

# Triennial Torah Study – 5<sup>th</sup> Year 24/01/2015



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|-------|--------------|--------|------------|
| Ex 26 | Isaiah 40-42 | Ps 146 | John 14-15 |
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## The Tabernacle: More Detail in Design (Exodus 26-27)

The word tabernacle comes from a Latin word meaning “tent.” The Hebrew word translated tabernacle literally means “dwelling place.” It may refer to either just the tent-or to the tent with the surrounding courtyard. In any case, the sense of being portable and temporary is obvious. And this sense of God having a temporary dwelling will continue all the way up to Solomon's time, when the tabernacle is replaced by the temple, a more fixed structure. This later event is seen by many as a foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God-when Christ takes up permanent residence on earth. The time of the tabernacle is thus seen as God inhabiting His people in the fleshly tent of our temporary bodies (compare 2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

In Exodus 26 and 27, we again read of the intricate designing of the Master Builder Himself. Only the finest materials available were used in construction of the tabernacle and its contents. Acacia wood was a light, strong and beautiful wood-durable and resistant to insects and disease-that grew in this region. God was very specific in His instructions for the building of the tabernacle. His instruction to be very precise in following the detailed building plan was repeated. He is the same when it comes to His righteous laws. Mankind is not to add to His laws or take away from them (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Revelation 22:18-19). Whenever God designs and builds anything, He does so according to a careful advance plan. His creation is not the result of some massive random cosmic explosion with colliding planetoids later accidentally forming a globular mass right where the earth needed to be in the solar system to make it advantageous for human life. Could you imagine reading the words, “In the beginning, God said, ‘OOPS’”?

When reading these chapters, take time to appreciate the fine detail of our Creator's perfect craftsmanship. And consider the lesson in Luke 16:10 to see how God judges our character: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

### “Comfort My People” (Isaiah 40)

Beginning with this chapter, the remainder of the book of Isaiah takes on a different tone—so much so that some have tried to claim it was really written by a different author. Part of the reason is that chapters 40-55 appear to be addressed to the people of Jerusalem while they are in captivity—and their captivity was not until many years after Isaiah’s death. However, the New Testament assigns 23 verses from all sections of this book specifically to the prophet

Isaiah (1:9; 6:9-10; 9:1-2; 10:22-23; 11:10; 29:13; 40:3-5; 42:1-4; 53:1,4,7-8; 61:1-2; 65:1). So Isaiah’s message was written for the future—for Israel and Judah in their imminent captivity *and* in their end-time captivity.

The message is to comfort and console the exiles. Luke 2:25 refers to the future redemption of Israel as the “Consolation of Israel”—which was to be accomplished through Yeshua. In 2 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul tells us that God comforts us so that we may comfort others (verses 3-4). Learning to be a comforter is learning to be like God. At times, chronic or serious trials can be very discouraging for a believer, leaving one to wonder why God allows them. One of the reasons is to train us to be able to lend aid and comfort to those experiencing the same or a similar type of difficulty. A person with no experience with trials is limited in his ability to empathize and sympathize with those who truly suffer. On the other hand, the person experienced in receiving God’s comfort *while enduring trials* is well equipped to offer godly comfort to others.

Verses 3-5 of Isaiah 40 are identified by all four Gospel writers as applying to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23)—who announced the first coming of the Messiah. However, Yeshua indicated that John only partially fulfilled these prophecies—that their ultimate fulfillment would come in the end time (see Matthew 17:10-13, especially verse 11).

Notice the message: “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low” (Isaiah 40:4). What does this mean? Does it mean that all mountain ranges on earth will be flattened and all valleys filled in? If so, it would mean no more Grand Canyon. No more Yosemite Valley. No more Matterhorn. No more great cascading waterfalls and other such beautiful wonders of God’s creation. A perpetually flat landscape, with only slight dips and rises. Is this what God means? No, for while there will likely be topographical changes to the surface of the earth, “every” valley and “every” hill will not disappear. If that happened, the whole world would be flooded. Indeed, Scripture says that Jerusalem itself will be an exalted mountain during Christ’s reign.

