

IN MEDIO

Volume 1, Issue 5, November 2006

The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man Part One: Isaiah

In “Public Debates, the Extent of God’s Knowledge, and Human Will,” IN MEDIO (October 1, 2006), I presented a biblical defense for certain types and extents of public debate about Jehovah God, Jesus Christ, and teachings of the Bible, summarized my recent radio discussion with Dr. Robert Morey, and laid the groundwork for our upcoming debate on the following subjects:

1. The nature and extent of God’s knowledge.
2. Does the Bible teach that mankind has “free will”?

I agreed to this debate with Morey for the purpose of providing those interested with an opportunity to hear two sides of the debate concerning what the Bible teaches respecting these two issues. In preparation for the debate, I agreed to present additional information about my view relative to the above two issues. I also promised that in this month’s IN MEDIO article I would further discuss my and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ views on God’s knowledge, specifically, his foreknowledge. In December’s article I was to defend further my and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ view of mankind’s “free will.”

Instead of preparing separate presentations on each subject, however, I am going to present three separate articles on “The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man” with each article discussing both debate subjects in relation to the following:

- Part One: Isaiah (November 1, 2006)
Part Two: Romans (December 1, 2006)
Part Three: “The Scroll of Life ... from the Founding of the World” (January 1, 2007)

At the end of Part Three I will send Dr. Morey a proposed format for our debate and work with him in making this a reality for the benefit of those interested in what we have to say about these issues. Also for the benefit of those same people and for the sake of God and the truth about him as we have reason to believe it, I will make myself available anytime after the first of the new year to debate Dr. Morey, or anyone else, on these two subjects. Of course, as I offered to Dr. Morey, I also openly seek opportunities to defend the truth about God’s name (in English, “Jehovah”) and his and his great Son’s true identities.

For now, though, I give my attention to the Hebrew prophet Isaiah and what he records about Jehovah's knowledge, specifically, his foreknowledge, and also whether or not Isaiah teaches us anything about a "free will" for mankind.

The Historicity of the Book of Isaiah

"Historicity" here refers to the book of Isaiah's historical value. While most interested in this debate already accept the book of Isaiah as prophetic, the product of Jehovah's direction and inspiration, it is not necessary to accept it as such in order to know what it teaches about God's knowledge and the will of man. Indeed, since we cannot prove that any book in the Bible was truly "inspired" it is better to present our discussion about its historicity in terms of what we have reasons to believe. This will help bring credibility to our discussion about what Isaiah teaches by not relying on assumptions concerning its potential inspiration. It will also make this discussion easier to appreciate from a historical perspective, both for those who believe Isaiah was a prophet of Jehovah and for those who accept the book of Isaiah as merely the religious, literary product of ancient Israel.

I admit openly that I believe the book of Isaiah is of God, meaning that he has been involved to an extent known only by him in preserving its essential message. I do not claim to be able to prove this, nor do I believe it is necessary to prove as I am not relying on such an assumption for my knowledge of the text.

For purposes of my debate with Dr. Morey there will be no need to discuss the different perspectives on possible text divisions some accept respecting the authorship of the book of Isaiah (that is, whether or not there were one, two, three, or more writers of the book). We both agree (or at least it is my position) that the book of Isaiah is the product of one writer, a book that may or may not have been "adjusted" to some degree by others throughout the course of history without changing its essential message about the history, rebellion, and deliverance of the nation of Israel by Jehovah.

More important from a historical perspective is the fact that the book of Isaiah is not only well preserved in the Masoretic traditions of the Leningrad Codex (early 11th century CE), the Aleppo Codex (early 10th century CE), the early 9th century CE Petersburg Codex and the late 9th century CE Codex Cairensis, but it is also well preserved in the 4th century CE Greek Codex Vaticanus, the 4th century Greek Codex Sinaiticus, the 5th century CE Greek Codex Alexandrinus, and other early and late CE Greek, Latin, and Syriac (and even more) language versions. Most important, it is also supported by the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) of the Dead Sea Scrolls, preserving the book of Isaiah in its entirety and dated to between 150–100 BCE, the Scroll of Isaiah (1QIsa^b) containing approximately 75% of the book of Isaiah (also found among the

Dead Sea Scrolls), and it is represented by a total of 22 manuscripts from Qumran (two of which are 1QIsa^a and 1QIsa^b). Isaiah is also one of the three most frequently quoted books in the New Testament (Deuteronomy and the book of Psalms are the other two).

Commenting on the historical period of Isaiah's life and activities, the book *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), pages 1220–1221, states:

Isaiah undertook his service as a prophet during the reign of Uzziah, who began to rule in 829 B.C.E., and he continued as such into the time of Hezekiah's reign, which concluded by about 717 B.C.E. Isaiah, chapter 6, verse 1, refers to "the year that King Uzziah died" (c. 778 B.C.E.) as the time when Isaiah received the commission from Jehovah that is recorded in that chapter; though it may be that he had recorded the preceding information before that. Then in chapter 36, verse 1, reference is made to "the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah" (732 B.C.E.), when Sennacherib sent an army against Jerusalem and was turned back. In addition to giving the account of the threatened siege and the delivery of Jerusalem, Isaiah tells of Sennacherib's return to Nineveh and his assassination. (Isa 37:36–38) If this bit of historical information was written by Isaiah and was not an insertion by a later hand, it may show that Isaiah prophesied for some time after Hezekiah's 14th year. The Assyrian and Babylonian chronological records (though their reliability is questionable) seem to indicate that Sennacherib ruled some 20 years after his campaign against Jerusalem. Jewish tradition, which can also be unreliable, says that Isaiah was sawn asunder at King Manasseh's order. (Whether Paul has reference to this at Hebrews 11:37, as some believe, has not been proved.)—Isa 1:1.

