

**Title: “Mind the gap”**

**Purpose:** To consider how large the gap is between the wonderful vision of “Zion future” and his people today.

**Introduction**

It was just one year ago that the BBC reported the case of a lady who had been widowed for 5 years and for whom just 3 words formed a living link to her husband.

Whenever this widow travelled around London by Underground she would always try and make sure that her journey would go via Embankment.

You see her husband, Oswald Lawrence, was a one-time actor and had been the voice on the Northern Line and in particular one announcement that London Underground were now only playing at that one station. Maybe you can figure it out:

\*\*\*\*\* **PLAY RECORDING of “Mind the gap”** \*\*\*\*\*

This morning

This morning, as we come to the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Isaiah, I want to give you a vision and the same 3 words as a living link.

Let me read the opening 5 verses, just to refresh our memories: \*\*\* **READ Isaiah 2v1-5** \*\*\*

- (Verse 1) Now we can see that Isaiah's divine revelation is continuing - what we have in front of us is not coming out of Isaiah's imagination - as we know from **2 Peter 1v20-21** "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."
- Q. So what do we have in these key opening verses? Well it is clearly a vision of the future, something that is going to take place (verse 2) “in the last days”.

Q. So when are the last days? Well, from the NT, we learn that this is a period of time that had it's beginning in the days of Jesus Christ and that they will only come to an end when Christ returns a second time.

- Let me say when we come to talk about the future we need to avoid various extremes:
  - either we don't really like to talk or think about it at all (and I think this extreme is one that Satan must like, because at all costs he would like to “future-proof” us so we do not have this living-link to the future at all) – and by the way, if Satan ever reminds you of **the sin in your past**, just remind Satan of **the sentence in his future!!**
  - alternatively we like nothing more than to talk of end times things – and of course this is equally unhelpful and unbalanced because we need to live in today and work today.

- a third extreme is to consider the future as something that has already arrived today, it is dragging too much of that which is still future into the present (we over-realize future things) (one example might be in the area of healing – we feel that what God promises for then must apply now also)

- the reverse of this is to think that God’s revelation of the future is exactly that and should have no real application to today at all – it is there in heaven just like pie in the sky.

Ok, enough just to set the scene.

What we’re going to do is look at 2 sections providing 2 pictures and 2 applications and then forge a living link with 3 easy to remember words:

So then:

## 1] Picture #1 – (what I’m going to call) “the future of Zion” (Verses 1-5)

What a picture – and I want to point out 3 things that verses 2-4 very graphically show us:

### 1. FIRST is: **Zion’s prominence**

In the ancient world, luxurious gardens and high and remote mountain tops were thought to be the exclusive domain of the gods. And the gods were generally associated with particular mountains – so, for example, the Greek god Zeus was connected with Mount Olympus

It is for this reason that we read about all the trouble that Israel and Judah had with people wanting to attend the “high places”.

It is very interesting that when you think of Jerusalem, this is, by comparison today a very small mountain – really nothing much to write home about BUT as:

Isaiah 2 verse 2 says: “In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as **chief among the mountains**; it will be raised above the hills..”

So there is coming a day, so we learn, that Zion is going to lose its insignificance.

It is interesting to see Jesus’ take on this one. He says in John 12 verse 32 that “...when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” – the word used in the Greek version of Isaiah 2v2 is the same one for “lifted up” here in John 12 and the end result Jesus says is that there is going to be a DRAWING OF PEOPLE.

And this leads us to a second aspect of this picture – no just 1) Zion’s prominence but also:

### 2. SECONDLY - **Zion’s pull**

God’s exalted Kingdom is going to exert **a terrific pull**, it is going to be:

- like **a massive magnet**
- like **a honey pot**

and **Verse 2** describes “nations streaming to it”.

Things are not always going to be the way they are today, no not at all.

Things are going to change and Christianity is going to be the sole mountain and **people are going to be experiencing a great pull** – and it will even be a bit like a great wide stream going up a mountain – and normally streams don’t do that but in the last days, surprising things will be happening.

There is nothing like meditating on this great word picture of Zion in the last days to blow away the “**depressed misery**” of our own day when we say things like “O woe is me, woe is the church in the UK, where congregations are dwindling, where church buildings are being vacated and sold as domestic dwellings and gastro-pubs.”

