal evidence that Isaiah was the original author. First, the phrase “for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” is found only in the book of

¹ The main differences in are in their use of the words “nations” (גוֹיִם) and “peoples” (עַמִּים), and Micah’s addition of the words “strong” (עָזָז), and “afar off” (רָחוֹק) in 4:3.

² Isaiah’s ministry can be dated from Is 1:1. Micah’s ministry can be dated from Mic 1:1.

³ J. P. Lange, *Isaiah: Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1877, p. 4.

⁴ B. K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Tyndale OT Commentary, D. J. Wiseman, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1988, p. 171.

⁵ Ibid.

Isaiah (1:20; 40:5; 58:14) except for its use in Mic 4:4.⁶ Second, Micah may have amplified Isaiah's original text by adding v. 4.⁷ Third, Moyter argues Micah's opening is ordinary, when compared to Isaiah's typically stylish opening.⁸ Fourth, Micah's variations suggest that he freely quoted Isaiah. For example, Micah adds "and" (ו) before the phrase "to the house of the God of Jacob" in 4:2.⁹

Since the evidence shows either prophet could have been the original author, Feinberg aptly concludes, "it is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which insures us that we have the mind of God in both cases".¹⁰

Context of Isaiah 2:1-4

To understand the passages, it is necessary to understand the context of it. This includes the context within the book of Isaiah, the immediate context, and the historical context.

Context within the Book of Isaiah

The theme of Isaiah is salvation.¹¹ Even Isaiah's name, a compound word meaning "Yaweh's salvation", suggests this theme.¹² Isaiah can be divided into two halves: chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66. The first half of the book focuses on God's retribution of Judah, while the second half displays God's restoration of Judah.¹³ Chapter 1 serves as an overview of the book of Isaiah. It begins with the condemnation of Judah (vv. 1-23) and ends

⁶ G. W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary F. Gaebelein, ed., 12 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, vol 6, p. 34.

⁷ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1971, vol 1, p. 75.

⁸ J. Alec Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Analysed Bible, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 53. Moyter proposes that *בֵּית־יְהוָה נְכוֹן* is less stylish than the typically Isaianic *יְהוָה נְכוֹן בֵּית־הָרַב*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ C. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1990, pp. 167-168.

¹¹ G. L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1994, p. 363.

¹² F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah: Commentary on the Old Testament*, C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, eds, reprint edn, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1996, p. 45.

¹³ J. A. Martin, *Isaiah*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, J. F. Walvoord, and R. B. Zuck, eds, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1994, p. 1032.

with the promise of restoration for Judah (vv. 24-31). The structure of chapter 1 shows the themes of the two halves of the book.

Immediate Context

Following the first chapter's overview of the book, Is 2:1-4 and 4:1-6 serve as bookends for the first section of chapters 1-39. Both refer to the glorious future of Jerusalem while bracketing a warning of judgment.¹⁴ In chapter 2, after prophesying of Jerusalem's glorious future in vv. 1-4, Isaiah challenges Israel to obey God in v. 5. Then, in the remainder of chapter 2, and through chapter 3, Isaiah prophesies of judgment. Thus, in the first few chapters of Isaiah, the contrasting pictures of punishment for sin, and promised restoration, are interwoven.

Historical Context

Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701 BC may be the historical event leading up to Isaiah's writing. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was moving towards Jerusalem, when the Angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13-19:35). Sennacherib then departed and returned to Ninevah (2 Kings 19:36). Isaiah refers to this invasion of Judah, and God's protection of Jerusalem, in 1:8-9. If Isaiah wrote 2:1-4 during this time, his prophecy of Jerusalem's glorious future would have painted a picture of contrast and hope to the Jerusalem of his day.

Exegesis of Isaiah 2:1-4

Is 2:1-4 paints a picture of the glorious future of Jerusalem, during Christ's millennial reign, in three broad strokes. One stroke sketches the time of His future reign (vv. 1-2a). A second stroke draws the location (vv. 2b-3a). The third stroke colours the picture with the benefits of His reign (vv. 3b-4).

The Time of Christ's Reign (2:1-2a)

Is 2:1 serves as an introductory header to the rest of the passage.¹⁵ In this verse, Isaiah supernaturally "saw" (הִתְהַוָּה) the "word" (דְּבַר). It was a

¹⁴ Leupold, *Isaiah*, vol 1, p. 73.