With the historical period of the book placed before us and with a reasonable degree of confidence about the book of Isaiah's textual credibility, I will now consider what the book tells us about the nature and extent of God's knowledge and whether or not it teaches that mankind has "free will."

Note: By "free will" I mean that men and women have the ability to make choices; they can decide what to do on their own, though there are many factors in life that can and do influence the decisions they make. God himself can and in my opinion does often influence the affairs of men and women, which I will also show from the book of Isaiah. Further, mankind has the limitations of sin imposed upon us as an inheritance from Adam (Romans 5:12). But while we are all at times "a slave of sin" (John 8:34) and thus subject to "hurtful desires" (Colossians 3:5) which themselves produce sin (James 1:14), each of us can still choose the "way out" (1 Corinthians 10:13) which God makes available to us. The sin is our own, as is the willful desire that gives birth to it, as we will see in the book of Isaiah.

A Commentary on Isaiah's Presentation of God's Knowledge and Man's Will

I will present the teaching of Isaiah on these subjects by providing the results of a direct and complete reading of the book, from Chapter 1 through Chapter 66, with the chapter and verses that to me have the most bearing on these two issues, together with my own observations:

Isaiah 1:1–4: “The vision of Isaiah the son of A´moz that he visioned concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uz·zi´ah, Jo´tham, A´haz [and] Hez·e·ki´ah, kings of Judah” (verse 1). Israel has “left Jehovah”; “they have turned backwards” (verse 4). This appears to be the clear result of nothing more than the decisions of God’s chosen people, a product of their own “free will” and desire which are here revealed as being *against* Jehovah’s will.

Isaiah 1:5–9: Indeed, the ‘whole head and heart’ (verse 5), the complete desire of God’s people has become so wicked that unless Jehovah himself preserved a remnant from among them they would have “become just like Sodom” and “Gomorrhah” (verse 9).

Isaiah 1:10–15: Jehovah detests what his people have become so that even their prayers, offerings, and festal seasons” (verse 14) give him no delight. When they ‘make many prayers he is not listening’ (verse 15) because of the course of action they have chosen.

Isaiah 1:16–20: But Jehovah is always ready to forgive. His mercy depends entirely upon him, and he will give it to his people, conditionally:

Isaiah 1:16–17 (NWT)

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the badness of YOUR dealings from in front of my eyes; cease to do bad. Learn to do good; search for justice; set right the oppressor; render judgment for the fatherless boy; plead the cause of the widow.

Jehovah will give mercy to those who choose to ‘make themselves clean,’ who choose to ‘remove the badness of their dealings,’ who choose to ‘cease to do bad,’ who choose to ‘learn to do good,’ who choose to search for justice,’ and who choose to defend those who cannot defend themselves. These texts show that the desire for these things to occur is Jehovah’s. It also shows that the decision to do them rests with his people.

Isaiah 1:28: That is why those who choose of their own accord to ‘leave Jehovah will come to their finish.’

Isaiah 2:1–11: Isaiah receives a vision about the “final part of the days” and “Jehovah alone must be put on high in that day” (verse 11).

Isaiah 3:10–11: Isaiah again writes about the consequences of each person’s own actions when he writes that the righteous ones “will eat the fruit of their dealings” and the wicked one “the treatment [rendered] by his own hands will be rendered to him.”

Isaiah 4:3: “And it must occur that the ones remaining in Zion and the ones left over in Jerusalem will be said to be holy to him, everyone written down for life in Jerusalem.” It is reasonable to see the reference here to “written down for life” in relation to the “scroll of life of the Lamb” spoken of in Revelation 13:8 into which names are written and from which names can be ‘blotted out’ (Revelation 3:5), that is, if the one written in it does not ‘conquer and observe the Lord Jesus’ deeds down to the end’ (Revelation 2:26). More will be said about this “scroll of life” in Part Three of this study.

Isaiah 5:1–7: Israel is Jehovah’s vineyard (verse 7) that Jehovah “*kept hoping* [emphasis added] would produce grapes,” but it “gradually produced wild grapes [footnote: ‘stinking things’ or ‘putrid, rotten berries’]” (verses 2, 4). Jehovah “*kept hoping* [emphasis added] for judgment, but, look! the breaking of law” by people according to their own desire (verse 7). The Hebrew for “kept hoping” (*qawah*) can mean “*hope,*” “*endure,*” “*await*” (Koehler and Baumgartner, page 830) to “*wait,*” or “*look eagerly, for,*” (Brown, Driver, Briggs [BDB], page 875), and even to “*expect*” something (Gesenius, Tregelles trans., page 727). Jehovah ‘kept expecting’ his people, his “vineyard,” to produce good “grapes,” but instead they broke his laws. He wanted them to do certain things, and instead they chose to transgress his commands.

Isaiah 5:13: Therefore, as a result of their disobedience Jehovah decreed that Israel would “have to go into exile for their lack of knowledge”:

Isaiah 5:24 (NWT)

Therefore just as a tongue of fire eats up the stubble and into the flames mere dried grass sinks down, their very rootstock will become just like a musty smell, and their blossom itself will go up just like powder, because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of armies, and the saying of the Holy One of Israel they have disrespected.

