

Zion; let everlasting joy be on their heads, and let them obtain gladness and joy; let sorrow and sighing flee away."

The answer to Israel's plea consists of three parts. The first is contained in verses 12-16, beginning with the words "I, even I, am he who comforts you." In verses 12-13 the LORD asks why His people should fear men, whose days are like grass, and forget the inexhaustible power of God the Creator. Verse 14 gives a specific promise: the exiles will soon be set free. They will not die in the dungeon, nor will their bread be lacking. In verses 15-16 God again calls attention to His great power over nature but declares that His power of revelation is even greater, giving His people His Word and saying to them, "You are my people."

The second part of God's answer, which begins with the words "Rouse yourself, rouse yourself," is largely devoted to describing the sufferings of Jerusalem by the figure of a mother whose sons, overwhelmed by famine and warfare, lie helpless as an antelope in a net, suffering the wrath of God. This sad description of their plight (vv. 17-20) is followed by the promise that God will take the cup of misery out of their hands and give it to their tormentors (vv. 21-23).

The third part of the answer (52:1-6) starts with words that closely parallel the beginning of the plea (51:9). There suffering Israel prayed that God's arm would put on strength. Here God assured Israel that strength is available, telling her to put it on as a garment. The parallel is even clearer in the Hebrew than in the English. Although more than twenty different Hebrew words are translated "strength" in the King James Version, the same Hebrew word ^{^33} is used in both of these verses.

In addition to exerting His strength on Zion's behalf, God promises that she will be enabled to clothe herself in beauty and holiness. She is to be freed not only from captivity but also from uncleanness (vv. 1-2). Verse 3 gives renewed assurance that she still belongs to God. Recalling the statement in 50:1, that they were sold for their iniquities, God now declares that, just as He received no recompense when they were taken away,