¹⁵ Verse 1 is written in prose, while vv. 2-4 are written as a poetic structure.

prophetic word “concerning Judah and Jerusalem”. Isaiah begins v. 2 abruptly with the word **וְהָיָה** (“and it will happen”). This abruptness gives the word a future force.¹⁶ Also, the relationship of the word with v. 1 causes it to signify a future time.¹⁷

The prophetic events that Isaiah saw will happen “in the last days” (**בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים**). This phrase occurs 16 times in the OT. These occurrences can be divided into two groups. The first group focuses on a future time of peace and prosperity.¹⁸ Is 2:2 and Mic 4:1 fall into this category. The second group focuses on a future time of judgment and war.¹⁹ In the LXX, the phrase “in the last days” is translated as **ἐν ταῖς ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις**. The Greek phrase **ἐσχαταὶς ἡμέραις** (“last days”) occurs three times in the NT (Acts 2:17, 2 Tim 3:1, and Jas 5:3).

Acts 2:17 speaks of the pouring out of God’s Spirit in blessing in a future time. Therefore, the “last days” was prophesied in the OT, and is future still in the NT. The phrase points to the future, but is not definitive enough to place it in a specific time. Other prophetic scripture, such as Revelation, is needed to better understand how the “last days” fits chronologically into the end times.

Rev 20:1-6 gives the time frame of Christ’s future reign in the millennium, a time of peace and prosperity. The millennium follows the tribulation (Rev 6-19), and precedes the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21-22). Many passages in Isaiah, including 2:1-4, fill in the details of the millennial kingdom (9:6-7, 11:1-10, 40:1-11, 61:4-11, 62:1-12, 65:17-25). Thus, the phrase “in the last days,” in the context of Is 2:1-4, refers to the time of Christ’s future millennial reign.

¹⁶ E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, vol 1, p. 96.

¹⁷ B. K. Waltke, and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990, p. 539. Waltke classifies all of verse 1 as a temporal adverbial construction. When this construction is followed by a **וְהָיָה** it signifies a future time.

¹⁸ Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Ezek 38:8; and Hos 3:5.

¹⁹ Deut 4:30; 31:29; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 8:19; and 10:14.

The Location of Christ's Reign (2:2b-3a)

In the last days “the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established” (v. 2b). The phrase “will be established” (יְהִי־נִכּוֹן) prophesies of a specific event that will happen in the future. Young argues that it should not be translated as a future passive. His purpose is to show that it is an event already in progress at the time (e.g., the church). His argument is syntactical, and rests on using יְהִי־יָ (‘‘will be’’) with the passive participle נִכּוֹן (‘‘established’’).²⁰ But Sailhamer, arguing against Young, shows the use of ‘‘will be established’’ in 1 Chr 17:14 has to mean a future event, and, therefore, should be interpreted the same in Is 2:2.²¹

The specific action is the establishment of ‘‘the mountain of the house of the Lord.’’ The term בַּיַּת־יְהוָה (‘‘house of the Lord’’) occurs 175 times in scripture and refers to the tabernacle or temple of God in virtually every use. Thus, Isaiah has in mind a literal temple. Ezek 40-43 describes the millennial temple. Ezek 43:12 specifically describes its location as on top of a mountain. Also, Is 2:3 refers to many people saying ‘‘let us go up’’.

Many people will specifically go up ‘‘to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob’’ (v. 3). Since the prophecy relates to Jerusalem, Isaiah is prophesying the temple will be built in Jerusalem, on top of a mountain.²² In fact, the prominence of the temple mount in Jerusalem is a theme that runs throughout the book of Isaiah.²³ The temple mountain will be ‘‘higher than the mountains’’ (בְּרֵאשׁ הַהָרִים). Translators have

²⁰ Young, *Isaiah*, vol 1, p. 100.

²¹ J. H. Sailhamer, ‘‘Evidence from Isaiah 2’’, in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, D. K. Campbell, and J. L. Townsend, eds, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1992, p. 87.

²² In BHS (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 2nd edn, Karl Elliger, and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds, Stuttgart Ger: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), the Masoretes noted that the phrase אֶל־הָרַיִם (‘‘the mountain’’) occurs 16 times in the OT. In 15 of the uses it refers to Mount Carmel. It is significant that Mount Carmel is an actual mountain. Thus, because the same phrase is used here in Isaiah, it may offer evidence that a real mountain is in view. BHS, p. 677.

