



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Personal Study Guide

Fall 2020 | KJV Large Print

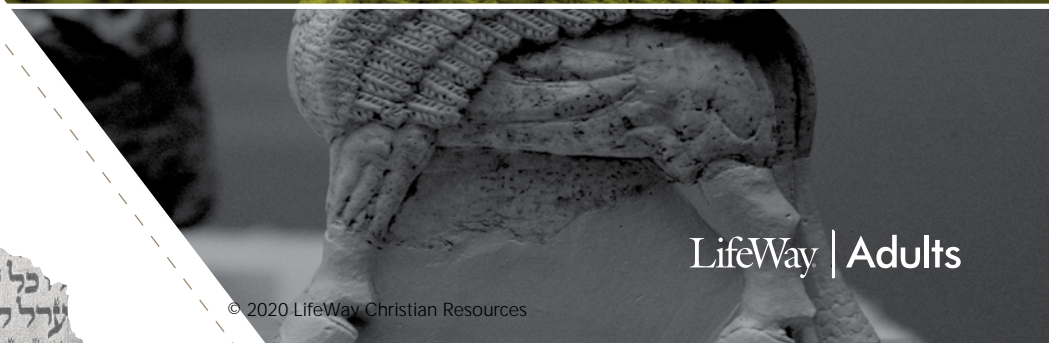


U N D E R S T A N D

E X P L O R E

A P P L Y

Isaiah



LifeWay | Adults

JESUS

Seven centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah described Him in detail. Isaiah wrote about one who would be “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3), “wounded for our transgressions,” and “bruised for our iniquities” (v. 5). The one of whom Isaiah prophesied would die not as a martyr but as our substitute, for “the iniquity of us all” (v. 6). In other words, He would suffer the punishment that we deserve for our sins and suffer judgment in our place (vv. 5-6). He would do so willingly (v. 12) to provide the way of salvation for sinful people.

Without question, Isaiah was pointing to Jesus. That the prophet could speak about Jesus in such detail testifies to the divine origin and trustworthiness of Scripture. Also, it reveals that Jesus was no afterthought of God nor a “Plan B.” God made a plan for our salvation even before the foundation of the world and predicted it clearly through the prophet Isaiah.

This salvation, however, is not automatic. Only the one who “shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

MEET THE WRITER

Terry J. Betts wrote this study of Isaiah. Dr. Betts is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned degrees at Wright State University (B.S.Ed.) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., Ph.D.), and completed additional studies at Jerusalem University College.

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER

In Acts 8, we find Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian official. As Philip approached the official, he heard the man reading from Isaiah, so Philip asked the official if he understood what he was reading. The official replied that he needed a guide.

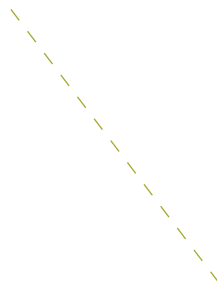
Isaiah had told many years before of One who would be pierced and crushed for our sin so that we could be healed by His wounds (Isa. 53:5). The healing would be required because of sin. Isaiah pointed to a coming judgment against the Israelites because of that sin and the salvation God would provide to those who repented. That repentance would not come until after the Israelites were led away as captives. The exile was more than judgment; it was purposeful discipline designed to help people understand their need for God. That realization would lead to repentance and a restored relationship with God.

The Book of Isaiah is filled with insights about the nature of God and our relationship with Him. Part of this relationship includes the promise of God reconciling His people to Himself. The message of Isaiah continues to be echoed today. We are sinners facing sure judgment. The sovereign God disciplines us with a view toward repentance and relationship with Him through faith in His Son.

As we study the Book of Isaiah, we pray that each of us will discover the truth found by the Ethiopian official: we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness which is found only through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.

Humbly,

Dwayne McCrary



WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Ahaz [AY haz]—evil king of Judah who participated in idolatrous practices (2 Kings 16:3); father of Hezekiah; contemporary of Isaiah

Assyria [uh SIHR ih uh]—a powerful nation that conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC; invaded all the fortified cities of the Southern Kingdom of Judah except Jerusalem, and demanded tribute payments from Judah’s king, Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14-26)

Chaldeans [kal DEE uhnz]—a people group who occupied an area of southern Babylon where the Tigris River and Euphrates River meet; “Chaldean” became synonymous with “Babylonian” in the Old Testament

Ephraim [EE fra ihm]—one of the tribes of Israel but by the time of the prophets came to be synonymous with the Northern Kingdom

Hezekiah [HEZ ih kigh uh]—son and successor of Ahaz as king of Judah; a good king who initiated religious reform in Jerusalem; his name means “Yahweh is my strength”; a contemporary of Isaiah

Sennacherib [suh NAK uh rib]—Assyrian king who overran all the fortified cities of Judah except Jerusalem, then demanded tribute payments from King Hezekiah of Judah

Seraphim [SEHR uh fim]—winged, angelic creatures; their name means “burning ones”; mentioned only in Isaiah (6:2-6) and Ezekiel (1:4-28; 10:3-22)

Tyre [TIGHR]—a major city situated on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel; was a major port for trade and an extremely wealthy place with a great deal of influence; its people were known as skilled seafarers

Uzziah [uh ZIGH uh]—king of Judah and contemporary of Isaiah; also called Azariah; a relatively good king who did “what was right in the LORD’s sight,” with the exception of failing to remove the high places (2 Kings 15:3-4)

Zidon [SIGH duhn]—ancient city, founded long before the Israelites entered Canaan; located on the Mediterranean coast, Sidon and Tyre were centers of sea trade

Zion [ZIGH uhn]—First mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:7, the term Zion was used by biblical writers in a number of ways, including: the fortified hill of pre-Israelite Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-9), the temple mount (Ps. 2:6), the whole city of Jerusalem (Ps. 126:1; Isa. 10:12), the whole nation of Judah (Isa. 1:27), and the heavenly Jerusalem (Isa. 59:20; 60:14; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1).