So what does the prophecy here mean? It appears to have both a figurative and a literal meaning. Mountains and hills being brought low can represent large and small nations being humbled, and valleys being raised can represent oppressed and downtrodden people being exalted (compare verses 17, 23, 29; 2:11-17; 24:21; 60:10, 14, showing that God hates pride, and how the haughty will be humbled and the humble—especially the faithful saints—will be exalted). Yet again, there is apparently a literal fulfillment as well. Consider that the passage is discussing the building of a highway (verse 3). It is *in the construction of this highway* that mountains are brought low and valleys are raised—crooked places made straight and rough places smoothed (verse 4). Thus, if there’s a mountain in the way, it is brought low; if a valley would impede the highway, the valley is raised up (compare 42:15-16; 49:11). Furthermore, since the purpose of a highway is to facilitate interchange between separated people, we can look at this figuratively as well. Any obstacles that separate and divide people will be removed (compare 19:23; 62:10).

Remember that this reference applied in part to the work of John preparing the way (the highway) for Yeshua’s first coming. No physical highway was then being built. Rather, John preached a message of repentance and many of his followers became disciples of Yeshua. Yet John’s work of preparation was a forerunner of an end-time work of preparation—preparing for the second coming of Christ. Again, it is

accomplished through a message of repentance and helping people in the process of conversion and overcoming sin.

At Christ's return, the Israelites and then the whole world will be helped in the same process. When He comes, there will be a literal highway of return for the exiles from Assyria and Egypt. But more importantly, that highway will represent *spiritual* return to God—repentance—as well as harmony with other people through that way of repentance. Part of the repentance process will include people coming to terms with and turning from hatred and competition that has existed between nations for sometimes thousands of years.

Verses 6-8 are cited by Peter in discussing the solution to the fleetingness of human life (1 Peter 1:24-25). The same analogy of man's life being as the grass of the field is used by James as well—applied especially to the futility of riches as a panacea (James 1:10-11; see also Job 14:1-2; Psalm 103:15-16). Verses 9-11 show the zeal and courage should have in preaching the joyous “good tidings!” Verse 13 is quoted twice by Paul (Romans 11:34; 1 Corinthians 2:16).

One of the many recurring themes in this section of Isaiah is the greatness of God's power as the Creator of the universe, of the earth and of man upon the earth (verses 12, 22, 28; for more examples see also 42:5; 44:24; 45:12, 18). In verse 26, we are told to lift our eyes upward—to the heavens. God calls all in the “host”—that is, the celestial bodies, including all the stars—by name, an amazing fact also mentioned in Psalm 147:4. It is amazing since there are at least a hundred billion galaxies of a hundred billion stars each. Scientists estimate the universe at around 15 billion years old. Yet to name every star at a rate of one per second would take more than 21,000 times that long—a mind-boggling feat that God gives but a passing mention. The greatness and awesome might of God should be of true comfort to His people.

The chapter ends with the wonderful verses about waiting on God. “To wait [on God] entails confident expectation and active hope in the Lord—never passive resignation (Ps. 40:1). Mount up...run...walk depicts the spiritual transformation that faith brings to a person. The Lord gives power to those who trust in him.... The eagle depicts the strength that comes from the Lord. The Lord describes his deliverance of the Israelites in Ex. 19:4 as similar to being lifted up on an eagle's strong wings. In Ps. 103:5, the strength of people who are nourished by God is compared to the strength of the eagle” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Isaiah 40:31). It is a remarkable picture. Through faith in God's power, our waiting can be a time of soaring.

### **One From the East and the North (Isaiah 41)**

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In verse 2 God mentions sending someone “from the east.” In verse 25 He says this person is “from the north” yet also “from the rising of the sun”—which again means from the east. So it is likely that the same person is being referred to. Yet who is this person?

First of all, we need to bear in mind that this whole section of prophecy is given to comfort the exiles of Judah and Israel—in both their ancient and future Babylonian captivities. It is describing a time of punishment on their enemies. Thus, the person being sent would seem to be a deliverer sent to free them from captivity. Indeed, most commentaries equate this person with the Persian ruler Cyrus, who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and released the Jewish exiles. This is a sensible conclusion since Cyrus is explicitly referred to by name in basically the same role just a few chapters later (44:28-45:4).

“One from the east refers to Cyrus, king of Persia (559-530 B.C.; see 46:11)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 41:2). And as for “from the north...from the rising of the sun” and his calling on God's name (verse 25): “The conquest of Media by Cyrus (550 B.C.) made him master of the territories north of

Babylon. Cyrus, who did not personally know God (45:4), nevertheless called on God's name when he released the exiles (2 Chr. 36:23; Ezra 1:1-4)" (note on Isaiah 41:25).

