

Commentary on Isaiah

Comments on Isaiah:

Selected Verses comparing

Pulpit Commentary comments with other Commentaries

See also verse by verse commentary on Isaiah (under construction)

Introduction: The following comments are in part an assessment of the **Pulpit Commentary (PC)**, a popular, prodigious, venerable work, regarding comments dealing primarily with prophetic passages, especially those dealing with Israel. My comments are not in any way intended to denigrate this valuable resource or to discourage the reader from utilizing it (it is listed in many of the commentary collections on this website). The objective is simply to make the discerning reader aware of occasional comments in the **PC** that reflect a **non-literal interpretation** and thus can potentially be misleading and confusing. To be fair, my comments on the **PC** comments reflect a personal bias toward literal interpretation of all of Scripture, which in turn leads to the belief that all of the Old Testament promises given to Israel which have not been literally fulfilled, will in the future be literally fulfilled to Israel, specifically the believing "remnant" representing Jews who have placed their faith in the Messiah's substitutionary sacrifice. My literal bias also leads to a firm belief in a future, literal one thousand year period often referred to as the "Millennium", a time period which immediately follows the return of the "King of kings and Lord of lords" at the end of Daniel's Seventieth Week (often referred to as the "Tribulation"). We are now living in what Jesus defined as an "age", but it will be followed by what He referred to as "the age to come" (Matthew 12:32), the age in which He will reign on earth and during which all the promises given to Israel will be perfectly fulfilled.

To reiterate, the goal of these comments is not to be argumentative or negative, but to present an alternative interpretation so that the reader might be equipped to draw the most accurate conclusion as to God's original intended meaning. In that regard, I would strongly recommend reading the the context surrounding these verses and arriving at your own interpretation before reading the specific comments. I would also recommend interpreting the text literally using the axiom that if the plain **sense** (plain, normative language) of the text makes good **sense** in context, seek to make no other **sense** (as in trying to "fit" it into one's "systematic" theological viewpoint) lest it potentially end up as nons**ense**!

Isaiah 1:8 And the daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, Like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city (See also onsite notes on **Isaiah 1:8**)

PULPIT COMMENTARY (PC):

Not "the faithful Church" (Kay), but the city of Jerusalem, which is thus personified.

COMMENT:

In this comment the PC is in full agreement with other modern evangelical commentaries. The literal nature of this interpretation is somewhat surprising in view of some of the other PC comments discussed below.

John MacArthur agrees with the Pulpit Commentary writing that the phrase

"daughter of Zion" occurs 28 times in the OT, 6 of which are in Isaiah (Isa 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2; 62:11). It is a personification of Jerusalem, standing in this case for all of Judah." ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word](#))

("Daughter of Zion" - 2 Kgs 19:21; Ps 9:14; Isa 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2; 62:11; Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23; Lam 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:22; Mic 1:13; 4:8, 10, 13; Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:10; 9:9; Matt 21:5; John 12:15)

Isaiah 1:26 "Then I will restore your judges as at the first (**see expressions of time**), And your counselors as at the beginning (**see expressions of time**); After that (**see expressions of time**) you will be called the city of righteousness, A faithful city." (See also onsite notes on **Isaiah 1:26**)

PULPIT COMMENTARY:

The city of righteousness; or, of justice. The prophecy may have been fulfilled in part by the earthly Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and the Maccabees, but is mainly fulfilled in the heavenly Jerusalem—the Church of God, the true Israel. (**Ed: See Israel of God**)

COMMENT:

This comment is incorrect, confusing and misleading to the unwary reader who is not well schooled in the importance of literal interpretation of Scripture, especially prophecy. It reflects the viewpoint of the writer who does not accept a literal fulfillment of God's promises to Israel to be fully realized in the coming age, the Messianic Age, also known as the "millennium" or the one thousand year reign (Revelation 20). The "city of righteousness" is Jerusalem. The NIV Study Bible agrees that "the city of righteousness" refers "to the future Jerusalem as the "City of Truth".

The "**Church of God**" is not the "**true Israel**" (see discussion of **Israel of God**). This type of "replacement theology" is very misleading and frankly makes it very difficult for one to rationally, accurately and clearly interpret the many prophetic promises given to a literal Israel in the book of Isaiah. It is worth noting that Israel did not exist as a country at the time of the writing of the Pulpit Commentary, which may in part explain the PC attempts to explain the promises to Israel allegorically.

Isaiah 2:2 Now it will come about that in the **last days**, the **mountain** of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the **mountains**, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. (See also onsite **notes** on Isaiah 2:2)

PULPIT COMMENTARY:

The mountain of the Lord's house; i.e. the Church, the true Zion, which is to be the antitype of the existing Zion, and is therefore given its material attributes.