BIBLE READING PLAN

SEPTEMBER

- ☐ 1. Isaiah 1:1-15
- ☐ 2. Isaiah 1:16-31
- ☐ 3. Isaiah 2:1-11
- ☐ 4. Isaiah 2:12-22
- ☐ 5. Isaiah 3:1-15
- ☐ 6. Isaiah 3:16-26
- ☐ 7. Isaiah 4:1-5:7
- ☐ 8. Isaiah 5:8-30
- ☐ 9. Isaiah 6:1-13
- ☐ 10. Isaiah 7:1-19
- ☐ 11. Isaiah 7:20-8:10
- ☐ 12. Isaiah 8:11-22
- ☐ 13. Isaiah 9:1-21
- ☐ 14. Isaiah 10:1-19
- ☐ 15. Isaiah 10:20-34
- ☐ 16. Isaiah 11:1-16
- ☐ 17. Isaiah 12:1-6
- ☐ 18. Isaiah 13:1-22
- ☐ 19. Isaiah 14:1-23
- ☐ 20. Isaiah 14:24-32
- ☐ 21. Isaiah 15:1-9
- ☐ 22. Isaiah 16:1-14
- ☐ 23. Isaiah 17:1-14
- ☐ 24. Isaiah 18:1-7
- ☐ 25. Isaiah 19:1-15
- ☐ 26. Isaiah 19:16-20:6
- ☐ 27. Isaiah 21:1-17
- ☐ 28. Isaiah 22:1-14
- ☐ 29. Isaiah 22:15-25
- ☐ 30. Isaiah 23:1-18

OCTOBER

- ☐ 1. Isaiah 24:1-15
- ☐ 2. Isaiah 24:16-23
- ☐ 3. Isaiah 25:1-12
- ☐ 4. Isaiah 26:1-13
- ☐ 5. Isaiah 26:14-21
- ☐ 6. Isaiah 27:1-13
- ☐ 7. Isaiah 28:1-13
- ☐ 8. Isaiah 28:14-29
- ☐ 9. Isaiah 29:1-14
- ☐ 10. Isaiah 29:15-24
- ☐ 11. Isaiah 30:1-17
- ☐ 12. Isaiah 30:18-33
- ☐ 13. Isaiah 31:1-9
- ☐ 14. Isaiah 32:1-20
- ☐ 15. Isaiah 33:1-16
- ☐ 16. Isaiah 33:17-24
- ☐ 17. Isaiah 34:1-17
- ☐ 18. Isaiah 35:1-10
- ☐ 19. Isaiah 36:1-22
- ☐ 20. Isaiah 37:1-20
- ☐ 21. Isaiah 37:21-38
- ☐ 22. Isaiah 38:1-14
- ☐ 23. Isaiah 38:15-22
- ☐ 24. Isaiah 39:1-8
- ☐ 25. Isaiah 40:1-17
- ☐ 26. Isaiah 40:18-31
- ☐ 27. Isaiah 41:1-10
- ☐ 28. Isaiah 41:11-29
- ☐ 29. Isaiah 42:1-13
- ☐ 30. Isaiah 42:14-25
- ☐ 31. Isaiah 43:1-13

NOVEMBER

- ☐ 1. Isaiah 43:14-28
- ☐ 2. Isaiah 44:1-20
- ☐ 3. Isaiah 44:21-28
- ☐ 4. Isaiah 45:1-13
- ☐ 5. Isaiah 45:14-25
- ☐ 6. Isaiah 46:1-13
- ☐ 7. Isaiah 47:1-15
- ☐ 8. Isaiah 48:1-22
- ☐ 9. Isaiah 49:1-13
- ☐ 10. Isaiah 49:14-26
- ☐ 11. Isaiah 50:1-11
- ☐ 12. Isaiah 51:1-11
- ☐ 13. Isaiah 51:12-23
- ☐ 14. Isaiah 52:1-15
- ☐ 15. Isaiah 53:1-12
- ☐ 16. Isaiah 54:1-17
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- ☐ 21. Isaiah 59:1-21
- ☐ 22. Isaiah 60:1-22
- ☐ 23. Isaiah 61:1-11
- ☐ 24. Isaiah 62:1-12
- ☐ 25. Isaiah 63:1-19
- ☐ 26. Isaiah 64:1-12
- ☐ 27. Isaiah 65:1-16
- ☐ 28. Isaiah 65:17-25
- ☐ 29. Isaiah 66:1-13
- ☐ 30. Isaiah 66:14-24

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

Isaiah, whose name means, “the Lord saves,” lived and ministered in Jerusalem from about 740–700 BC. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah’s father, Amoz, was the brother of King Amaziah, who ruled Judah from 821–767 BC. If so, the prophet would have been King Uzziah’s cousin. New Testament writers attribute the authorship of the Book of Isaiah to one person: Isaiah. (See John 12:37-41.)

Some modern scholars, however, have argued there were at least two writers. These scholars appeal to differences in style and emphasis between chapters 1–39 and 40–60, along with the varying perspectives from both the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods. Much of their issue with an eighth century prophet is their presupposition that predictive prophecy is impossible. They believe it impossible for an eighth-century prophet to predict the rise and fall of Babylon or to know the name of Cyrus over one hundred and fifty years before he lived. However, a major theme of Isaiah is God’s ability to know the future, reveal it through His prophets, and bring it to pass.

Isaiah’s public ministry occurred during the expansion of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians threatened Israel and Syria, so these kingdoms organized a coalition to stand against Assyria. When they tried to enlist Judah to join the coalition, Judah refused. Therefore, Israel and Syria invaded Judah. Upon Judah’s appeal for help, the Assyrians conquered Syria and subjugated Israel. When Sennacherib became king of Assyria, Hezekiah of Judah withheld tribute to Assyria. Sennacherib invaded Judah, but in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord Himself defeated the invaders. Nevertheless, Hezekiah’s pride led to an ominous prophecy that dominates the second part of the book: the Babylonian invasion and exile. However, Isaiah also foretold Babylon’s defeat and Judah’s return home.

The themes of the Book of Isaiah include:

- God is the holy one of Israel, and Israel is His holy people who worship in Jerusalem, God’s holy city.
- God is incomparable; no one is like Him.
- The Servant of the Lord will bring salvation to Israel and the nations. He will establish justice, righteousness, and peace.
- The trustworthiness of God and the unreliability of all others;
- The demise of the wicked but hope and deliverance for the faithful; Isaiah’s message warns people of God’s judgment and exhorts them to trust in His salvation.

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

- I.** Rebuke and Promise from the Lord (1:1–6:13)
- II.** The Promise of Immanuel (7:1–12:6)
- III.** Coming Judgment upon the Nations (13:1–23:18)
- IV.** First Cycle of General Judgment and Promise (24:1–27:13)
- V.** Woes upon the Unbelievers of Israel (28:1–33:24)
- VI.** Second Cycle of General Judgment and Promise (34:1–39:8)
- VII.** The Greatness of God (40:1–48:22)
- VIII.** Peace Brought by the Servant-Messiah (49:1–57:21)
- IX.** The Program of Peace (58:1–66:24)



ON THE COVER

Miniature column base in the form of a human-headed winged animal, probably a part of a piece of furniture; Assyrian, 7th century BC, from Nineveh. The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of winged, angelic beings (seraphim) attending God's throne and offering praises to Him (Isa. 6:2).