Yet remarkably, Cyrus is referred to in chapters 44-45 as God's shepherd and God's anointed. He is clearly being used as a forerunner of Yeshua, who is sent by God the Father to ultimately free the exiles in the end time. Yeshua comes from the north since God's throne is said to be "on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north" (14:13). And reference to Christ's coming from the east is found in the New Testament: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:27).

Israel is referred to as God's servant—a servant being one who obeys a master, lord or employer. "The term was bestowed on the person chosen to administer and advance God's kingdom (Ex. 14:31; 2 Sam. 3:18). In chs. 40-55, the title of servant is bestowed implicitly on Cyrus (45:1-4) and explicitly on God's prophets (44:26), the nation of Israel (44:21; 45:4) and particularly on Yeshua (42:1-4; 52:13)" (*Nelson*, note on 41:8). We will see more on this in our next reading.

Also in verse 8, the Israelites' blessing is shown to be rooted in their descent from Abraham, God's *friend*. This incredible designation occurs in two other places in Scripture (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7). This friendship with Abraham extends to his descendants, and it is what ultimately brings favor and victory to Israel.

Those who are incensed against Israel (Isaiah 41:11), or war against Israel (verse 12), will be as nothing. God will help His chosen people (verses 13-14). "Exiled Israel seemed as feeble and despicable as a *worm* (Job 25:6; Ps. 22:6 [the latter verse prophetic of Christ in His final suffering])" (*Nelson*, note on Isaiah 41:14).

But God will deliver Israel—and not merely through unilaterally destroying its enemies. The Israelites would *themselves* thresh the mountains and hills (verse 15), symbolic of the nations around them and their false religions (compare Isaiah 2:2; Deuteronomy 12:2; Jeremiah 3:21-23). "The lowly 'worm' (v. 14) would be transformed into a threshing sledge (28:27) that removes mountains, the symbols of opposition and the location of pagan temples and palaces (Mic. 1:3-5)" (note on Isaiah 41:15). This did not happen in Israel's ancient return from Babylonian captivity—in which only a small percentage of Jews (and none of the northern tribes) returned to the Promised Land. This shows the prophecy to be primarily for the end time.

Furthermore, God is presented as performing miracles for the returning exiles, meeting their basic needs in the desert as He did for Israel of old (verses 17-20). This also did not happen in the ancient return from Babylonian captivity. But it will happen in Israel and Judah's future when Christ comes back. And Yeshua will ultimately crush Israel's enemies, in a much greater way than Cyrus ever did (verse 25).

Finally, God satirically shows the foolishness of idolatry. Idols cannot proclaim the future. They can't proclaim anything at all. God challenges idols in verse 23 to "do good or evil." What He's really saying is: "Do anything!" But of course, they cannot. The nations were and still are mired in idolatry—or, in God's words, "wind and confusion" (verse 29). And this is not limited to overtly pagan religions. Idolatry and many pagan practices and ideas are deeply embedded in traditional Christianity, which is really a counterfeit religion mixing some authentic Faith concepts with ancient paganism. Thankfully, Christ is coming to set all aright.

**"Behold! My Servant" (Isaiah 42)**

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The first four verses of chapter 42 are quoted by the apostle Matthew to describe Yeshua (Matthew 12:18-21), and the chapter continues in its description of this Messiah to come (verses 6-7; compare Luke 2:32; 4:18). *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* states: "The law of prophetic suggestion leads Isaiah from Cyrus to the far greater Deliverer, behind whom the former is lost sight of. The express quotation in Matthew 12:18-20, and the description can apply to Messiah alone (Ps. 40:6; with which cf. Exod. 21:6; John 6:38; Phil. 2:7). Israel, also, in its highest ideal, is called the 'servant of God' (ch. 49:3). But this ideal is realized only in the antitypical Israel, its representative-man and Head, Messiah (cf. Matt. 2:15, with Hos. 11:1)" (note on Isaiah 42:1). Some statements in Isaiah 42 refer to Yeshua's first coming, some to the second.

Verses 2-3 refer to His gentleness at His first coming and toward those who are humbly seeking Him at His second coming. But verses 13-15 show another side of Yeshua—His power and wrath toward evildoers during the Day of the Lord.