The judgment of Jehovah is entirely due to the decisions made by his people, the ones who have “rejected” his law and who have “disrespected” his “saying.”

Isaiah 6:8–10: Because of their decisions and great transgression in breaking Jehovah’s law, God sends Isaiah to proclaim his judgment against them, to ‘make their heart unreceptive’ so that they do not “actually turn back and get healing for themselves.”

This is an excellent example of how Jehovah will ensure that his will is accomplished, even by further hardening the hearts of those who have sinned against him so that he is not receptive to any repentance they might give as they undergo the judgment from him, at least not until after his just punishment for their error has been met. For since Jehovah is “a God of acts of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness” (Nehemiah 9:17), and since his people have transgressed his law to the point of judgment, he will cause it to come about even if he must “paste their eyes together, that they may not see” (Isaiah 6:10) and to keep him from ‘feeling regret.’ Consider:

Jeremiah 18:7–10 (NWT)

‘At any moment that I may speak against a nation and against a kingdom to uproot [it] and to pull [it] down and to destroy [it], and that nation actually turns back from its badness against which I spoke, I will also feel regret over the calamity that I had thought to execute upon it. But at any moment that I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build [it] up and to plant [it], and it actually does what is bad in my eyes by not obeying my voice, I will also feel regret over the good that I said [to myself] to do for its good.’

Isaiah Chapter 7: In the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, Jehovah assures him and his people not to fear “Rezin the king of Syria” or “Pekah the son of Ramaliah” for “before the boy [Immanuel (verse 14)] will know how to reject the bad and choose the good” (verse 16) their combined efforts against Judah will fail. Here direct reference is made to the prophetic child’s ability to “reject the bad and choose the good,” something we have also inherited from Adam and from Eve along with our sin. The Hebrew text speaks of the child’s eventual ability to “know” (Hebrew: *yada*) which involves the idea of ‘*learning to know*’ and ‘*gaining knowledge of*’ (BDB, page 393), as in Genesis 3:22 where after disobeying Jehovah and eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad Adam ‘knew [form of *yada*] good and bad.’ The account in Genesis shows clearly that this was not something Jehovah wanted Adam to know at this time, but something Satan deceived Eve into doing, and something Adam chose for himself.

In the Isaiah text (7:16), the prophetic child will also be given the opportunity to know how to “reject the bad and choose the good” on his own since he, like Adam his Father, has ‘become like God knowing good and bad’ (Genes 3:22). The Hebrew word for “reject” is *ma’am* and the word for “choose” is *bachar*, and both involve choices made by the person in question (compare the use of *ma’am* [“reject”] in Isaiah 8:6 and the use of *bachar* [“choice”] in Isaiah 66:3).

All of these points again make clear the fact that those born of Adam have the ability to choose good and reject bad. It is just this capacity to decide between the two, and the extent to which they choose one or the other, that provides Jehovah with the basis for

judgment against his people. They are, and we are, all sinners, but some choose good and reject bad to differing degrees that move Jehovah to ‘turn back his anger,’ or not (Isaiah 5:25).

Isaiah 9:13: Israel has “not returned to the One striking them, and Jehovah of armies they have not sought.”

Isaiah 9:14–17: Because of this, because of their “false instruction,” because of their “wandering,” and because they let themselves “be confused” Jehovah’s “anger has not turned back.”

Isaiah Chapter 10: For these reasons Jehovah will raise the ‘Assyrian rod’ (verse 5) so that only a “remnant among them will return” (verse 22), and these “will certainly support themselves upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, in trueness” (verse 20). Even the “alien resident” will ‘attach himself to the house of Jacob’ (14:1).

Isaiah 11:1–9: Isaiah prophesies about the one who will judge in righteousness, “in the fear of Jehovah” (verses 3–4), and the resulting earth of peace that “will be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea” (verse 9).

Isaiah 11:10–12: In the day of the one “standing up as a signal’ (verse 10) Jehovah “will again *offer his hand* [emphasis added] a second time, to acquire the remnant ... from the four extremities of the earth” (verses 11, 12). The offering is real, and those who choose to accept it may do so.

Isaiah 13:9: Jehovah’s day is coming to “annihilate [the land’s] sinners out of it.” Yet, all are “sinners,” showing that only those who “practice spiritism and the fornicators and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone *liking and carrying on* [emphasis mine] a lie” (Revelation 22:15) will be removed, for Jesus is “the root and the offspring of David” (Revelation 22:16) prophesied in Isaiah 11:1–10.

The Greek for “liking and carrying on” the sins mentioned in the text from Revelation shows the elements needed beyond the mere occurrence of such sins: the person must ‘like’ (Greek: *philon* [verb], a form of *phileo*, meaning to “*have affection for*” [BAGD, 3rd ed., page 1056] the way the Pharisees had an ‘affectionate desire [Greek: *philousi*] for the prominent places at meals’ [Matthew 23:6]) and ‘carry on’ (Greek: *poion* [verb], a form of *poieo*, which can mean “*carry out, practice*” [BAGD, 3rd ed., page 840]) the sinful behavior that is not agreeable with “fruits” or “works that befit repentance” (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20). This shows that it is because of the person’s intent, or desire, that they practice such sins; they ‘like’ it.

Isaiah 13:11: And so “Jah Jehovah” (Isaiah 12:2; 26:4) will bring forth “*their own error* upon the wicked themselves” (emphasis mine). What they choose to do will come back upon them.