MY COMMENT:

The PC allegorizes or spiritualizes this verse which can be logically read (and interpreted) literally as a literal mountain. We know that the Holy Temple in ancient times rested on a mountain. To state that "**the mountain of the Lord's house**" equates with "**the Church, the true Zion**" reflects a total disregard for the literal interpretation. And frankly, if we begin to allegorize or spiritualize passages that can otherwise be interpreted literally, we can make the Bible say whatever we want it to say. God had one specific meaning when He spoke through His prophet Isaiah. We may not always understand God's intended meaning and therefore there will arise legitimate and intellectually honest disagreements on such passages.

John MacArthur interprets "*the mountain of the house of the LORD*" as a literal mountain, writing that it is a

"reference to Mt. Zion, the location of the holy temple in Jerusalem" ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word](#))

The **Bible Knowledge Commentary** agrees that this description

"refers to the mount where the Temple was built." ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

On the other hand respected evangelical writers interpret the first "**mountain**" as a reference to the kingdom of Israel as the leading ("chief") kingdom over all the other kingdoms of the earth. Either of these interpretations makes good sense in the context, but to interpret this phrase as "the Church" is nonsense and confuses the meaning of the entire section. Note that all of these conservative, evangelical writers agree that the second allusion to "**mountains**" in context is not referring to a literal mountain but is a figure of speech where mountain refers to a **kingdom** (as is done elsewhere in the Old Testament - see "*great mountain*" in **Daniel 2:35** - see **notes**).

Isaiah 4:2-3 In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. And it will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy-- everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. (See also onsite **notes** on **Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 4:3**)

PULPIT COMMENTARY:

He that is left ... he that remaineth. (KJV). Equivalent to the "escaped" of the preceding verse. Shall be called holy. Strikingly fulfilled in the fact that the early Christians were known as "holy"... Perhaps, however, more is meant than this (**Ed note:** but PC does not further elaborate).

COMMENT:

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem around 730-680 BC and his message was given to Judah and not to the Church. Note that the PC interpretation fails to take into account the importance of "context" in accurate interpretation. Specifically the preceding context (Isaiah 4:2-note) clearly gives us a definite time phrase "in that day". Isaiah explains that this day will be in the time of "the Branch of Jehovah", a time which fits best with the Messianic kingdom. This verse is not speaking of "early Christians" but of those Jews who are part of the believing **remnant** and who will enter into Messiah's Millennial. The "**survivors**" ("escaped" in Isaiah 4:2) are those who are "left" when the King returns at the end of the "time of Jacob's distress" (in Jeremiah 30:7 = "the **Great Tribulation**" in Matthew 24:21 = "a time of distress" in Daniel 12:1 = "a little while until indignation runs its course" in Isaiah 26:20)

MacArthur agrees writing that

"Holy or set apart is another way of describing the remnant who will inherit God's prosperity in that day." ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word](#))

Clearly Gentile believers will also participate in the Messianic Kingdom but strictly speaking they are not what the Bible refers to as "the remnant" which refers to believing Jews.

William MacDonald agrees writing that

"Unbelievers will have been destroyed by the Lord Jesus at His Second Advent. Saved Jews, recorded for life in Jerusalem, will be called holy." ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson or Logos](#))

The phrase "**everyone who is recorded for life**" clearly includes not only the Jewish remnant but also all believing Gentiles.

J Vernon McGee states that "**in that day**"

"refers to the Day of the Lord. This phrase will occur again and again in Isaiah [click the 45 occurrences of "in that day" in Isaiah and Jeremiah = Isa 2:11, 17, 20; 3:7, 18; 4:1, 2; 5:30; 7:18, 20, 21, 23; 10:20, 27; 11:10, 16; 12:4; 17:4, 7, 9, 11; 19:16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24; 20:6; 22:8, 12, 20, 25; 23:15; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 2; 28:5; 30:23; 31:7; 39:6; 52:6; 58:2; 60:11; 65:5; Jer 4:9; 7:22; 11:4, 7; 17:16; 34:13; 38:28; 44:2; 46:10; 48:41; 49:22, 26; 50:30; 51:2; 52:4, 6] (and *in* all the prophets), and it will be mentioned in the New Testament. Joel particularly will have something to say about it. It begins as every Hebrew day always begins—at sundown. It begins with darkness and moves to the dawn. **It begins with the Great Tribulation and goes on into the millennial kingdom.**" ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (Bolding added)

The **Bible Knowledge Commentary** adds that...

Sometimes the phrase *in that day* refers to the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem (e.g., Isa 3:7, 18; 4:1), but here (see the statements in Isa 4:2, 5) as in Isa 2:11, 12, 17 it means the **millennial** reign of Christ. ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill (KJV = "a very fruitful hill")

PULPIT COMMENTARY:

With the "hill" of his passage compare the "mountain" of Isaiah 2:2 (see above), both passages indicating that the **Church of God** is set on an eminence, and "cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14).