Returning to Christ's gentleness in verse 3, His not breaking a bruised reed appears to mean that upon those who are lowly and hurt, having already suffered punishment, Yeshua will not add to their punishment. Indeed, just the opposite, He will take special care of them and restore them to health and happiness—and even grant them spiritual vitality. "Smoking flax" in the same verse is rendered "dimly burning wick" in the RSV and NRSV (see also *JFB Commentary*). This appears to represent those who at one time had a fiery zeal but are now as a mere smoldering candle wick about to go out—their faith and hope in God's deliverance is almost gone. Yeshua will not quench what is left in them. Again, just the opposite, He will rescue them, not only restoring their faith and zeal, but through the granting of His Spirit giving them such a fiery zeal for God as is otherwise humanly impossible.

Verse 4 says He would bring law to the world (compare 2:2-4). Verse 21 of Isaiah 42 says one of His responsibilities would be to "magnify the law and make it honorable" (KJV). In Christ's famous Sermon on the Mount, far from doing away with God's law as many argue, He explained the spiritual intent behind God's law and actually made it even more binding—showing that God's law is to regulate even our thoughts, not merely our actions (see Matthew 5:17-48).

Isaiah 42:14 shows that the punishment on Israel is painful to God, as is often the case when parents have to discipline their children. To God it will have been like birth pangs—ending with His at last "delivering" them. Rabbinic teaching refers to the time just before the Messiah comes as the "birth pangs of the Messiah." Verses 15-16 show the miraculous way in which Christ will lead the exiles back from their captivity. It has also been suggested that this is representative of Christ leading spiritual Israel, ever since its inception to ultimate deliverance in the Kingdom of God. That may well be for the return of physical Israel and eventually all of mankind, which must be grafted into Israel as well (see Romans 11).

In Isaiah 42:18-20, the "servant" and "messenger" of God is Israel—now spiritually blind and deaf. This is clearly illustrated in the remainder of the chapter. The people sit in captivity and punishment because of their disobedience. In the ancient Babylonian captivity, Christ's coming to magnify the law was yet future. Now He has already come and still the people do not heed. This has been the cause of the Israelites' suffering through the ages. And it will culminate in the worst time of suffering ever. Yet even in captivity, the people will not at first repent and turn to God.

**Praise to God who helps those in need (Psalms 146)**

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We come now to the concluding section of the book of Psalms, the final Hallel (“Praise”) collection (Psalms 146-150)-the other two being the Egyptian Hallel (113-118) and the Great Hallel (120-136). In this final cluster of five untitled and unattributed hymns, each is bracketed at beginning and end by shouts of *Hallelujah!* (“Praise Yah,” typically appearing as “Praise the LORD”)-perhaps added by the final editors of the Psalter (see in comparison Psalms 105-106 and 111-117).

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments: “The Psalter collection [the whole book of Psalms] begins with two psalms that address the reader and whose function is to identify those to whom the collections [of the Psalter] specifically belong [that is, those who fit the profile of the righteous as portrayed in the Psalms-the holy congregation of God] (see...Ps 1-2). Here, at the collection’s end, that congregation gives voice to its final themes. They are the themes of praise-and calls to praise-of Zion’s heavenly King (see 146:10; 147:12; 149:2), the Maker, Sustainer and Lord over all creation (see 146:6; 147:4, 8-9, 15-18; 148:5-6); the one sure hope of those who in their need and vulnerability look to him for help (see 146:5-9; 147:2-3, 6, 11, 13-14; 149:4); the Lord of history whose commitment to his people is their security and the guarantee that, as his kingdom people (see especially 147:19-20), they will ultimately triumph over all the forces of this world arrayed against them (see 146:3, 10; 147:2, 6, 10, 13-14; 148:14; 149:4-9)” (introductory note on Psalms 146-150).

The psalms of this final section are typically thought to have been composed following the Jewish return from Babylonian Exile. However, there is no way to really know whether this is the case. It does seem likely that these psalms were at least arranged as a concluding group at that time. The Latin Vulgate translation follows the Greek Septuagint in attributing Psalms 146 and 147 (with the latter divided into two psalms) to the postexilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah respectively. However, there is no other evidence to corroborate this.