Isaiah 17:9–10: Israel has chosen to ‘forget the God of its salvation’ and so it “must become a detestable waste.”

Isaiah 22:19: Those no longer fit for their position Jehovah will ‘push away,’ which shows that however free man’s will may be he is still subject to Jehovah’s will.

Isaiah 24:1–6: Jehovah has and will judge the earth and all who have “bypassed the laws, changed the regulation, broken the indefinitely lasting covenant” will be “scattered.”

Isaiah 25:1–9: But those who ‘laud Jehovah’s name’ (verse 1), those who “have *hoped in him* ... he will save” (verse 9; emphasis added). God’s people today can also ‘hope in Jehovah’ and in his Son Jesus Christ with “full assurance of the hope down to the end” (Hebrews 6:11). This is a response from each person, and requires our endurance in order to “hope down to the end.”

Isaiah 28:14–19: Those ‘making a lie their refuge’ and ‘concealing themselves in falsehood’ (verse 15) will be ‘trampled’ by the “flash flood” (verse 18) of Jehovah’s justice and righteousness. No one having faith in the “precious corner of a sure foundation” will “get panicky” (verse 16). This shows the difference between those who choose to put faith in Jehovah and in his “tried stone” and those to whom ‘God lets an operation of error go’ so that “they may get to believing the lie, in order that they all may be judged because they did not believe the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:11–12).

Isaiah 29:13–16: To the ones who ‘come near to Jehovah with their lips only’ but who have in fact removed their heart far away from him,’ to those who show ‘fear toward Jehovah but which results in only men’s commandments being taught’ (verse 13), Jehovah will act and cause ‘the wisdom of their wise men to perish’ (verse 14). He will show the ones made of clay that he is the “Potter” and that he sees their “deeds [that] have occurred in a dark place” (verse 15) concerning which they will be judged. All of this, the removal of one’s heart from Jehovah, the fear of men rather than God, and the ‘dark deeds’ that are done involve choices made by each of us, or by none of us, or by some of us at one time, but not after that time has passed, because we have all at one time been among those ‘erring in our spirit’ and yet we can all still “get to know understanding” (Isaiah 29:24).

Isaiah 30:1–2:

“Woe to the stubborn sons,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “[those disposed] to carry out counsel, but not that from me; and to pour out a libation, but not with my spirit, in order to add sin to sin; those who are setting out to go down to Egypt and who have not inquired of my own mouth, to take shelter in the stronghold of Pharaoh and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt!”

If the counsel ‘carried out’ is ‘not from Jehovah,’ from whom, then, is it? From those who *choose* to “add sin to sin” and who “are setting out” to act on their own free will, “not with [Jehovah’s] spirit.” The free will of those who choose to sin against Jehovah by ‘carrying out their own counsel’ is clear.

Isaiah 30:12: It is not because of the mere act of sin that Jehovah rejects them, but because they in fact choose to ‘reject God’s word and trust in defrauding and in what is devious.’ Yet, there is always the “way out” for them (1 Corinthians 10:13), and for us all, *if we are willing*:

“By coming back and resting YOU people will be saved. YOUR mightiness will prove to be simply in keeping undisturbed and in trustfulness.” *But YOU were not willing*” [Isaiah 30:15; emphasis added].

Those who are not “willing” (Hebrew: *’avah*; “be willing, consent” [BDB, page 2]; “*to be inclined, willing, prone, to wish*” [Gesenius, page 4]; “*want to*” [Koehler and Baumgartner, page 3]) to return to Jehovah cannot give forth the ‘sound of their outcry’ and in turn be ‘shown favor’ (Isaiah 30:19). Obviously, we each have a “will” in order for us either to *be* willing or “not willing,” which Hebrew word (*’avah*) is also used in Isaiah 30:9 for those “who have been unwilling to hear the law of Jehovah.”

Isaiah 37:1–7: Jehovah will intervene in man’s affairs, especially in response to the prayers of his servants, or in response to the taunt of his enemies (verse 4). God will even ‘put a spirit in his enemy’ causing him to bring about his own destruction (verse 7), or Jehovah can ‘put his hook in their nose and his bridle between their lips’ and lead them to their end (Isaiah 37:29, 36–38).

Isaiah 37:26: It is the fault of the king of Assyria himself, for as Jehovah himself noted:

Have you not heard? From remote times it is what I will do. From bygone days I have even formed it. Now I will bring it in.

Sennacherib should have “heard” already what becomes of those who resist Jehovah, as is plain from the way God treated the Pharaoh of Egypt during the Exodus, and the kings of lands thereafter (Joshua 9:10). Jehovah’s fame spread far and wide after those days (Joshua 9:9). More than from those examples, Sennacherib should have known that Jehovah ‘formed what he would bring in’ from “bygone days,” even from the days of his

servant Abram, “And I will bless those who bless you, and him that calls down evil upon you I shall curse” (Genesis 12:3).

Isaiah 38:1–5: Of all that Jehovah decrees he knows it beginning to end. But even his own decrees are subject to change at his discretion:

“This is what Jehovah has said, ‘Give commands to your household, *for you yourself will indeed die and will not live.*’” At that Hez·e·ki´ah turned his face to the wall and began to pray to Jehovah and to say: “I beseech you, O Jehovah, remember, please, how I have walked before you in truthfulness and with a complete heart, and what was good in your eyes I have done.” And Hez·e·ki´ah began to weep profusely. And the word of Jehovah now occurred to Isaiah, saying: “Go, and you must say to Hez·e·ki´ah, ‘This is what Jehovah the God of David your forefather has said: “I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. *Here I am adding onto your days fifteen years*” [emphasis added].’”