God Confronts

God confronts His people about the consequences of their actions.

ISAIAH 1:10-20

Paying bills, going to the grocery store, getting the car serviced—our days are filled with mundane tasks that we carry out on autopilot. Sometimes, church and devotions fall into repetitive ruts. Even relationships can become stale and fade into the background. As a result, the failure of a relationship can catch us off guard.

When have you ever taken a relationship for granted? How did it affect the relationship? Were you able to do anything to get the relationship back on track?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 1:1–4:6

Isaiah 1:1–4:6 lays the groundwork for Isaiah’s entire message. Here, the prophet contrasted the sin and rebellion of Judah in his day to their future of blessedness and holiness in the last days. After briefly mentioning the kings who reigned during his ministry, Isaiah described Judah’s sinful ways like a prosecuting attorney with overwhelming evidence. We see a picture of a people who had abandoned God. Though God had raised them, provided for them, and cared for them in every way as a loving father would his children, with ingratitude they rebelled against Him (Isa. 1:2). They were worse than oxen and donkeys who at least knew who feeds them (1:3).

God was using loving discipline to draw His people back to Himself, yet they stubbornly refused to return (1:5-9). Instead of trusting in the Lord, the people of Judah placed their trust in material things, military heroes, renowned leaders, and spiritual gurus. God would remove their false sources of security so they might recognize their futility (3:1-3). Young and old, male and female, all would bear the consequences of their arrogant sin (3:5-26).

Such is the case with us. God never abandons His children but lovingly confronts us and, if need be, disciplines us so we will return to Him. Whatever God does to bring us to Himself is an act of loving kindness, no matter how difficult His discipline may seem.

The good news is that God’s announcement of judgment was not His only message. Even though His people’s present situation was dreadful, their future was bright. God was going to once again establish His temple, people from every nation would stream to it to worship the Lord and receive His instruction, and there would be peace (2:1-4). On that day, the Branch of the LORD, Jesus Christ, will be beautiful and glorious among them, the people of God will be called holy, and their names will be written in the book of life because the Lord washed away their sin (4:1-6).

As you read Isaiah 1:10-20, circle what God is looking for in those who worship Him. What do these actions reveal about the nature of worship?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EMPTY RITUALS (ISA. 1:10-15)

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. ¹¹ To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. ¹² When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? ¹³ Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. ¹⁵ And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

VERSE 10

The words *hear* and *give ear* both mean “hear and obey.” So the message is straightforward. The people needed to hear and obey the word of God. Verse 10 contains several personal elements:

- **LORD**, often denoted as *Yahweh* from Hebrew, is God’s personal, covenantal name. Israel was Yahweh’s treasured possession and holy nation, set apart to God’s personal mission of blessing all other nations. God chose Israel to be a conduit of blessing for every people group on the earth.
- The expression *our God* emphasizes that while other nations had a multiplicity of gods, Yahweh was Israel’s God, the one and only God.
- The word *law* is the Hebrew word *tora*, and even though it is authoritative, it has the idea of affectionate, personal instruction, such as what a parent would share with a son or daughter.

There is a scathing indictment in verse 10. By saying, *ye rulers of Sodom* and *ye people of Gomorrah*, Isaiah was communicating how utterly depraved Judah’s ways had been and how serious the consequences of such sin were. Verse 9 reveals that were it not for

the Lord's mercy, Judah might have been completely wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Gen. 19:23-25.)

VERSE 11

Sacrifices were meant to be outward expressions of true commitment to the Lord. God knows what is in the heart of every person, and He knows when a sacrifice is offered insincerely. Outward formality cannot hide degenerate hearts. This verse is reminiscent of 1 Samuel 15:22, “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

The Lord confronted His people about their sacrifices. He was clear about what He thought of their sacrifices: They meant nothing to Him; they added nothing to Him; and they did nothing for Him.

The *fat of fed beasts* represents offering to God one's best, and the *blood* represents devotion to God. But it was all a sham. The people were blemished with sin and absent of true devotion to God. It would be like offering a gift to a spouse who knows the one giving the gift is cheating on him or her. Instead of being a blessing, the gift would be an affront because of the infidelity. Similarly, their sacrifices were an affront to God.

Outward formality cannot hide degenerate hearts.

VERSE 12

When a person comes before the Lord with an insincere heart and selfish motives, it is unacceptable “worship” to God. Acceptable worship involves approaching the Lord on His terms. Many believe they can come to God any way they please, and He should be happy with that. When contemplating his own worship, the psalmist recognized, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18). David wrote: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Ps. 24:3-4). Isaiah was saying that no matter how impressive the number of sacrifices the people brought into the temple, it was just the sound of treading in Yahweh's courts and nothing more.

VERSES 13-15

The Lord emphatically commanded the people to **bring no more** their offerings to the temple because they were meaningless and detestable to Him. God described Israel's worship with the same words He had used to describe the worship of the pagans (Deut. 18:9; 1 Kings 14:24). He condemned them for the abhorrent practice of perpetrating their own arrogance in the guise of worship.

The **new moons** festival consecrated each new month to the Lord by expressing to Him repentance, devotion, and fellowship. The law required the people to present offerings to the Lord (Num. 28:11-15). Additionally, the New Moons festivals included the blowing of trumpets over the sacrifices so that all who heard would be reminded that Yahweh was their God (Num. 10:10).

The institution of the Sabbath was so important that it was included as the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11). Israel was required to cease from all work and rest because the Lord rested on the seventh day of creation. The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant the Lord made with Israel (Ex. 31:12-13) and reminded the people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Keeping the Sabbath served as a testimony of their devotion to the Lord. In addition, the Sabbath was an act of faith. It was unheard of in the ancient Near East to cease from work every seven days. It would have been seen as bad business in the eyes of Israel's neighbors. Nevertheless, keeping the Sabbath was Israel's way of showing the nations that Yahweh could be trusted ultimately to be their Provider. The Sabbath also provided a designated, focused time to worship the Lord, as David mentioned in Psalm 92.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare related passages.*

Compare Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What reasons are given for celebrating the Sabbath in these verses? How are the reasons different and how are they the same? What do these verses reveal about God's desires? How does this compare to what we find in Isaiah 1?

Other prescribed festivals included Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. God instituted these holy days as times for Israel to celebrate God’s wondrous acts and blessings upon them and to express their gratitude, love, and devotion to Him. Instead, they turned them into something repulsive; they were a mockery of what they were meant to be and thus a mockery of God. The people worshiped the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. (See Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9.) What once was a “sweet savour” to the LORD (Ex. 29:18; Num. 15:3) had now become a burden to Him, and He was weary of them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament book.