**Psalm 146**, the first in the final Hallel collection, is, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* notes, “a hymn in praise of Zion’s heavenly King, with special focus on his powerful and trustworthy care for Zion’s citizens who look to him when oppressed, broken or vulnerable. It has many thematic links with Ps 33; 62; 145.” Indeed, there are a number of very close links to the latter, the previous psalm, as we will see-thus providing a good transition from the Davidic collection (138-145) to the final collection of psalms (146-150).

Following the opening general declaration of *Hallelujah* or “Praise the LORD,” the psalmist gives the same imperative to himself (verse 1)-and all who sing the song thus proclaim this directive to themselves as well. “O my soul” here is simply a way of speaking to oneself. For a similar directive, compare the opening and closing of Psalms 103 and 104.

Psalm 146:3-5 echoes 118:8-9 in calling on people to not trust in mortal human beings no matter what their station in life but rather to look to God. Of course, we have to trust people to a certain extent as part of life. The point here is that other human beings should not be our ultimate source of trust. For that we must rely on God (compare also Jeremiah 17:5, 7).

Incidentally, note that the New King James Version translates the end of verse 4 to say that when a human being dies and his spirit leaves his body, at the same time “his plans perish.” The NIV says, “his plans come to nothing,” and other modern translations follow suit. However, the earlier King James Version renders this literally to say “his *thoughts* perish.” While thoughts can certainly include plans, there is no valid basis here for limiting the scope of the word. Rather, the basis in this case is one of doctrinal bias, and this is a good example of how such bias can influence translation. No doubt later translators found the literal wording untenable given their belief in the immortality of the human soul wherein consciousness continues apart from the body-a doctrine not supported by Scripture. The Bible instead

teaches that at death a person's thoughts do in fact cease: "The dead know nothing.... There is no work or device or knowledge in the grave where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). Death is elsewhere portrayed in Scripture as an unconscious sleep. Life after death is not as a disembodied consciousness but will come only through a future resurrection of the dead to a new body.

Returning now to the progression of the psalm, let's note again that verse 5 gives the contrast to verses 3-4. Rather than trusting in mortal man, "happy" or "blessed" (NIV) is the person who relies on God for help. The remainder of the psalm then explains why this is so, showing that God-the Almighty Creator, Sustainer and Deliverer, who faithfully loves and cares for those in need, and who (in contrast to dying) lives and reigns forever-can truly be counted on.

"The LORD raises those who are bowed down" (verse 8) is essentially repeated from the previous psalm (compare 145:14). God giving food to the hungry (146:7) is also found in the previous psalm (145:15-16). Furthermore, God caring for the righteous and upending the wicked is found in both songs (145:17-20; 146:8-9)-as is the focus on God reigning forever (145:13; 146:10).

As in many psalms, God is identified with His nation of Israel . Note in verse 5 that He is the "God of Jacob," and in verse 10 that He is referred to "Your God, O Zion." Israel and Zion are the special recipients of God's attentive care and blessings. We will see this focus in the next psalm as well. Yet we should recognize, as throughout the Psalter, that these names can apply to God's spiritual people as well. Moreover the ultimate fulfillment of the help promised in both psalms will come with the future establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations-who must all become part of Israel in a spiritual sense.

## John 14

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We continue in the very night of Yeshua's betrayal where He spends His remaining hours continued in love and teaching of His disciples. He speaks some of the most reassuring words that have continued to comfort His people throughout millennia. "Let not your heart be troubled. In My Father's house are many staying places. I go to prepare a place for you."

He plainly tells us, He is The Way, The Truth, and the Life. This is The Way of Torah and this is why He tells His taught ones that in fact... they do know The Way. No one comes unto the Father but through Yeshua – He is THE DOOR. He tells us that to love Him is to keep His Commandments, the same commandments given from the beginning.

He also gives us the promise of The Helper, to stay with us forever! This is the same as the Spirit of Truth given to us so that we may worship the Father in Spirit and Truth just as He seeks.

## John 15

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Yeshua is the vine and we are the branches. Unless we stay in the vine, we have no life and will be pruned away. The evidence of our being in the vine is our fruit.

He commands us to love one another, as He has loved us. He chooses us – we do not choose Him. He makes this very plain. Be prepared to be hated by the world, for the world hated Him first and as we are His and do His commands, the world will hate us also. A servant is not greater than his master.