²³ Martin, ‘‘Isaiah’’, p. 1036. See Is 11:9; 25:6-7; 27:13; 30:29; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20.

interpreted the word **כְּרֹאשׁ** in this verse in at least two ways: “chief” and “on top,” with each translation offering a different emphasis.²⁴ Also, Martin believes that “mountains” (**הַהָרִים**) could represent “kingdoms”, since it is used that way in Dan 2:35.²⁵ The context largely determines how the two words should be translated. Sailhamer correctly argues that Isaiah’s use of the Niphal form of the word **נִכּוֹן** (“will be established”) shows the new creation of mountains. He supports this by showing that it is used throughout the Psalms and wisdom literature, especially in contexts dealing with creation themes.²⁶ The word **נִשָּׂא** (“will be lifted up”) is used elsewhere in Isaiah (2:14, 30:25, 57:7) to describe high mountains and hills. The word **הַגְּבָעוֹת** (“hills”) is often used in parallel structure as a synonym for “mountains” in Hebrew poetry.²⁷ In the parallel structure in Is 2:2b, there is a correlation between “higher” and “lifted up”, and “mountains” and “hills”:

“the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established
higher than the *mountains* and it will be *lifted up* above the *hills*”

The phrase “and it will be lifted above the hills” is a poetic restatement of “higher than the mountains”. The word “hills” (**הַגְּבָעוֹת**) is never used in Isaiah to represent “kingdoms”.²⁸ In addition, the phrase “the mountain of the house of the Lord” refers to the temple mountain. The word “mountains” (**הַהָרִים**) should be translated consistently throughout the passage as a literal mountain (whether singular or plural). Based on this

²⁴ NIV and NASB use “chief”, which emphasises the importance of the mountain. KJV and NKJV use “on top”, which emphasises the height of the mountain.

²⁵ Martin, “Isaiah”, p. 1037.

²⁶ Sailhamer, “Evidence from Isaiah 2”, p. 88.

²⁷ BDB (F. Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Lafayette LA: Associated Publishers & Authors, 1981), p. 149. Examples include Is 2:14, 30:17, 30:25, 31:4, 40:4, 40:12, 41:15, 42:15, 54:10, 55:12, and 65:7.

²⁸ The word “hill” is used 14 times in Isaiah, and in each use an elevated geography is meant. In fact, Is 31:4 seems to refer to the temple mountain as a “hill”.

evidence, the best translation and interpretation for the phrase is a literal “higher than the mountains”.²⁹

Not only will the mountain be the highest; it will also be the focal point of mankind. The phrase “and all the nations will flow to it” provides vivid imagery of its importance. In contrast to physical waters flowing from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8) all nations will flow to Jerusalem.³⁰ It is significant that Isaiah uses the phrase “all nations” because it emphasises that both Jews and Gentiles will come to Jerusalem. Jews, as one of the world’s nations, will occupy the land promised to them in the Palestinian Covenant (Deut 30:1-10, Num 34:1-12). Gentiles will occupy the remainder of the world’s nations.

Girdlestone suggests that “nations” specifically refer to Gentiles, while “peoples” refers to Jews.³¹ But the phrase “and all nations will flow to it” is in a poetical, parallel structure to the phrase “and many people will come”.³² There is a correlation between “nations” and “peoples”, and another correlation between “flow” and “come”.³³

and all *nations* will *flow* to it,
and many *peoples* will *come*.

²⁹ Other scriptures show that the temple mount will be higher physically than all other mountains on earth. The last-bowl judgment during the tribulation will flatten the geography of the earth (Rev 16:20). When Christ returns, Jerusalem will rise (Zec 14:10).

³⁰ Sailhamer, “Evidence from Isaiah 2”, p. 90.

³¹ R. B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1956, p. 256.

³² The word וַאֲמַרְו stands out in this structure. In BDB, it is actually at the end of the line, but it is not included in the parallelism of the line here. Therefore, it may be used simply to usher the reader on. The line does have continuity, though, because the tense of each of the three verbs is waw consecutive perfect: וַיִּקְהַרְו and וַיִּהְיוּ כּוֹ and וַאֲמַרְו.

³³ Isaiah uses the word עַמִּים “peoples” (15 times) and גּוֹיִם “nations” (18 times), in a variety of ways. For example, עַמִּים refers to “you from far countries” (8:9), while גּוֹיִם refers to the “whole earth” (14:26). Thus, the context of Isa 2:1-4 should be a determining factor in the interpretation of each word.

In this parallel structure, “nations” and “peoples” are considered synonyms.³⁴ In addition, Mic 4:1b-2a interchanges the words.

And *peoples* will flow to it,
and many *nations* will come.

This shows that the words have equivalent meanings.³⁵ Thus, the world’s population will come to Jerusalem.

The Benefits of Christ’s Reign (2:3b-4)

As the nations stream towards Jerusalem, they will encourage one another to go to the temple by saying:

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us His ways
that we may walk in His paths.³⁶

The Hebrew construction of the phrase “Come, let us go up” (לָכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה) expresses purpose.³⁷ The nations have a purpose for going to Jerusalem; they want to learn from Christ Himself. But they won’t simply learn and forget. The syntactical relationship between יְרַנֵּנוּ (“He will teach us”) and וְנִלְכֶּה (“that we may walk”) is one of result.³⁸ What they learn will result in action.