Consequently, when the people *spread forth* their *hands* in prayer, God would refuse to look at them. When the Lord shines His face upon His people and looks at them, it is a way of expressing His favor. To refuse to look at them was His way of saying He was withdrawing His blessing from them. How often one prays and how zealously one prays is no substitute for obedience. What’s more, He said *your hands are full of blood*. It is possible *blood* is a reference to the multitude of sacrifices they made, but the way it is expressed in Hebrew suggests He was saying they were guilty of violent bloodshed. Isaiah’s message is sobering.

What are causes and ways believers today fall into patterns of unacceptable worship of the Lord? What warnings should we draw from Judah’s mistakes?

TRUE FOLLOWERS (ISA. 1:16-17)

¹⁶ Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷ Learn to do well; seek

judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

VERSES 16-17

The Lord gave nine commands for the people to correct their ways and demonstrate they were true followers of God. These commands were not given as a way to secure salvation but to demonstrate the authenticity of their salvation. The first three deal with the inward removal of sin. The second three address outward devotion to Yahweh. The last three pertain to relationships with others, showing how true repentance would affect how they related to others. Instead of being the oppressors, they would oppose oppressors. Also, they would champion the cause of those who could not care for themselves, such as *the fatherless* and *the widows*.

Taken together, the three sets of commands signify authentic repentance and true devotion to the Lord. The washing and cleansing of themselves called for sincere repentance so that there no longer would be a disconnect between their hearts and their acts of worship. The authenticity of their repentance would be demonstrated by their actions: turn away from their sinful ways, learn what God's will is, and do it.

If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation, then why is it necessary for believers to be faithfully obedient to God?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God (Isa. 55:7).

REPENTANCE REQUIRED (ISA. 1:18-20)

¹⁸ **Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.** ¹⁹ **If ye be willing and**

obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: ²⁰ But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

VERSE 18

Come now, and let us reason together. In this phrase is a note of hope. The verb translated *reason* carries the idea of setting things right and bringing an end to a quarrel. The people had a chance to repent and to avoid the fate that befell Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 10).

God invited His sinful people to come to Him in repentance and faith. He promised to cleanse them of all their sin. The Lord takes no pleasure in disciplining His children. It is necessary for their correction, but He would rather enjoy them in sweet fellowship. If their sins were *scarlet*, they would be made *white*, non-existent. Here, the Lord made clear that He alone can cleanse us of sin. When He calls us to wash and cleanse ourselves, that washing and cleansing can happen only when we come to Him in sincere repentance (v. 16).

VERSES 19-20

The Lord confronted His people with a choice: either repent, obey, and enjoy God's blessing, or ***refuse and rebel*** and suffer the consequences. To ***eat the good of the land*** means to live an abundant life. To be ***devoured with the sword*** means to be cut off from the Lord. It was God's message to the people in Isaiah's day, and it is His message to us today.

The Lord Jesus Christ graciously and mercifully calls to us: *Whosoever will, come to Me, and I will forgive you, cleanse you, and give you abundant, eternal life. Reject Me and spend eternity separated from Me.* It is a choice every person must make. The Lord offers forgiveness and cleansing to all who repent—to the lost who need salvation and to believers who seek restored fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:9).

How does God take the initiative today to bring people into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Relying on religious rituals alone falls short when approaching the holy God.
- God expects His followers to demonstrate righteousness and justice.
- God offers forgiveness to those who repent.

Ask God to examine your heart and reveal any sin in your life that might be hindering your worship of Him. What actions do you need to take in response to what God shows you?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being completely, how would you rate how well you do the nine commands found in verses 16-17? What do you need to do to more completely follow the commands?

Discuss as a group the difference it should make to believers as they go through their daily routines to remember that our sins are forgiven and have been made “white as snow.” Begin to memorize Isaiah 1:18.

PRAYER NEEDS



God Sends

God calls His people to recognize and declare His sovereign purposes.

ISAIAH 6:1-13

Each branch of the U.S. military has some form of saying, “Never volunteer for anything.” However, when Isaiah had an encounter with the King—the LORD of Armies—he quickly volunteered to take on the mission God had for him. That’s what happens when a person experiences what Isaiah did. The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision, and in this vision Isaiah recognized his sin and need for a Savior. The Lord cleansed him of his sin and then called him to service. When the Lord reveals Himself to us and saves us from our sin, the proper and appropriate response is Isaiah’s response, “Here I am. Send me.”

Why does God call and then use believers to carry out His purposes?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 5:1–6:13

Isaiah concluded his introduction of the book with a song of indictment against the people, followed by six “woes.” The song is about Isaiah’s “loved one” who had a vineyard. This loved one worked hard to have a productive vineyard. He expected a harvest of good grapes but instead got worthless grapes. Then the Lord revealed He was the owner and vinedresser of the vineyard. He said He would remove everything He built as a protection for His vineyard, and it would be laid waste as He caused the rain to cease. The Lord’s vineyard in which He delighted was the people of Israel and Judah. He expected from them justice and righteousness, but all He saw was injustice, bloodshed, and cries of despair. Accordingly, these wicked people could expect divine judgment (Isa. 5:1-7).

Isaiah marshaled six woes against these unfaithful people. The word *woe* was spoken in times of mourning over the death of a loved one, expressing grief and bereavement. The prophets used this expression to foretell divine judgment. The sins that brought on these woes included greed and socioeconomic oppression, carousing, spiritual blindness, the exploitation of others, the perversion of morality, and the arrogance of thinking they were wiser than the Lord. Consequently, the Lord would turn their sins back upon themselves. Those who greedily accumulated wealth at the expense of others would become desolate. Those who were gluttons and drunks would die of hunger and thirst. Those who taunted the Lord to hurry up would quickly experience His judgment, and those who exchanged darkness for light and light for darkness would experience darkness and distress, the light being obscured by clouds of judgment (5:6-30).

It is after this climactic ending to Isaiah’s introduction in chapters 1–5 that Isaiah described how the Lord called him and what the content of his message would be to God’s covenant people (6:1-13).

As you read Isaiah 6:1-13, how would you describe the connection between how one sees God and how one responds to God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD'S GLORY (ISA. 6:1-4)

¹ In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

VERSE 1

Isaiah described the scene of heaven revealed to him in a vision while in the temple. God's throne was encircled by angels declaring His holiness, a sound that shook the foundation of the temple. But before beginning his description of what he saw, Isaiah recorded that he had the vision in the year of King Uzziah's death, which was in 740 BC.

Uzziah, who was also called Azariah, began his reign over Judah in 792 BC as a fairly good king who did "what was right in the LORD's sight," with the exception of failing to remove the high places (2 Kings 15:3-4). So the people continued worshiping at the high places. It was a time of economic boom and military strength.