NO! NOT ANY MORE, this is a temporary trend.

**The WINTER of today’s discontent will melt away and become a GLORIOUS SUMMER!**

Man made this attempt – Babel

As we consider this glorious word picture of Zion, we should remember another OT city – one by the name of Babel.

This was man’s attempt, of course, and it was a terrible failure. Man has always had a yearning to manufacture its own UTOPIA. And this is very natural in a sense because from the beginning man grew up in a beautiful garden knowing the intimate and unbroken joys of fellowship with God the Father and this was a situation of real UTOPIA.

But man’s attempts always end in CONFUSION, they always end up creating a DYSTOPIA where instead of:

- HARMONY & UNITY, we get

- HARM & UNIFORMITY, some sort of totalitarian entity, a situation where people would stream out if they could (somewhere like modern-day North Korea would be a good example).

Now one question we should ask ourselves is:

Q. What was it that they were streaming up to Jerusalem for?

**Verse 3** tells us **“He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”**

A rhythm here

See the **rhythm?** - *The people stream in when the word faithfully goes out.*

Remember what Paul said about that young church at Thessalonica – **“that the word rang out from them...”**

This entices us to keep on sharing the pure Word of God – because as **Psalm 19** says, the Word of God is: **perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, sure** and **altogether righteous**. It is a word which:

**revives the soul, makes the simple wise, gives joy to the heart, gives light to the eyes, stimulates the fear of the Lord.** The word of God is: **more precious than gold** and **much sweeter than honey.**

Q. Are you convinced about that?

Well – if you are, then there is a remarkable power in our deep-held convictions. People are always struck by the convictions that people hold, convictions are what make people tick and even if they might not initially understand certain convictions, they are forced to acknowledge that for you at least they are powerful and maybe they will be forced to reflect and then see what you see.

### 3. THE THIRD THING is - **Zion's peace**

It is estimated in today's world that:

The **no. of countries** involved in wars is: 60  
& the **no. of Militias and separatist groups** involved are: 523

We turn on the television in the evening and you can be sure we will hear about:

- car bombs in Iraq
- atrocities in Syria
- tribal cleansing in the Central African Republic etc. etc. etc.

#### **How discouraging it all is!**

And yet the day is approaching when Zion is going to become **PROMINENT**, when its **PULL** will be felt and when **PEACE** will become an incredible REALITY.

#### Greenham Peace Women – Songbook #9

You will all have heard of the Greenham Peace Women – I wonder if you know that they had a songbook and song #9 is called The vine and the fig tree – and it goes like this:

*And everyone neath their vine and fig tree  
shall live in peace and unafraid,  
Everyone neath their vine and fig tree  
shall live in peace and unafraid.*

*And into ploughshares beat their swords  
Nations shall learn war no more.  
And into ploughshares beat their swords  
Nations shall learn war no more.*

The United Nations has a garden, and there are various statues that have been donated by different countries and Russia, in 1959 donated one called “Swords into Ploughshares” – based on this wonderful ideal.

The fact is, however, and we must never forget this – that this maybe **MAN'S IDEAL**, but it only comes and will only ever come through the work of the **IDEAL MAN**.

#### A wonderful picture

So this is a truly wonderful picture of the still future city of God – Prominent, exerting a strong PULL and bringing a thorough-going PEACE -

BUT (and there IS, so often, a BUT) there exists a GAP, a wide GULF between:

- the IDEAL and the REAL
- the FUTURE and the PRESENT
- the NOW and the NOT YET

#### An attachment

Q. I don't know how many of you use email?

I guess quite a few of us do – and probably on a daily basis – and from time to time you send things called ATTACHMENTS (maybe a photo or perhaps another electronic document) – and you know what happens – you can guess what I'm going to say – the email goes something like this:

Dear so-and-so, I am just sending through that photo of our new grand-daughter, it's attached – isn't she lovely, she got my eyes don't you think etc. etc. – you hit the send button – and of course you have FORGOTTEN THE ATTACHMENT and it is very important here in Isaiah 2 that we GET THE ATTACHMENTS – and there are 2 of them “attached” to the 2 sections.

