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Cover Page Footnote

Thanks to Dr. Sloan for his help in the refining of this article and my parents for supporting me throughout my college career each and every step of the way.

Salvation of the Nations in Isaiah

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The United Nations in 1945 was established in order to prevent future wars from occurring. This was just after two terrible world wars had gotten finished, with millions dead and injured on both sides of the war. Humanity was ready to come together and try to put an end to the horrors of what they had been a part of once and for all. At the UN headquarters in New York, there the well known 'Isaiah Wall' that has writing from the famous verse Isaiah 2:4 inscribed onto it. It reads, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more."¹ Some may look to the UN or worldly leaders to bring peace in the world- unfortunately, the United Nations has not been a perfect solution to this ongoing problem and has been a disappointment to many. The only true fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy will come when Jesus establishes his rule on earth and rules the nations with a rod of iron.²

This paper will be covering the topic of the Salvation of the Nations, as seen in the book of Isaiah. This theme gets into how God will provide salvation to the nations and what that salvation looks like. There are some different ways in which Isaiah talks about the salvation of the nations. These include the foretelling of the future millennial reign of Christ, and the coming Messiah being a light to the nations. The millennium seen in both Isaiah and the book of Revelation has not yet occurred, being the reason that many of the prophecies and passages on the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah are of occurrences that are set to happen in the end days, that is, post-resurrection of Jesus. Some of these prophecies about the salvation of the nations still haven't occurred yet and are still to take place.

¹Clyde Haberman, "Koch, Angry at U.N., Would Alter Isaiah Wall," *The New York Times*, February 10, 1982. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/02/10/nyregion/koch-angry-at-un-would-alter-isaiah-wall.html>.

² Revelation 12:5 NASB 1995

In this paper there will also be discussions about various passages that point to the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah, and different views on the salvation of the nations or the lack thereof. One discussion will discuss whether the term used in the book of Isaiah, “Nations” refers to the gentiles, or those who aren’t God’s people, or whether they are really just referring to the diaspora of the Jews dispersed among the nations. Three theological implications of the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah will be discussed, and applications that we can take away from this topic that was studied and apply to our lives today in relation to the salvation of others will also be discussed.

Isaiah 2:4, as discussed previously, and Isaiah 2:2 are the first sightings in the book of Isaiah that talk about the salvation of the nations. In those verses it is seen that all nations will stream to God on the mountain of the house of the Lord. This is such an important section in the book of Isaiah about the salvation of the nations and God’s work among the nations as history, God’s perfect plan for humankind, pans out. Isaiah 2:4 talks about how there will be no more war- that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. This passage seems to be referring to the millennium, as this awesome peace has not yet occurred and may not ever occur until Christ’s return and his ruling of the earth during the future millennium. This is an amazing prophecy as world peace is something many nations and people have strived and longed for, basically since the creation of the world. For God to establish his kingdom on earth and bring about world peace would truly be an astounding accomplishment and something to be praised for.

Prophecies throughout the book of Isaiah touch on this same topic of the stopping of war in the world and peace between humanity, it is not an isolated theme.

In this passage Israel is mentioned as being a leader of the nations, and this could apply in many ways such as both spiritually and politically. The topic of international cooperation is noted, as the law of the Lord will go out from Jerusalem to the whole world.

Another passage that covers the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah is Isaiah 11:1-10. In this passage the earth is talked about as being full of the knowledge of the Lord. The Messiah is a key theme in this passage, and even fulfills the things from chapter 2 such as defending the poor and settling disputes. The passage reads that God will establish justice by punishing the wicked harshly.

There is peace in nature in the passage, as the animals that are normally hostile towards each other now lay together. Vegetarianism among animals is the result of what happens in the passage. The passage even shows how little children will play near cobras. This passage is referring to the Millennium, where Jesus will rule the nations from Israel for one-thousand years and there will be world peace. The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples and His resting place will be glorious.

The text says that Egypt and Assyria will be blessed in Isaiah 19:23-25.

Isaiah 25 is another key passage in the topic of the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah. In it Isaiah prophesies God will swallow up death and defeat it, and will swallow up the covering over all the nations. Isaiah's vision of a future banquet on Mount Zion is described in verses 6-8 which is generally understood by scholars as a sign of salvation for both Israel and the nations.³

³Jaap Dekker, 2021. "Salvation for Israel and the Nations: Disputing the Interpretation of Isaiah 25:6-8 as an Announcement of Doom." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 31 (2): 154–66. doi:10.5325/bullbiblrese.31.2.0154.