Even though God had given Judah a good king and blessed the people with good things during Uzziah's reign, they still continued their corrupt practices. It was time for God to call His messenger, Isaiah, and announce His displeasure with them.

Isaiah's vision began with a vision of the Lord. No one has seen God, yet the Lord graciously revealed Himself in a vision to Isaiah for the sake of His people. Isaiah saw the splendor of His majesty **sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up**, asserting Yahweh's power and authority over all creation. The Lord's **train filled the temple** as His glory fills all the earth.

VERSE 2

The **seraphims**, literally "the burning ones," are angelic beings who are heavenly attendants to the Lord. Isaiah witnessed them flying above the Lord with their three sets of **wings**, with one

set covering their faces, one set covering their feet, and with one set they flew. Fire is often associated with the presence and glory of God. In reverence, submission, and awe for Yahweh, and because of the brilliance of His glory, these fiery heavenly beings covered themselves.

DID YOU KNOW?

Isaiah 6 is the only place in the Bible that mentions the seraphim. Of all the angelic beings mentioned in the Bible, only the seraphim and cherubim (Ezek. 1:4-28) are described as having wings.

VERSES 3-4

The way Hebrew expresses the superlative—the supreme and extreme surpassing all others—is to repeat something three times. (Compare Rev. 4:8.) So in the strongest way possible, the seraphim were declaring God’s holiness. They were not just declaring God holy; they were declaring God is the most holy being there is.

To proclaim God is *holy* is to proclaim His divine perfection, unlike anything in creation. We are created beings; He is the Creator. Therefore, God is unique. All of creation is dependent on Him, while He is completely independent of His creation. God is infinitely superior to all of His creation and holy in all of His attributes. To say God is *holy, holy, holy* is to say He alone is to be honored above all else, because He is above all else and *the whole earth is full of his glory*.

The sound of the seraphim calling out to one another shook *the posts of the door*. The temple was *filled with smoke* that may have been from the altar in the temple. Smoke or a cloud is often associated with the presence of God and probably shielded Isaiah from seeing any more than his mortal eyes were able to bear.

What should we learn about God in Isaiah’s vision of God on His throne? How should God’s holiness affect how we think about God and how we live for Him?

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the meaning and usage of key words or phrases.*

Focus on the word *glory* in Isaiah 6:3. Look up the word in a Bible dictionary to discover its basic meaning. Use a concordance to find other uses of the term in the Scriptures. Scan the passages and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the term. What does the word and its usage reveal about the nature of God?

GOD'S FORGIVENESS (ISA. 6:5-7)

⁵ Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. ⁶ Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

VERSE 5

Isaiah's first response was, *Woe is me! for I am undone*. In other words, "I am about to die!" The word *woe* is associated with mourning a death or warning of impending death. The word *undone* comes from a Hebrew verb meaning "to be silenced" and was often associated with the silence of death. Isaiah believed he was doomed to die. Perhaps God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33:20 flashed in his mind, "there shall no man see me, and live." What is sure is that at the sight of God's throne, Isaiah became aware of his sin and unworthiness to be in God's presence. Others have had similar responses. When Job saw God, he responded, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Similarly, when Peter first met Jesus and witnessed His awesome power, he fell to his knees and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Isaiah gave three reasons for his response. The first was that he was overcome with the consciousness of his own sin and recognized

he was unworthy to stand in God’s presence. Isaiah knew he was *unclean* before God. He was unable to join the seraphim in praising God because his lips were unclean. The second reason for his response was that Judah was a sinful people too. In this overwhelming experience, Isaiah thought not only about his own situation but that of his *people*. The third reason for Isaiah’s response was that he saw Almighty God arrayed in splendor and glory.

VERSES 6-7

Before Isaiah could faithfully serve the Lord by prophesying to a people who were unclean, he himself needed to be clean. So, no doubt at the bidding of the Lord, one of the seraphim took a glowing coal from the altar with tongs and touched Isaiah’s lips as a way of cleansing Isaiah of his sin.

God sometimes used fire to purify. The purifying burning coal from the altar implies an acceptable sacrifice was made for Isaiah’s forgiveness of sin and his reconciliation to God. Isaiah did nothing for himself. The removal of his iniquity and the atonement for Isaiah’s sin was initiated and completed by the Lord. The removal of Isaiah’s sin meant God’s sense of justice was satisfied, and the prophet could now stand before God without fear. This is what the expression, *thy sin purged* meant. Isaiah’s experience anticipated what the people of Judah needed done for their own iniquities to become the holy and blessed people God promised they would become in chapters 1–5. All of these actions anticipate Jesus, who is the one and only atoning Sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin.

How should Isaiah’s vision of God on His throne affect how we think about the holiness of God? What can we learn from Isaiah about God and ourselves when we stand before God to worship Him?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Eph. 2:4).

GOD'S CALL (ISA. 6:8-10)

⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. ⁹ And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

VERSE 8

Finally, God spoke and posed a question, asking who was willing to go on mission on His behalf. The New Testament references this passage to Jesus and the Holy Spirit (John 12:40-41; Acts 28:25-26). Therefore, the “us” in *who will go for us* is likely the self-consultation of God within the Trinity and more than just an expression of a plural of majesty. The Lord’s questions to Isaiah reveal He is a God on mission. His mission is to save all who will repent of their sin and by faith turn to Him.

Isaiah’s response was short and to the point: *Here am I; send me*. He experienced the merciful and gracious cleansing of God from the penalty of his sin, which is death. In addition, because the Lord had forgiven him, Isaiah had a right standing before God. Consequently, Isaiah’s quick reply was the only logical and appropriate one.

VERSES 9-10

In verse 9, God told Isaiah what his message would be, and in verse 10 revealed to Isaiah what would result from his message. Verse 9 contains the oddest message one could imagine God giving to His prophet. It seems as if God didn’t want them to understand the message. However, the mention of *heart*, *ears*, and *eyes* taken together is a poetic way of saying the people were so spiritually blind and deaf that when Isaiah preached to them, what he said would be incomprehensible to them. In fact, Isaiah would speak with such simplicity that the people would ridicule him for it (Isa. 28:9-10). The only way they could understand was to have a change of heart. Their hearts were hardened in rebellion against God, and they would become even more hardened as they heard and rejected God’s word through His prophet. The Lord did not

commission Isaiah for the purpose of confusing the people; God called Isaiah to proclaim His message while realizing most would reject it. Therefore, they would be without excuse when God's judgment fell on them because the Lord was giving them one more opportunity *convert, and be healed*.

Why is it important for believers who proclaim God's message to recognize that most who hear the message will not respond positively to it?