So let's get our FIRST ATTACHMENT and in essence these “attachments” carry a lot of the PAYLOAD of what we are meant to be taking away with us.

#### Verse 5 – attachment #1

So have a look at Verse 5 it reads:

“Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

It is as though God is saying through Isaiah – here's MY GREAT MANIFESTO and stage one, in the fulfilment of it, is that this should become MANIFEST – “in my people”.

It is a stirring appeal to His people to walk in the full light of this revelation and knowledge – the word picture that has just been painted is NOT meant to be taken as a typical modern day painting masterpiece, which would be hung up in a museum of art where aficionado's go and gawp – no! this is meant to be acted upon – it is meant to STIR US UP.

#### Micah 4v1-5

At this point it is probably worthwhile for me to direct your attention to a parallel passage, very briefly – and that passage is **Micah chapter 4 and the first 5 verses** (it's p. 932 in the blue church bibles)

\*\*\*\*\* READ Micah 4 verses 1-5 \*\*\*\*\*

And notice here how this same essential vision IS NOT JUST LEFT HANGING – like a CONSTABLE or a VAN GOGH – it is followed up by AN ATTACHMENT -> Q. What is that attachment?

Well it is there in **Micah 4 verse 5** and it says:

**“All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.”**

So I wonder:

Q. How do you see, how do you respond to Isaiah 2 and these opening verses?

Q. Are they to you a MASTERPIECE or are they a MANIFESTO summoning you to a RESPONSE?

You see the reality is that there is a GREAT GAP between this FUTURE IDEAL and the PRESENT REALITY – a gap that should not be anything like as wide as it is – and that, of course, is where the challenge lies for us – we must ask ourselves the question (whatever else we do or don't learn this morning):

Q. How big is the gap for me?

And hopefully as we move into the second half of the passage this will be drawn out somewhat.

Picture #1 – “the future of Zion” now

## **2] Picture #2 – And “the failure of Zion” (Verses 6-22)**

The chapter divides in two just as the NIV has it with the section headings that it inserts – and so we are now looking at the section called “The Day of the LORD” which is from **Verse 6 through to the end of the chapter at verse 22.**

Now, although we are moving to a new section, we need to just be aware that the 2 sections are STAPLED TOGETHER by a little Hebrew conjunction which is the first word of Verse 6 and so the more literal version all read “FOR you have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob.”

The reason that this first very **+ve summons** is being given is because they are currently a long way from where they should rightly be.

A truly huge GAP or DISCONNECT is present.

Q. So, #1 - what is the problem? (And this is given us in verses 6-8)

And then we'll look at what the outcome is going to be, if there's no real change (and that is there in verses 9-21).

**i) The PROBLEM:**

So first of all the problem as God through Isaiah outlines it – let me read the verses:

\*\*\* READ Verses 6-8 \*\*\*

You probably spotted that alternation between: “they are FULL of this” and “there is NO END of that...”

it’s a poetic way of saying that things are really bad. They have really SUNK themselves into various things right up to their waist and beyond.

- they’ve got superstitions from the East AND practice divination (that is sorcery) like the Philistines (if you’re wondering why Isaiah particularly alights on the Philistines – it is simply because they live at the far West).

There is a lot of irony here – in God’s good design all the nations are streaming to Zion – in Israel’s plan they are all streaming to the nations!!

- further - they are loaded with silver and gold
- not only that - they have horses and chariots
- AND, JUST TO TOP IT OFF – they have idols, objects of worship aplenty!

**Alec Motyer**, (who’s written a very comprehensive 500 page commentary on Isaiah) – draws out a helpful set of **5 pretty telling contrasts** between **Verses 1-4** (the coming Zion) and **Verses 6-9** (God’s own present people):

- firstly - the world is drawn to Zion (v2) YET God’s people choose to conform to the world (v6)
- second - the world seeks spiritual benefit (v3) BUT Israel heaps up material wealth (v7)
- third - the consequence of coming to Zion is world peace (v4) HOWEVER Israel is full of armaments (v7)
- fourth - the world seeks to know the true God and commits itself beforehand to obey him (v3) SO WHAT DO THEY DO - God’s people are busy inventing their own gods (v8)
- lastly - the world is received before the Lord’s tribunal/His Judgement seat (v4) WHEREAS God’s people are abandoned and denied forgiveness (v6 & v9)

And of course should not be so quick to distance ourselves from this rather GRATING CONTRAST:

Think about how you go about SECURING your own life.