³⁴ R. Chisholm Jr, *From Exegesis to Exposition*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1998, p. 142. Chisholm calls this reiterative poetic parallelism; the second line simply reiterates the first, using synonymous terms.

³⁵ BDB, p. 156. BDB states that לָכוּ is sometimes parallel with צֵם, and gives the example of Is 2:2, 4 when compared with Mic 4:1,3.

³⁶ BHS has an athnak under בְּאַרְחֵי יְהוָה (“in his paths”). This suggests the peoples’ statement is finished. BHS, p. 678.

³⁷ J. Gibson, *Davidson’s Introductory Hebrew Grammar and Syntax*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1994, p. 106. The imperative לָכוּ, plus the cohortative וְנַעֲלֶה (with simple waw) expresses purpose.

³⁸ Chisholm, *Exegesis*, p. 110. The jussive יְרַנֵּנוּ, plus the cohortative וְנִלְכֶּה indicates result.

The teaching will bear results, because it is from Christ Himself. The preposition כִּי (“because”) relates the teaching to its source.³⁹ It also introduces a chiasm (A, A’, B’, B structure) that characterises the source.

A Because from Zion
A’ instruction will go forth,
B’ and the word of the Lord
B from Jerusalem

This chiasitic structure equates “Zion” with “Jerusalem”, and emphasises it as the location of the teaching. The chiasm also equates “instruction” and the “word of the Lord”, and emphasises it as the source of the teaching.⁴⁰ What will this “instruction” contain? Isaiah’s use of the word (תּוֹרָה) in Is 51:4 relates it to justice.⁴¹ This same relationship is found here in 2:3-4. Verse 4 begins with the verb וְיִשְׁפֹּט (“and He will judge”). The grammatical structure of this word shows that “He will judge” is an example of the type of “instruction” given.⁴² Hence, the instruction is judicial in nature.

Isaiah elaborates on the recipients of Christ’s judicial instruction through a parallelism. The phrase “He will judge” equates with “He will decide”, while the phrase “nations” equates with “peoples”.

*And He will judge between the nations,
and He will decide for many peoples.*

³⁹ Ibid., p. 116. Causal clauses express a cause or reason for the main action or state. כִּי or one of the other causal prepositions typically introduces them.

⁴⁰ BDB, p. 436. “Instruction” was chosen as the translation for תּוֹרָה, because BDB categorises the use of it here under the title “instruction in the Messianic age”.

⁴¹ Is 51:4 “Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation: For law (תּוֹרָה) will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples” (NKJV).

⁴² Chisholm, *Exegesis*, p. 131. The word וְיִשְׁפֹּט is a Qal waw consecutive perfect. This stem and tense sometimes introduces a statement that gives a specific instance, or example, to demonstrate the truth of the preceding, general statement.

Thus, Isaiah is taking advantage of Hebrew poetry structure to emphasise the judicial role that Christ will play.⁴³ He will judge the world from His throne in the temple (Ezek 43:1-12). Christ will judge the sinful behaviour of man. Only believers will enter the millennium (Matt 25:31-46, Ezek 20:33-38) but they will have children born into sin (Zech 14:16-19).⁴⁴ Sinful natures result in sinful action. Sinful actions need judging.

The result of Christ's judgment will be peace throughout the world. Isaiah uses two sets of parallel structures to describe the worldwide peace. In the first parallel structure, the word וְכִתְּתוּ ("they will beat") describes the parallel phrases: "their swords into ploughshares" and "their spears into pruning knives".

*They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning knives.*

In the second parallel structure לֹא ("not/no") describes "lift up sword against nation" and "longer learn war". In the Hebrew, לֹא ("not/no") is the first word of each phrase, and, therefore, more clearly shows the parallel structure.

לֹא-יִשָּׂא גּוֹי-לְגוֹי חֶרֶב
וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה
Nation will *not* lift up sword against nation,
and they will *no* longer learn war.

Isaiah shows that the ramifications of such activities will be enormous. Since war instruments will be made into farming items, no war instruments will exist. Since nations will no longer attack their neighbours, the art and study of war will be removed entirely. Delitzsch sums it up well by stating:

⁴³ See the discussion earlier in the paper showing "peoples" and "nations" as synonyms in the context of this passage.

⁴⁴ J. F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1959, p. 302.

“There is a peace, not an armed peace, but a full, true God-given and blessed peace.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

Isaiah’s words should greatly encourage us. Isaiah prophesied of a time of great blessing for Jews and Gentiles alike. He prophesied of a time when Christ will rule and teach from Jerusalem. It will be a time of peace, such as the world has never known. Such a glorious future should be an encouragement to walk in the light of the Lord today!

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⁴⁵ Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, p. 76.