GOD'S PERSISTENCE (ISA. 6:11-13)

¹¹ Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, ¹² And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. ¹³ But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

VERSES 11-13

Isaiah asked the Lord how long he was to deliver God's message to people who were unwilling to repent. God directed him to deliver the message until His judgment was complete. The Lord painted a picture of *cities* that are *wasted without inhabitant* and a land that is *utterly desolate*. He was going to use invaders to lay waste to Judah and take the survivors into captivity. Jeremiah later prophesied that this exile would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Ezekiel prophesied that during that time God would purify His people (Ezek. 36:25).

But God did not leave Isaiah hopeless; He pointed to a remnant who would return to Him. A *tenth* would survive, though they too would suffer. The purifying would continue until only a *substance*, a *holy seed* would remain. Yet this holy seed was what would spring forth as the holy people of God. Even though judgment must fall upon the sinful people of Judah because of God's justice, His grace would shine through as He would never eradicate His promise of salvation that would ultimately come through Jesus, who was the first fruit of this holy seed promised to Abraham. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:22-23.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is holy and chooses to reveal His glory to people.
- All humans are in need of God’s forgiveness for sin.
- God invites willing followers to deliver His message to others.
- God’s messengers are to be faithful throughout their lives regardless of the response.

God revealed His holiness to Isaiah in a vision. What does it mean to say God is holy, and what are various ways the Lord reveals He is holy?

As a group, read aloud Isaiah 6:8. Discuss how Isaiah’s response to God’s call upon his life is the logical and appropriate response for every believer. What might be said about a person who responds negatively to such a calling?

Why is it so important for believers to be faithful throughout their lives to God’s commission to serve Him even when it can be difficult to do so?

PRAYER NEEDS



God Promises

Since God is sovereign, His people can trust His promises.

ISAIAH 7:7-17

“Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth” is an odd idiom. A person can tell the age and quality of a horse by looking at its teeth. To look at the teeth of a horse given as a gift shows a lack of appreciation. The idiom means do not reject a gift someone gives you. In Isaiah’s day, God offered King Ahaz a gift, a sign guaranteeing God’s protection. But Ahaz thought it was better to trust in Assyria instead of God—a decision that would have devastating consequences.

Why are people sometimes prone to believe they can do better than what God offers them?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 7:1–12:6

The event that precipitated Isaiah's message in Isaiah 7:1–12:6 was what biblical scholars call the Syro-Ephraimite War (735-733 BC). King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria posed a threat to the entire ancient Near East. Eventually, he would turn his attention west toward Israel and Judah. So Pekah, the king of Israel, joined Rezin, the king of Syria, with the hope of forming a coalition of all the kingdoms in the region to defeat the Assyrian invasion.

When King Jotham of Judah and his son, Ahaz, who succeeded him, were called to join the anti-Assyrian pact, they both refused. Therefore, Syria and Israel waged war on Judah to replace Ahaz with a Syrian/Aramean prince and to secure Judah's participation in the alliance against Assyria. Ahaz was shaken by the threat of the Syrians and Israelites. So the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz with a message. The message was for Ahaz to stay calm and not fear the threat of Syria and Israel. Ahaz could trust in the Lord to defeat Judah's enemies.

Even though the Lord promised to give Ahaz a sign to prove He would bring down the coalition, Ahaz refused to believe. Instead, Ahaz sent messengers with silver and gold from the Lord's temple and the king's palace as a bribe to Assyria's King Tiglath-pileser. (See 2 Kings 16:7.) Therefore, Judah became a vassal of Assyria. Tiglath-pileser deployed his armies and invaded Syria, deporting the survivors into exile and executing King Rezin. The Assyrians also began their invasion of Israel but stopped when the people of Israel overthrew Pekah. Tiglath-pileser installed Hoshea, a pro-Assyrian king, on Israel's throne and exacted a heavy tribute from them. Ironically, because Ahaz refused to believe God and turned to the Assyrians for help, the Assyrians would eventually turn on Judah and decimate its land and population.

As you read Isaiah 7:7-17, note the contrast between God's kindness to Ahaz and Ahaz's stubbornness. Why is it dangerous to fail to believe God's promises?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD INTERVENES (ISA. 7:7-9)

⁷ Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. ⁸ For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. ⁹ And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

VERSE 7

When King Ahaz of Judah refused to join the alliance formed by **Rezin**, king of **Syria** (also called Aram), and Pekah, king of Israel, to go to war with Assyria, the allied kingdoms decided to go to war with Judah. Rezin and Pekah's goal was to replace Ahaz with someone who would support the anti-Assyrian coalition. When this news reached Jerusalem, Ahaz and his people trembled "as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind" (Isa. 7:2). Consequently, God sent Isaiah to assure Ahaz he was safe and could trust in the Lord's plan.

When the word **LORD** or **GOD** is in capital letters in English translations, it indicates Israel's covenantal, personal name of God, "Yahweh." Literally, Isaiah shared what "Lord Yahweh says." By using His personal name, God communicated that the threat against His people was a personal affront to Him. Yahweh's message was clear and concise. The enemies said they would conquer Judah, but the Lord emphatically declared, ***It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.*** The issue before Ahaz was clear: Would he listen to his enemies or would he listen to the Lord?

Second Kings 15:37 and 2 Chronicles 28:5 indicate that the Lord sent Rezin and Pekah against Ahaz because Ahaz "did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree" (2 Chron. 28:1b-4). Ahaz led Judah into committing spiritual adultery against the Lord by his idolatry and murderous sacrifices. So the

Lord's message of deliverance to Ahaz through His prophet Isaiah was a demonstration of God's mercy and grace.

DID YOU KNOW?

Israel is sometimes referred to in the Old Testament as *Ephraim*, the Northern Kingdom's most prominent tribe. (See Isa. 11:13; Jer. 7:15; Hos. 5:9-14.) Accordingly, the alliance formed between Syria and Israel to defend against the expansion of Assyria is known as the Syro-Ephraimite war.

VERSES 8-9

By pointing out that *Damascus* was the *head* or capital of *Syria*, and that *Samaria* was the *head* of Israel (*•Ephraim*), God was saying they would not have another capital in Jerusalem. Moreover, they would not have another king in Jerusalem. God had promised David that He would establish David's dynasty forever (2 Sam. 7:11-13). God was not going to allow anyone to cut off David's line.

It was just a matter of time before Aram would fall and Rezin would be executed. Also, Israel's time was short; the Assyrians destroyed Samaria in 722 BC and carried off the Northern Kingdom's survivors into exile, never to become an organized people again. If the *threescore and five years* refers to the following sixty-five years from this point, then the reference is to 671 BC when the Assyrians transported conquered foreigners into the region of the former Northern Kingdom. These people became what are known as the Samaritans in the New Testament. Thus, the people of the Northern Kingdom were deprived of their land. So the Lord foretold, *Ephraim shall be broken, that it be not a people*. As a whole, the unholy alliance between Israel and Aram would be destroyed. Therefore, Judah had no reason to fear the coalition's threats.