- Q. Do you run after celebrities, sports heroes, human icons – following their latest exploits and fashions, eagerly gobbling up all the latest **gos** and all the up-to-the-minute **pics**?
- Q. Do you feel that in a very real way your **self-worth** is related to your **nett-worth**!
- Q. Are we simply “aping” the fads and fashions of our day?  
Q. Seeking, at all cost, to be “culturally” relevant?

Let’s go on to look at the outcome which is spelled out here:

**ii) The OUTCOME:**

If the DAY OF THE LORD is going to be a wonderful day, it is also going to usher in a period of JUDGEMENT.

And the truth is that judgement begins with the house of God – the OT prophets make this clear and also Peter in:

**1 Peter 4 Verse 17** says: “For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

### Terrific vs Terrifying

One thing that you may well have spotted is that if the first part of Isaiah chapter 2 is truly TERRIFIC then the second part is just as truly TERRIFYING.

There are 2 sets of refrains used from verses 10-21 (one comes x3 and the other twice). The one that is used three times over speaks of the:

“dread of the LORD and the splendour of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth.”

And actually this would have carried quite a bit of weight with them because (as **Zechariah 14v5** informs us) “You will flee as you fled from **the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.**”

This refrain speaks of dread and of the earth shaking because of God’s sheer majesty.

The other refrain, which comes twice, it is there in **Verse 11** and **Verse 17** says:

“The **arrogance** of man will be brought low and the **pride** of men humbled; the Lord alone will be **exalted** in that day...”

And you can see how this is vividly pictured with such poetic force.

(This is one of the things about Isaiah and much of the prophetic materials that we have in our OTs that they are communicated not in simple prose but in poetic forms and imagery.)

\*\*\* READ Verses 12-16 \*\*\*

## CONCLUSION

Let me try and wrap things up and draw things together.

We have been treated, here in **Isaiah chapter 2** – to a pair of amazing word pictures, 2 matching visions:

- we have - a wonderful vision of Zion future (and we sung earlier that great **John Newton** hymn: “*Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God...*”) a truly breath-taking and a thorough inviting vision
- now along with that, we have, a rather shocking vision of how **present Zion** compares.

By way of how we are to make sense of these - God (through his prophet Isaiah) has added



ATTACHMENTS – 2 attachments:

- ATTACHMENT #1 – was there in Verse 5 “Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”
- ATTACHMENT#2 – this we have in Verse 22 (the final verse) – and again it is absolutely key:

Verse 22 “Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?”

This attachment matches the first – it is expressed in **-ve form** whereas the first one was expressed in **+ve form**.

**Richard Lovelace** in his timeless classic: **“The dynamics of spiritual life”** writes:

*“When men’s hearts are not full of God, they become full of the world around like a sponge full of clear water that has been squeezed empty and thrown into a mud puddle”*

Either way around we are all SPONGES – this is our inalienable nature – we ABSORB things:

Q. But what are we absorbing?

Q. How big a gap is there between our PERSONAL PICTURE OF ZION and the true one?

Ploughing a straight furrow

The reason we need this wonderful vision of the destination of all things is because it helps us plough a straight furrow in very uncertain times.

We can so easily be swept up with those around us who are ploughing their own ditches but without any longer term vision.

If we are the people of Zion – we are given a true view – we are told the end from the beginning and we fix our eyes upon it.

We:

- WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD

and not only that we:

- ACTIVELY CEASE TRUSTING IN MAN

man is full of himself, his achievements, his ideologies, his progressive technological advances and everything that science promises

Q. But you know what? Every single man, every single human being, is only one breath away from extinction! Sobering isn’t it.

As Proverb chapter 27 says: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."

Q. Can we sum up this chapter in a sentence?

Well, if we had to, perhaps we might say:

"Mind this glorious vision – Zion, city of our God AND while you're at it, very crucially: **MIND THE GAP.**"

AMEN