COMMENT:

The believers in the NT church are indeed called to be "the light of the world" and a "city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Mt 5:14-note) but to interpret the present passage as a reference to the New Testament church is clearly incorrect and confuses the truth that this is clearly a parable about Israel.

J Vernon McGee emphatically states that in regard to "a very fruitful hill"...

"there is nothing wrong with *the* soil. The problem is with the vineyard itself, that is, with the vine. Isaiah 5:7 makes it quite clear that the vineyard is the house of Israel; it is Judah. It is **not the church** or something else. This is clear; **we do not have to guess at these things.**" ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

Isaiah 11:9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

PULPIT COMMENTARY:

"Messiah's kingdom, when fully realized, shall be one of perfect peace. **"They shall neither hurt nor destroy in all his holy mountain."** Primarily, no doubt, the passage is figurative, and points to harmony among men, who, in Messiah's kingdom, shall no longer prey one upon another (see especially verse 9). But, from the highest spiritual standpoint, the figure itself becomes a reality, and it is seen that, if in the "new heavens and new earth" there is an animal creation, it will be fitting that there harmony should equally prevail among the inferior creation... **"My holy mountain"**. As the Jewish Church is always bound up with the "holy hill of Zion," so the Messianic one receives the designation of "the mountain of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:3; 30:29; Micah 4:2), or "the holy mountain" (Zechariah 8:3). What was physically true of the type is transferred to the antitype, which is "a city set upon a hill" in a

certain sense." (Bolding added)

COMMENT: Notice that the basic tenet guiding the interpretation of this passage in the PC is that **'the passage is figurative'**. If one does not accept a literal Messianic Kingdom in which **"the wolf will dwell with the lamb..."** then one by default must resort to figurative interpretation (Click for discussion of literal vs figurative/allegorical/spiritualizing). There is however no reason not to interpret Isaiah 11 literally as a glorious description of the future millennium, an age lasting 1000 years, during which the Messiah will rule and reign from **"the holy mountain"** in Jerusalem.

John MacArthur agrees commenting on this section that...

"Conditions of peace will prevail to the extent that all enmity among men, among animals—rapacious or otherwise—and between men and animals will disappear. Such will characterize the future millennial kingdom in which the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) will reign. Everyone will know the Lord when He returns to fulfill His New Covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:34). ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word](#))

The **Bible Knowledge Commentary** agrees commenting that here in chapter 11...

"Isaiah described the righteous kingdom which the Messiah will set up. The curse will be lifted, peace and harmony will be present, and wild animals will again be tame and harmless to domesticated animals and humans... and on the temple mount (God's **holy mountain...**) tranquility will prevail. **Many Bible students interpret these verses nonliterally**, because they suppose such changes in the animal world are not possible. However, because the Messiah is "God[is] with us" (Isa 7:14) and He will be dwelling with His people, it need not be difficult to envision these changes in nature. Though the curse of sin will be removed to some extent it will not be totally removed until the end of the millennial kingdom when finally death will be abolished (Rev 20:14). The reason such tranquility is possible is that all the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord (Isa. 11:9; cf. Jer. 31:34; Hab. 2:14). This means more than people knowing intellectually about the Lord. The idea is that people everywhere will live according to God's principles and Word. Animals will be affected, as well. This will occur in the Millennium when the Messiah will be reigning (Isa. 9:6,7), Jerusalem will have prominence in the world (Isa 2:2), and Judah and Israel will be regathered to the land in belief and will be living according to the New Covenant. The Millennium can hardly be in existence now since these factors do not characterize the present age." ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#)) (Bolding added)

William MacDonald writes that

One of the most glorious promises in all of Holy Scripture is the second half of Isaiah 11:9, giving the reason for the ideal conditions during the Millennial Kingdom. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson or Logos](#))

J Vernon McGee adds that...

During the time when the Lord reigns on earth the calf and the young lion will lie down together. The only way they can lie down together today is if the calf is inside the lion! **"The lion shall eat straw like the ox."** That seems ridiculous to us. Anybody knows that a lion does not eat straw. But a Bible teacher, who has a very sharp mind, once said, "I will tell you what I'll do. If you can make a lion, I will make him eat straw." The One who made the lion will be able to make him eat straw when the time comes." ([McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

The **Believer's Study Bible** agrees with the preceding comments and adds that...

These verses describe the results of the Messiah's rule over the earth. The primary result would be an incredible peace that would reach all of creation. This is an age yet to come. To spiritualize the verses by saying that they reflect the perfect peace of God in heaven is to reduce the passage to an absurdity." ([Criswell, W A. Believer's Study Bible: New King James Version. 1991. Thomas Nelson](#))