Miller (1995), however, takes that Isaiah 25:6-9 is a passage of judgement on the nations, while he admits that there is a sense of contrast in the passage.⁴

Cho and Fu bring out a unique perspective that the swallowing of death is at the time of the feast of all peoples! “The climactic event of this extravagant feast Yhwh prepares for all peoples is Yhwh feasting on death, God swallowing the swallower.”⁵

In verse 6 we see that there will be a lavish feast for all people on the mountain, including the nations other than Israel, prepared by the Lord. In this feast there will be aged wine, and fat pieces of meat with marrow signifying prosperity and plenty. This signifies economic as well as agricultural prosperity, and probably refers to the millennium when Jesus will provide economic and agricultural prosperity to the whole world.

In this passage the Lord will also wipe away all tears from all faces. He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth.

In Isaiah 40:5 the glory of the Lord will be revealed and everyone will see it.

Another key passage talking about the salvation of the nations is found in Isaiah 42, verses 1 through 13. The key takeaway from this chapter is that God will bless the nations through the Messiah. Another thing we see is that God will bring forth justice to the nations through His servant. Additionally, and this is a huge blessing to all people, God will be both just and merciful at the same time. Not only this but he will be the perfect balance of both worlds.

⁴ Miller, Glenn. "Isaiah 25:6-9: A Journal of Bible and Theology." *Interpretation* 49, no. 2 (04, 1995): 175, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/isaiah-25-6-9/docview/202738272/se-2>.

⁵ Cho, Paul Kang-Kul, and Janling Fu. “Death and Feasting in the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 25:6-8),”. *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27* / Vol. 17, (2013): 118, Society of Biblical Literature.

It is also awesome in this passage about how it talks about the God who created all the nations, and not just Israel, has His blessing on the Messiah. His Messiah is appointed by God, and He has the authority of God, and lastly, He is equal to God.

God is described as having a covenant to the people, which must be the new covenant. Covenant is mentioned in Isaiah 49:8 as well.

God is also described here as a light. In terms of the New Testament, this connects to the fact that God will bring salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Both the theme of the covenant and the theme of the light connect to the theme of the salvation of the nations.

The chapter also talks about how God will have victory over His enemies, the nations. God will have victory over the idols. And amazingly, foreign nations will sing praises to God and bring glory to Him.

Isaiah 45:22 proclaims to the nations to turn to God and be saved (from all the ends of the earth).

In Isaiah 49:1-13, God's servant is discussed. He is discussed as becoming a light for the gentiles. This expression indicates the millennium, where Jesus will be ruling the world and certainly will be a light to the world, including the gentiles. Hence, the prophecy found in this chapter is fulfilled later through Jesus Christ. It is prophesied that Kings and princes will rise and bow down to the Messiah in these verses as well.

God says to those who are in bondage to be delivered and to those who are in darkness to be brought to light. The Diaspora of the Jews coming back to Israel is mentioned here, "Surely, thus says the Lord, "Even the captives of the mighty man will be taken away, And the prey of the

tyrant will be rescued; For I will contend with the one who contends with you, And I will save your sons.””⁶

Isaiah 51:4-6 is also a key passage concerning the salvation of the nations in the book of Isaiah. The passage reads, “Pay attention to Me, O My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation; For a law will go forth from Me, and I will set My justice for a light of the peoples. “My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait for Me, And for My arm they will wait expectantly. “Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment And its inhabitants will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not wane.”⁷

Beyer discusses this passage, and he mentions that it does indeed talk about the salvation of the nations. For Gentiles and Jews, God’s salvation and righteousness would last forever as seen in verse 6. The bodies of the inhabitants of the earth will die, but those who place their trust in the Lord will last forever.⁸

Next is a passage that occurs just before the suffering servant passage in Isaiah 53. The key verses are Isaiah 52 verses 10 and 15. God ‘bears his holy arm’ or pulls up his sleeves in front of all the nations, so that all the world can see God’s salvation. God will also sprinkle many nations, like the priests would do to the altar or in the holy of holies before the ark of the