Even though Jehovah decreed that Hezekiah “will indeed die and will not live,” Hezekiah’s tears softened the face of Jehovah and moved him to allow Hezekiah to live longer than he had originally decreed. Jehovah is a loving God who loves his servants, and who listens to them. The end did not change (Hezekiah died), only how long it took to get there did change at Jehovah’s decree, which he was happy to do for the sake of his servant. Thus, the future does not unfold with certainty for every detail; it is subject to adjustment and change based on the choices and actions of Jehovah and others to whom he gives attention. But no adjustment or change, desired or not desired by Jehovah, will ultimately cause his purpose to be unfulfilled, not even the addition of fifteen years to a person’s life can change it.

Isaiah 40:13–14: No one can teach Jehovah anything. Though he lets some events unfold before him, whether it is his people’s “own error” (Isaiah 13:11), or ‘carrying out their own counsel’ (Isaiah 30:1–2), Adam’s naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19), or the actual appearance of things God creates (such as physical “light” [Genesis 1:3–4]), no one can be his “man of counsel”:

Who has taken the proportions of the spirit of Jehovah, and who as his man of counsel can make him know anything? With whom did he consult together that one might make him understand, or who teaches him in the path of justice, or teaches him knowledge, or makes him know the very way of real understanding?

No one, is the answer. Jehovah is himself the source of his own knowledge, and he will find out on his own what is to occur, as with the examples noted above. No one “teaches him knowledge” or “makes him know” anything. He knows or will find out everything that can be known on his own, without the aid of anyone. He knows even the “generations from the start” (Isaiah 41:4).

Isaiah 41:8–20: Jehovah has ‘chosen Israel’ as a people, physically and spiritually (Romans 11:2, 25–26). Even though many have chosen to leave him, “the remnant that are to be found” (Isaiah 37:4) will fulfill Jehovah’s word. It is these Jehovah has “not rejected” (verse 9). It is these Jehovah will ‘take by the right hand’ and “help” (verses 13 and 14; compare 42:6). Jehovah “shall not leave them” (verse 17). But the people must “see and know and pay heed and have insight at the same time, that Jehovah” has ‘answered them’ (verses 17–20).

Isaiah 41:26:

“Who has told anything from the start, that we may know, or from times past, that we may say, ‘He is right’? Really there is no one telling. Really there is no one causing [one] to hear. Really there is no one that is hearing any sayings of YOU men.”

Jehovah is a real God. This can be proven by his foretelling of events long in advance. Whether the events involve Israel of old, the foretelling of the one who will “crush” the “head” of Satan, “the original serpent” (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 20:2, 10), or the foretelling of world events and conditions taking place right now such as the time when mankind would be saying “Peace and security!” (1 Thessalonians 5:3; which is prominently featured on the United Nation’s web site [<http://www.un.org/peace/>]), what Jehovah foretells will take place:

Isaiah 42:8–9 (NWT)

“I am Jehovah. That is my name ... The first things—here they have come, but new things I am telling out. Before they begin to spring up, I cause YOU people to hear [them].”

Isaiah 42:19–22; 43:5–7, 21: Though Jehovah’s servant whom he has chosen (42:1) has become “deaf” and “blind” (42:18), even though they have neither ‘kept watching nor kept listening’ (42:20), Jehovah has “taken delight” in a remnant “for the sake of his righteousness” (42:21; compare Isaiah 11:11). It is these whom, in spite of being a “people plundered and pillaged” (42:22), Jehovah “formed for [himself], that they should recount the praise of [him]” (43:21).

Even though his people have all sinned against him, his purpose will come to be even as he promised Abram and his people for generations thereafter. Nothing can stop Jehovah’s purposes, for he can always “show mercy to the one to whom [he] may show mercy” (Exodus 33:19). Thus, the remnant of his choosing, that he “created for his own glory” (43:7), will be saved. It is not because they deserve it; it is not because they have always done according to his will; it is because he is God and because he is the one who chooses those who will be his “witnesses” (43:10):

Isaiah 43:25 (NWT)

“I—I am the One that is wiping out your transgressions for my own sake, and your sins I shall not remember.”

If it were not for Jehovah’s mercy, none could continue. But for his own sake he will let some continue, and ‘because he has found delight in them’ (Psalm 18:19; compare Numbers 14:8; 2 Chronicles 9:8; Psalm 5:4; Isaiah 56:4), all those who did not ‘wickedly depart from their God’ (Psalm 18:21).

Isaiah 44:1–8, 21–22: Jehovah “long ago” (verse 7) “appointed the people,” Israel, his servant (verse 1; compare Genesis 17:8). He has “kept helping [them] even from the belly” (verse 2) so that they should come to see it, and know that he is God. Thus, they are his “witnesses” (verse 8) who in spite of their rebelliousness against him have not been “forgotten on [his] part” (verse 21), that is, all those who “return to [him]” (verse 22).

Isaiah 45:11: Because he is a living God, a God of prophecy and truth, Jehovah can tell his people “about the things that are coming.” He knows the future because he knows both what he will bring to pass (see Isaiah 46:11, below) and what the thoughts and hearts of men are, even as he told Moses concerning his people, Israel, “I well know *their inclination that they are developing today* before I bring them into the land about which I have sworn” (Deuteronomy 31:21; emphasis added).

