

part of the Jewish nation took advantage of the permission to return to Jerusalem granted by Cyrus after he conquered Babylon. About a century later, when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls, he found it necessary always to be ready for active warfare. Still later, the great persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes led to the revolt of the Maccabees and a long period of constant warfare. It would be absurd to say that the promise of an end to her warfare (or, "hard service," if some would prefer that translation) merely pointed to the return from exile.

This is even more true of the next phrase, "that her iniquity is pardoned." The Bible nowhere teaches that Israel's guilt came to an end at the return from the Babylonian Exile.

The third phrase, "that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins," would by itself be sufficient to show that this verse looks far beyond return from exile. In view of the biblical teaching about the terrible nature of sin, one could hardly think of the Exile, miserable as it was, as having been a complete expiation for all of Israel's sin, and there is no slightest hint in later portions of Isaiah that it could be so regarded. The proclamation clearly looks far beyond return from exile and points to the divine provision for atonement described so well in Isaiah 53.

Though there would seem to be little doubt of the general import of this third phrase, there have been some disagreements among commentators as to its exact sense, largely occasioned by the word "double," which gives rise to two apparent difficulties: (1) that it seems to present God as a tyrant who would exact double punishment for the sins of His people; and (2) that it suggests that sin is a matter of balancing punishment and wrongdoing in such a way that a man could completely pay the penalty for his sins; whereas the Bible teaches that sin is so terrible in nature that even the eternal suffering of a human being would be insufficient to pay a proper penalty for his sin.

A rather unusual interpretation has been the assumption that "double" here means "double blessing" and that the phrase is a promise that Israel would receive double blessing in spite of all her sins. Such an interpretation lacks philological justification,