⁶ Isaiah 49:25 NASB 1995

⁷ Isaiah 51:4-6 NASB 1995

⁸Bryan E. Beyer. Encountering the Book of Isaiah: A Historical and Theological Survey. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
[https://reader.yuzu.com/reader/books/9781441210708/epubcfi/6/52\[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3DChapter_16\]!/4/208/1:26\[o%20t%20Chei\]](https://reader.yuzu.com/reader/books/9781441210708/epubcfi/6/52[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3DChapter_16]!/4/208/1:26[o%20t%20Chei])

covenant. Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him because what hadn't been told to them, they will see, and what they hadn't heard they will understand.

Isaiah 56:1-8 is a key passage that describes the salvation of those from foreign nations, describing those being saved as, “the sons of a foreigner”⁹ at one point in the passage. God will bring those people to His holy mountain and make them joyful in His house of prayer. God is described as accepting the burnt offerings and sacrifices of the sons of a foreigner, who joins themselves to the Lord.

God says to not let the son of a foreigner say that God has separated him from God's people, because of the above reasons. God will give to the eunuchs that keep His sabbaths and choose the things that please Him in His house and within His walls a memorial, and a name better than the name of a son or daughter, He will give them an everlasting name and they won't be cut off. God will gather those to Israel who aren't already gathered to Him, the nations.

In Isaiah 60 the salvation of the nations is a theme as well. The passage talks about how nations will come to the Light of God in Israel, which is through the Messiah. The nations will be in the dark, but God will rise upon Zion (which signifies Israel) and His glory will be upon Zion.

Because of this Zion will be the light that the nations will come to and that kings will come to, the brightness of Zion's rising. All the nations in this section will gather together and come to Israel.

In Isaiah 61 verses nine and eleven we see that God brings blessing for the nations through Israel. Initially the messiah is mentioned and salvation is brought through the Messiah. Next we see that the Messiah blesses Israel, and Israel then blesses the nations.

⁹ Isaiah 56:6 NASB 1995

Isaiah 62:2 talks about Israel being like a leader of the world, that will be a sight for the nations to see- its righteousness and glory.

Isaiah 66:18-23 talk about the universal worship of Yahweh. In it all nations and tongues will be gathered. People from all over the world will be brought to Jerusalem as a grain offering to the Lord.

Seeing God's glory is a common theme among many passages mentioned, and it seems to imply that those who see His glory have salvation.

One view by Croatto (2005) on many of the passages that seem to connect to the salvation of the nations is that they are all about Judeans, or God's chosen people and not the nations, or the gentiles. This view holds that when the nations are attracted to the light of Jerusalem, the nations here refers to geographical realms and not peoples. Hence, "At this point in the textual sequence nothing suggests the theme of the conversion of the nations".¹⁰ Croatto goes on to say that the mention of the house of Jacob actually lends to the reasoning that the people being referred to here are in fact Judeans and not other nations besides Israel.¹¹

Van Winkle (1985) states that there are some scholars on one hand that believe the salvation of the nations is a theme in Deutero Isaiah (40-55) while on the other hand some scholars believe that there is no salvation of the nations in the passages of Deutero Isaiah. Those who believe there is salvation of the nations believe that the nations have a co-equity with Israel as seen in the passages. Scholars that believe that there is no salvation of the nations in Isaiah believe that based on the passages Deutero Isaiah proclaims salvation only to Israel and the other nations are in submission to the nation of Israel.

¹⁰ Croatto, J. Severino. "The 'Nations' in the Salvific Oracles of Isaiah." *Vetus Testamentum* 55, no. 2 (2005): 145. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1519464>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 143–61.

An example of the second view, where there is no salvation of the nations found in Deutero-Isaiah, is found by A Schoors who remarks that although God is the creator of the universe, there is “no expectation of salvation on behalf of the gentiles”¹² and another scholar believes that any mention of the gentiles in their place in the new order is a position of being “entirely and debasingly subservient”.¹³

According to Van Winkle (1985), there is the old but neglected view of Deutero-Isaiah that states that there is salvation of the nations and also a theme of subservience to Israel, Israel being an agent for the salvation of the nations.¹⁴

Three oracles give a clear expression of Isaiah’s conception of the relationship between the nations and Israel and Yahweh, and these are the oracles which have caused the controversy over the different views. The first oracle is found in Isaiah 51:4-6 and discusses and envisages the salvation of the nations, the second found in Isaiah 49:22-23 expects the submission of the nations to Israel, and the third in Isaiah 42:5-9 shows Israel as an agent of salvation for the nations.¹⁵ We will look at the first oracle next.