Isaiah 46:3, 10–11: It is the “entire remnant” (verse 3, NWT footnote reading) that Jehovah has “carried from the womb” and these are the ones who know that it is Jehovah who is “telling from the beginning the finale” (verse 10), for he both ‘spoke it and will bring it in’ (verse 11).

Isaiah 48:8–11, 17–18: Even though they have all been ‘transgressors from the belly’ (verse 8):

For the sake of my name I shall check my anger, and for my praise I shall restrain myself toward you that there may be no cutting you off. Look! I have refined you, but not in [the form of] silver. I have made choice of you in the smelting furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake I shall act, for how could one let oneself be profaned [verses 9–11]?

Jehovah has had to ‘check his anger’ and to refine those who have chosen to transgress, not for their sakes, but for his glory, which will result in their undeserved salvation. These are the ones who have ‘benefited themselves’ by ‘paying attention to his commandments’ (verses 17–18).

Isaiah 50:5: Those who will receive the mercy of Jehovah are the ones who choose not to “turn in the opposite direction”:

The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself has opened my ear, and I, for my part, was not rebellious. I did not turn in the opposite direction [Isaiah 50:5].

Here we have both the act of God and the will of man, together. Jehovah may ‘open our ears’ but do we ‘for our part’ not act “rebellious”? When Jehovah comes to us, do we receive him or “turn in the opposite direction”? Or have we perhaps turned from him without realizing it by ‘teaching men’s commandments in place of fearing him’ (Isaiah 29:13)?

However it could be done, Isaiah 50:5 shows that it can be done. Though Jehovah may act to make one receptive by ‘opening our ears,’ we can rebel against him. We can “turn in the opposite direction.” It is our decision. It is an exercise of our own free will.

Isaiah 53:6: But our nature is inherently sinful (Romans 5:12), so we “have all of us wandered about,” though at the same time it is “each one to his own way that we have turned.” This again shows that while we are sinners by nature the sins we commit are of our own doing. We can be thankful, however, for “Jehovah himself has caused the error of us all to meet up with that one” (the Messiah, the one “pierced for our transgression” [Isaiah 53:5; compare John 19:34]).

Isaiah 54:7–8; 55:3, 6–7: There is no indication that Jehovah wanted to be separated from man until after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 1:26–31; 3:17–18). There is no indication that Jehovah ever wanted to be separated from his chosen people, Israel, either. Though he left them “for a little moment” (54:7), he will “have mercy upon” them (54:8) if they ‘listen and keep their soul alive’ (55:3). But ‘listening’ involves more than a simple *hearing*:

Isaiah 43:25 (NWT)

Search for Jehovah, YOU people, while he may be found. Call to him while he proves to be near. *Let the wicked man leave his way*, and the harmful man his thoughts; and *let him return to Jehovah*, who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will forgive in a large way [emphasis added].

Jehovah will have mercy upon us all, and “forgive in a large way,” if we not only search for him but ‘*leave our way* and our harmful thoughts.’ Again, we cannot do this perfectly. We cannot earn God’s mercy. But he will give it to us if he delights in us and if we choose to “return to Jehovah.”

Isaiah 55:11: Jehovah’s word cannot fail. We can fail him. We can “turn in the opposite direction” (Isaiah 50:5), but that will not stop his purpose from being fulfilled:

For just as the pouring rain descends, and the snow, from the heavens and does not return to that place, unless it actually saturates the earth and makes it produce and sprout, and seed is actually given to the sower and bread to the eater, so my word that goes forth from my mouth will prove to be. It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which I have sent it.

There is an interesting parallel between the “word that goes forth” from Jehovah’s mouth here and Jesus’ illustration of the sower. After quoting Isaiah 6:9 and Isaiah 44:18 (both discussed above), Jesus says:

Matthew 13:18–23 (NWT)

“YOU, then, listen to the illustration of the man that sowed. Where anyone hears the word of the kingdom but does not get the sense of it, the wicked one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart; this is the one sown alongside the road. As for the one sown upon the rocky places, this is the one hearing the word and at once accepting it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself but continues for a time, and after tribulation or persecution has arisen on account of the word he is at once stumbled. As for the one sown among the thorns, this is the one hearing the word, but the anxiety of this system of things and the deceptive power of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. As for the one sown upon the fine soil, this is the one hearing the word and getting the sense of it, who really does bear fruit and produces, this one a hundredfold, that one sixty, the other thirty.

Here we see that a person may ‘hear the word’ but that which is ‘sown in his heart’ can be ‘snatched away’ because of the person’s own failure to ‘get the sense of it,’ leaving him or her vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. Neither Jehovah nor Jesus failed in speaking the word so that it was heard, nor in sowing it in the person’s heart. The person him- or herself simply did not ‘get the sense of it,’ so that the “Devil comes and takes the word away from their hearts in order that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

It is also clear from this illustration that yet another person may ‘hear the word’ and even ‘accept it with joy!’ But because of not having “root *in himself*” he continues only for a time before he is stumbled through persecution and tribulation, showing that he or she was not willing to “suffer for the sake of righteousness” (1 Peter 3:14).

Still another person may ‘hear the word’ spoken but is ‘choked’ by the pressures of the world and the “deceptive power of riches,” so that “he becomes unfruitful.”