However, Isaiah's message served as a warning to Ahaz. Putting his trust in political alliances, such as with Assyria, would be Judah's downfall. Ahaz sat on a throne that was established by the Lord, established on His promises to David and the people of God. David's sons who sat on the throne were to stand firm in the same faith that David had in the Lord. Judah's faith in God was the foundation of their very existence and essential to their identity.

But Ahaz was at a point of no return. Therefore, Isaiah said, *If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.*

How is God our source of hope? What might one conclude about people who appear to be without hope?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary.*

Make a list of the kings mentioned in Isaiah 7. Using a Bible dictionary, read the articles about each king listed and make notes on each. What lessons can you learn from what you read? How does each king's life illustrate the need for trusting in God and His plans?

GOD EXPECTS (ISA. 7:10-13)

¹⁰ Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD. ¹³ And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

VERSES 10-11

God offered Ahaz an opportunity to see *a sign* from God that He was willing and able to protect His people. It is amazing God would make such a generous offer to such an ungodly king as *•Ahaz*. And it is surprising the Lord spoke to Ahaz twice. This demonstrates Yahweh's patience, mercy, and loving kindness toward His sinful people. Since Ahaz failed to believe what he had heard of God's power, God was willing to show him. God offered to show

Ahaz whatever sign he desired, from the deepest depths of the underworld to the highest heaven. If Ahaz still chose to reject God’s message, he would be without excuse and would have no one to blame but himself when he reaped the consequences of his unbelief.

VERSES 12-13

Ahaz’s response appeared to be quite pious on the surface. Deuteronomy 6:16 commands: “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God.” This command speaks of the unbeliever who says, “I will not trust God until He shows me He is worth trusting.” It is treating God as if He is to put on some kind of dog and pony show to impress them. Jesus experienced this when the Pharisees and Sadducees tested Him to show them a sign, but He refused to do so. The clearest sign was already standing before them, the Lord Himself. Yet they chose to reject Him and deny His resurrection. (See Matt. 12:38-42; 16:1.)

Ahaz’s response was insincere piety. He didn’t want a sign because he was unwilling to believe. A sign would force Ahaz to openly admit his stubborn unbelief in Yahweh. Ahaz’s mind had already been made up, having already chosen Assyria over the Lord.

Isaiah saw through Ahaz’s pious ploy. But the prophet’s response addressed the *house of David* in the plural saying, “All of you have wearied the people and have wearied God.” The Davidic kings were supposed to shepherd their people in faithful service to God. Instead, all of them fell short, and most of them violated their trust by using the throne as a means to feed their own appetites. God was faithful to His promise to David, but the house of David had not produced kings who shepherded His people as God intended. After hundreds of years and many generations, God’s patience was wearing thin.

**What do people who display a false piety to God reveal about themselves?
What are some ways people try to disguise their unbelief?**

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His incarnation, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-23).

GOD ANNOUNCES (ISA. 7:14-15)

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

¹⁵ Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

VERSES 14-15

Isaiah declared that God would provide *a sign* despite Ahaz's unbelief: a *virgin* would give birth to a child *and shall call his name Immanuel*. *Immanuel* means "God is with us." The name of the child would be a reminder of God's presence, bringing comfort to those who trusted God and destruction to those who failed to trust God. What could have served as a sign of God's tender mercy for Ahaz instead would serve as a sign of God's indignation.

The Hebrew word, *alma*, refers to a young woman of marriageable age and has the specific meaning of "virgin." An example of this is in the description of Rebekah, soon to be the bride of Isaac (Gen. 24:14,16,43). Certainly, Matthew understood this meaning as he used the more precise Greek word, *parthenos*, meaning "virgin" to cite Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:22-23). What is clear is that this virgin would conceive and bring forth a son in the future.

Virtually all conservative, evangelical scholars affirm that verse 14 refers to the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary. Some scholars, however, see a more immediate near-future fulfillment of this prophecy and then a grander future fulfillment in Jesus as cited by Matthew. Some assert that in the immediate context this woman would be Isaiah's wife and that the birth is recorded in Isaiah 8:1-4. This idea of double-fulfillment would uphold the notion that Ahaz actually saw the sign God promised.

Many scholars, however, hold that Isaiah's prophecy pertains only to Jesus the Messiah based on Isaiah's other references to Immanuel. The "entire land" belongs to Immanuel (Isa. 8:8). Immanuel would be the reason the nations' plans to defeat God's people would fail (8:10). Immanuel would be named "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father," and His "reign on the throne of David" would never end (9:6-7). Based on these declarations, Immanuel would refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and no one else.

Butter and honey was the food of the impoverished. So the boy would be born into poverty and experience the full weight of a foreign power ruling over his people. Whether or not it would be

the Assyrians or the Romans, the ambiguity of who this ruling power would be speaks to both Ahaz's immediate situation and the birth and childhood of Christ. Either way, Immanuel would experience and understand the hardships of His people.

How does God's keeping His promise to send the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, affect our trust in God in other matters?

GOD JUDGES (ISA. 7:16-17)

¹⁶ For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. God's judgment, it is prophesied, is to come at the hands of Assyria ¹⁷ The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria.

VERSES 16-17

Isaiah revealed to Ahaz that God would bring a change in leadership because of the king's failure to trust God. The Lord is faithful to His promises; in a short time, He would eliminate the threats of Pekah and Rezin. The Aramean kingdom of Rezin was destroyed in 732 BC. Tiglath-pileser reduced the size of the Northern Kingdom of Pekah in 733 BC, and the king was assassinated and replaced by Hoshea. Eventually, the Northern Kingdom was totally defeated in 722 BC, which was about thirteen years after the Immanuel prophecy.

The Lord would also use **•Assyria** as His instrument of judgment against **Judah**. Isaiah compared the judgment coming to the days when the Northern Kingdom separated from Judah in 722 BC. (See 1 Kings 12.) By rejecting the Lord and seeking help from Assyria, Ahaz would fall. God used Ahaz's source of security as the source of his demise.

What sources of security do people turn to today as a substitute for trusting God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God’s plans are a source of hope for His people.
- God expects His people to respond in faith.
- God is faithful to keep His promises, with the birth of Jesus Christ being the ultimate proof.
- God brings judgment on those who fail to trust Him.

As a group, discuss ways following God’s plan produces hope. How can the group remind each other of the hope found in following God’s plan when a person’s faith is challenged?