The first oracle passage is universalistic as it envisages the salvation of the nations. In verse 5 the nations wait for Yahweh’s salvation and reign. One factor in this passage is the usage of words *qawa* and *yahal*. Smith argues that this passage actually means that the gentiles will wait in dread for God’s judgement on them. His justification for this position on the passage is the interpretation of the words *qawa* and *yahal*. He argues that *yahal* means to “wait in dread”

¹² Van Winkle, D. W. “The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah XL-LV.” *Vetus Testamentum* 35, no. 4 (1985): 4. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1517760>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 446.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 446–58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 446–58.

and that qawa means the same thing. However, Yahal does not likely mean that as it is used differently in most examples in the bible. In connected with God, it means to trust in him and his salvation, his word, and his lovingkindness, “it never means “to wait in dread” and never has negative connotations”.¹⁶

As for qawa, one situation can be argued for it meaning “to wait in dread” but there are so many other examples where it is used to mean “to wait in eagerness”. Deutero-Isaiah uses the term twice other than in this passage, and both times it is used in the context of waiting on the salvation that God will bring. Other examples in the Psalms and Lamentations of qawa parallel to yahal with Yahweh as the object indicate that ““waiting on Yahweh” is an expression of trust in him and his salvation.”.¹⁷ Thus, it holds that this passage is referring to the salvation of the nations.

There are numerous theological implications that we can draw from this study on the salvation of the nations in Isaiah. First, God provides salvation to all nations.

Secondly, we see that God works through the Messiah to provide salvation to the gentiles, and in the process he works through Israel to provide the salvation to the gentiles. The gentiles were not God’s chosen people- Israel was. Through Israel, the messiah came to this earth, lived a perfect sinless life, and was crucified on a cross to bear the sins of the world as the sacrifice to God for all of humanity. It was then the Jews that initially spread the good news to all of the nations, seen at the Pentecost and throughout the book of Acts, then in many cases the people that believed as a result of the Jews spread the gospel to others as well throughout history, spreading the church of Christ through all the nations.

¹⁶ Ibid., 448.

¹⁷ Ibid., 448.

Finally, we can wait for a day, in the millennial reign of Christ, when God will establish peace on this earth between all nations. This will happen during the millennial reign of Christ, which will occur during the future eschatological millennium.

An observation that can be made about the salvation of both Israel and the gentiles is that it is explicitly stated in scripture that God will provide salvation to all of Israel in the last days. However, what we infer from scripture, or what is implicitly stated, is that God wants all of humanity to be saved, as well.

An application for us today is that God wants to save the whole world, not just Christians. For Israel, at the time of Isaiah, they were mostly concerned with their own salvation. We could easily fall into this in our own time as believers, and only be concerned about getting saved ourselves, or we might become content with being saved ourselves and forget about or neglect the potential salvation of those in our lives that are unsaved and might just be craving something more to life than work, relationships, money, and the like.

Based on these passages and the fact that there is salvation of the nations through the Messiah which came from Israel, we should take initiative and care more about the salvation of non-believers in this world. Whether it is a friend that doesn't know Christ, that we have already witnessed to multiple times and doesn't seem receptive to the gospel, so we can pray for them, or a complete stranger in the mall that we might run across that needs to hear the good news of Jesus Christ that hasn't ever heard about it before in their life.

In conclusion, a major theme in the book of Isaiah is the salvation of the nations. This can be seen in many passages such as Isaiah 11:1-10, Isaiah 42:1-13, Isaiah 51:4-6, and more. Some scholars have argued that it is more of a theme that the gentiles are subservient to the Jews, which is evident in some passages, but it is also evident that God has the salvation of the nations

in mind in his plan for the world as well. In fact, God will work through Israel and His Servant the Messiah, coming from Israel, to bring about the salvation of the nations. This salvation includes the promise of future world peace which will be evident in the millennial reign of Christ on this earth in which there will be not only peace among people but also peace among nature.

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