Finally, it is clear that the ‘the word that goes forth’ also lands upon “fine soil,” and the one represented by it ‘hears the word,’ ‘gets the sense of it,’ and “really does bear fruit.”

In all cases Jehovah's word, "the word of the kingdom" spoken by God's Son, Jesus Christ, 'does not return to Jehovah without results.' Indeed, it is successful in all instances, for it provides each one with the opportunity to hear, to 'have our ears opened,' and either to listen or to "turn in the opposite direction" (Isaiah 50:5).

Isaiah 56:1-4: Jehovah's "word that goes forth" includes his desire for us to "keep justice" and "do what is righteous," so that we might be among those who "have *chosen* [Hebrew: form of *bachar*] what [Jehovah] has delighted in" (verse 4). Jehovah 'delights in' our *choices!*

Bachar is a Hebrew verb that can mean "examine," "choose," "prefer" (Koehler and Baumgartner, page 117), as when God himself chose Israel (Isaiah 41:8; 43:10), which clearly involves the will of the person doing the 'choosing' or 'examining.'

Isaiah 56:6, 11: We can choose to "love the name of Jehovah" (verse 6), or we can 'all of us turn to our own way' (verse 11).

Isaiah 57:17: We can 'keep walking as a renegade in the way of our own heart.'

Isaiah 58:2: Or we can choose to be among those who "day after day" seek Jehovah, 'and in the knowledge of his ways express delight.'

Isaiah 58:9-10, 13: To fulfill his purpose Jehovah will "remove the yoke bar" from his people and "satisfy the soul that is being afflicted" (verses 9, 10). But even after all this they must "turn back [their] foot as regards doing [their] own delights" on the sabbath; they must "glorify it rather than doing [their] own ways, rather than finding what delights [them]" (verse 13). This involves choice on the part of those shown mercy.

Isaiah 59:1-7: Israel must choose God's ways 'rather than their own' (58:13) for it is their "own sins [that] have caused the concealing of [his] face" (59:2); it is their "own lips [that] have spoken falsehood" (59:3); it is "their own feet [that] keep running to sheer badness":

Isaiah 59:13 (NWT)

There have been transgressing and a denying of Jehovah; and there was a moving back from our God, a speaking of oppression and revolt, a conceiving and a muttering of words of falsehood from the very heart.

Those who 'deny Jehovah' and who 'move back from God' by "speaking of oppression and revolt" and by 'muttering words of falsehood' do so "from the very heart." It is not God's will. It is man's will by which these things are done.

Isaiah 59:18: Thus, it is “in accordance with [their] dealings [that] he will reward correspondingly.”

Isaiah 61:8: Jehovah will “give their wages in trueness, and an indefinitely lasting covenant [he] will conclude toward them.”

Isaiah 61:11: “Jehovah will cause the sprouting of righteousness and of praise in front of all the nations.”

Isaiah 63:9–14: Jehovah has always shown “love” and “compassion” to his people, even ‘lifting them up and carrying them all the days of long ago’ (verse 9). Yet, “they themselves rebelled and made his holy spirit feel hurt” (verse 10). Still he “led [his] people in order to make a beautiful name for [his] own self” (verse 14). Such mercy was surely not dependent upon those who rebelled against Jehovah, but upon the one who chose to show them mercy, God.

Isaiah 64:4: But even those whom he shows mercy must ‘keep in expectation of him.’

Isaiah 64:7–8: Even though there have been times when “no one [was] calling upon [his] name” (verse 7), man is but “clay” in the hands of the “Potter”; we are “all of us the work of [his] hand” (verse 8). Jehovah not only “shaped” each of us from the womb by clothing us with “skin and flesh,” with “bones and sinews” (Job 10:8–11), but even “all its parts were down in writing” (Psalm 139:16). That is why Jehovah could say to Jeremiah:

Isaiah 59:13 (NWT)

Before I was forming you in the belly I knew you, and before you proceeded to come forth from the womb I sanctified you. Prophet to the nations I made you.

Jehovah knew that Jeremiah would respond and be his prophet, because that is how the “Potter” molded the “clay.” And so it is with each of us: Jehovah knows us! He knows what we will do! Jehovah knows us all, for he made us all, and he examines us all, inside and out (Psalm 11:5; 26:2; Jeremiah 11:20; 1 Corinthians 4:4–5).

We act in accordance with how we were made, and Jehovah himself takes care to form us so that, in his “image” (Genesis 1:26), we walk in accordance with the “law [that] is within [our] inward parts” (Psalm 40:8). We are not clay figurines without a will. We are made out of “clay” and “dust” (Job 10:9), but we can even be so bold as to say to our Maker, “He did not make me”; or, “He showed no understanding” (Isaiah 29:16). This Jehovah likens to the human son who says to his father (Isaiah 45:9–10), “What do you become father to?” and to his mother, “What are you in birth pains with?”

Yes, we have a will alright, one that is tainted by our own desire so that we even refuse to listen to the one who made us:

Isaiah 65:12 (NWT)

I called, but YOU did not answer; I spoke, but YOU did not listen; and YOU kept doing what was bad in my eyes, and *the thing in which I took no delight YOU chose* [emphasis added].

The “clay” has ignored the “Potter.” The thing made has “*chosen*” (Hebrew: form of *bachar*, as in Isaiah 56:4) that in which the Potter has ‘taken no delight.’

Because of having this free will to rebel against the one who made us, and in order for Jehovah to ensure the fulfillment of his promises and to glorify himself, he will assume the role of Potter even more so than during the time of our being “woven in the lowest parts of the earth” (Psalm 139:15). He will shape and mold people and entire nations during their life in order to affect the thinking of his people, and to cause them to turn back to him and *choose* to respond to his work:

Jeremiah 18:1-12 (NWT)

The word that occurred to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying: “Rise up, and you must go down to the house of the potter, and there I shall cause you to hear my words.” And I proceeded to go down to the house of the potter, and there he was doing work upon the potter’s wheels. And the vessel that he was making with the clay was spoiled by the potter’s hand, and he turned back and went making it into another vessel, just as it looked right in the eyes of the potter to make. And the word of Jehovah continued to occur to me, saying: “‘Am I not able to do just like this potter to YOU people, O house of Israel?’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘Look! As the clay in the hand of the potter, so YOU are in my hand, O house of Israel. At any moment that I may speak against a nation and against a kingdom to uproot [it] and to pull [it] down and to destroy [it], and that nation actually *turns back from its badness* against which I spoke, *I will also feel regret over the calamity* that I had thought to execute upon it. But at any moment that I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build [it] up and to plant [it], and it actually *does what is bad in my eyes by not obeying my voice, I will also feel regret over the good that I said* [to myself] to do for its good.’ “And now say, please, to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, ‘This is what Jehovah has said: “Here *I am forming against YOU a calamity* and thinking against YOU a thought. *Turn back, please, each one from his bad way, and make YOUR ways and YOUR dealings good.*”’” And they said: “It is hopeless! For *after our own thoughts we shall walk*, and we are going to carry out each one the stubbornness of his bad heart” [emphasis added].

Jehovah can do good or he can bring “calamity” and he can even feel regret over the choice to bring either one, depending on how those affected react. But there is no

'decree from all eternity' binding the hands of "clay." Unlike any human 'potter' Jehovah's work has made us such that we can "turn back" and make him even "feel regret" by 'making our ways and our dealings good.' Unfortunately, not all choose to do so.

Isaiah 66:2: And so it is that Jehovah will instead look "to the one afflicted and contrite in spirit and [those] trembling at [his] word."

Isaiah 66:3-4: Jehovah has extended his hand. He has "spoke, but [they] did not answer," (Isaiah 65:12). He even 'opens their ear' (Isaiah 50:5), but "they are also the ones that have *chosen* [Hebrew: form of *bachar*; emphasis mine] their own ways, and in their disgusting things their very soul has taken a delight" (verse 3). For the reason that they *chose* "their own way," Jehovah will himself "choose [Hebrew: form of *bachar*] ways of ill-treating them...for the reason that [he] called, but there was no one answering" (verse 4).

Isaiah 66:5: There are, however, those "trembling at [his] word" (Isaiah 66:2). To these Jehovah speaks, thus:

Isaiah 66:5 (NWT)

"YOUR brothers that are hating YOU, that are excluding YOU by reason of my name, said, 'May Jehovah be glorified!' He must also appear with rejoicing on YOUR part, and they are the ones that will be put to shame" [NWT].

Isaiah 66:22: And in the end Jehovah's purpose, his promise, will come to pass. Nothing can stop it. Nothing can change it. Indeed: "Even if it should delay [Hebrew: *mahut*], keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late [Hebrew: '*achar*']" (Habakkuk 2:3):

Isaiah 66:22 (NWT)

"For just as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making are standing before me," is the utterance of Jehovah, "so the offspring of YOU people and the name of YOU people will keep standing."

Conclusion

The book of Isaiah is rich in the history of the people of ancient Israel. They were a people whom Jehovah God chose among all the nations, a people enslaved, but freed by Jehovah that they might bring him glory as he unwinds the destructive power of sin and death, with a bringing of death to nothing in view (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Death entered the world through the choice of one man: Adam (Romans 5:12). So, too, the people chosen by Jehovah through his “friend,” Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23), had to make choices throughout their history. Because so many of them decided to “turn in the opposite direction” (Isaiah 50:5) and because they “*chose* their own ways, and in their disgusting things their very soul has taken a delight,” Jehovah himself “chose ways of ill-treating them ... for the reason that [he] called, but there was no one answering” (Isaiah 66:3–4).

Nevertheless, the free will of man and the choices God’s people made in ‘rebellious and making his holy spirit feel hurt’ (Isaiah 63:10) have not resulted in failure for God. Jehovah is the one “telling from the beginning the finale,” for he both ‘spoke it and will bring it in’ (Isaiah 46:10–11). His word “will not return to [him] without results, but it will certainly do that in which [he has] delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which [he has] sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

The “word” spoken was first one of blessing (Genesis 1:26), then one of promise and condemnation (Genesis 3:15–19), then one of blessing and hope (Genesis 12:1–3). They will all come true! The “remnant” of Israel (Isaiah 1:9; 10:22; 11:11; 37:4; 46:3 [footnote]) belongs to the promised ‘seed of the woman’ prophesied in Genesis 3:15, by means of whom “all the families of the ground will certainly bless themselves” according to the blessing and the hope given to Abram (later, Abraham).

It is this blessing and hope that is further revealed in Jesus Christ, and in the writings of his early followers. One of those early followers was the apostle Paul. One of his early writings was a book “to the Romans.” It is to that book we will look in Part Two of our discussion on the knowledge of God and the will of man.

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(REVISED April 19, 2008)*

***This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**