In what areas of your life is God asking you to trust Him in a deeper way? How would you describe your response? How can you address any sources of hesitation you may be experiencing?

Memorize Isaiah 7:14. Reflect on the promise of God that He would be with us. How does the promise of God’s presence instill hope in you? Thank God for sending His Son to “be with us” in this world.

PRAYER NEEDS



God Reigns

God controls the rise and fall of nations and powers.

ISAIAH 23:8-18

Throughout history, we have seen dictators, despots, and other leaders seize control of countries or regions. At the time, some of these leaders and the groups they led appeared to be invincible, carrying an unchecked arrogance as they gained more power. In Isaiah's day, Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea that had a vast and powerful financial empire. To the human eye, they seemed invincible, but they were no match for God. God is sovereign over every nation and human seat of power.

What are some things that may cause a person to question who is really in control?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 13:1–23:18

Isaiah's message revealed there will come a time when people from every nation will stream to the house of the Lord to worship Him (Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10). However, before this happens, the Lord would bring His purifying judgment on the nations. Hence, Isaiah 13:1–23:18 contains a series of judgment speeches against many of the nations in the ancient Near East, and these proclamations pave the way for Isaiah's message of universal judgment in chapters 24–27. One should recognize a number of things from these speeches:

- The Lord rules over all of the nations. They are all under His authority and will answer to Him.
- Even though Isaiah addressed the various nations in these judgment speeches, the audience who actually received these speeches was Israel. Primarily, their purpose was to inform God's covenant people of God's plans for the nations. God would keep the promises He made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3).
- These oracles serve as a warning to the people of God: if you act like the nations, then God will treat you like the nations. In fact, God would show greater severity to His people given all that they had witnessed Him do for them. They should know better than to act like the pagan nations around them. With a greater knowledge of God comes a greater responsibility to God.
- Although the judgment speeches speak of the destruction of nations and a warning to Israel, they also contain a message of hope for the people of God. Isaiah 14:32 exclaims, "the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it." Therefore, these oracles of judgment against the nations are an exhortation for the people of God to turn away from foreign alliances and put their trust in Him alone. The Lord is their salvation.

As you read Isaiah 23:8-18, what do you see God revealing about Himself concerning the nations and concerning the people of God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD IS JUST (ISA. 23:8-12)

⁸ Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth? ⁹ The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.

¹⁰ Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength. ¹¹ He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof. ¹² And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest.

VERSE 8

•**Tyre** and Sidon were ancient cities dating as far back as the third millennium BC. Both were coastal cities of the Mediterranean Sea located in Phoenicia west of the mountains of Lebanon and known as great cities of trade. They were the gateway for goods coming and going from the ancient Near East to places in North Africa and Europe. In many ways, they were the center of commerce for the world at that time. People everywhere knew them as opulent and prestigious cities.

DID YOU KNOW?

The king of Tyre supplied lumber and craftsmen for the building of the temple during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 5:8-9), approximately 280 years before Isaiah.

Isaiah posed a rhetorical question about who would destroy Tyre. Given the fortifications and strength of Tyre, the notion that Tyre would be destroyed would have seemed far-fetched to anyone in Isaiah's day. Before answering the question, one can almost hear the cynicism in Isaiah's voice as he described Tyre. He acknowledged the city's power to establish rulers over their colonies. Tyre traded with *princes*, an indicator of pronounced power. Also, with the

vast wealth amassed by Tyre's traders, these merchants were the most prestigious ones of that day. In a materialistic culture where amassing wealth was the most prized accomplishment, these importers and exporters enjoyed renown wherever they went.

VERSE 9

Isaiah pointed to the **LORD of hosts** as the One who would bring this notable city down. As impressive as Tyre was and as extraordinary as its inhabitants and those associated with them thought themselves to be, Tyre would be no match for the Lord and His armies. The beauty and pride of Tyre would be desecrated. It would be humbled, and its glory would be no more.

Any who arrogantly look to their own accomplishments and attempt to glorify themselves while continually ignoring Almighty God in due time will be brought low by the God they have disregarded. Verse 9 clearly reveals that God is in control of the nations. In His providential timing, He may allow them to last for a time, but His patience always comes to an end in regard to arrogant nations who thumb their noses at God and make themselves the objects of their own praise. He acts and brings destruction to all who would dare attempt to steal His glory.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare references that use the same phrase or term.*

Isaiah referred to God as the LORD of Armies in verse 9. Look up 1 Samuel 1:3; 2 Samuel 7:26; Psalm 80:4; Amos 5:14-15; Haggai 2:6-9; and Malachi 1:11-14. Pay attention to the verses surrounding these verses as well. Note the main point being made in each passage. What attributes of God are most seen in this title?

VERSE 10

Tarshish was one of Tyre's many colonies spread out around the Mediterranean Sea in Cyprus, North Africa, Italy, and Spain. Tarshish appears to have been located northwest of the Strait of

Gibraltar on what is today the southern tip of Spain. As a colony of Tyre, the people of Tarshish were under its rule. It was one of Tyre's most western located colonies. So when Isaiah addressed Tarshish, he appeared to be using it to represent all of Tyre's colonies from those closest to Tyre all the way to Tarshish. Isaiah compared the coming of refugees from Tyre to the waters of the Nile when unrestrained by its banks in the rainy season. The people who were under Tyre's rule would be free to live without its tyranny. Failure to control its colonies would be a sure sign of Tyre's demise.

All nations are powerless before the outstretched hand of the Lord Almighty.

VERSES 11-12

Just as Tyre's influence spread across the ancient Near East, Africa, and Europe, so would the effect of God's judgment be on these lands as the Lord ***stretched out his hand over the sea*** to bring down Tyre's empire of extravagance. The *sea*, Tyre's means to wealth, would be subdued under the Lord's mighty hand. As the sea reached out to all of Tyre's trade partners, all of the kingdoms would shake and feel the effect of its demise. All nations are powerless before the outstretched hand of the Lord Almighty. What's more, the Lord had commanded the destruction of all its Canaanite allies with fortresses north and south of it along the Mediterranean coastline.

The most prominent of Tyre's allies was **•Zidon** to the north, and it would suffer greatly. Their happiness and celebration would be as fleeting as their wealth. Isaiah likened Sidon's suffering to that of an abused **virgin** who was oppressed and raped. The intensity of their suffering would be so harsh that the inhabitants of Sidon would flee to the island of **Chittim** (Cyprus), but even there they would encounter unrest. Like its sister city, Tyre, Sidon would be besieged, overcome, conquered, and driven out to sea.

How does Isaiah's pronouncement against Tyre reveal God's justice? How is recognizing that God is just in all He does just as important as recognizing any of God's other attributes?

GOD IS ACTIVE (ISA. 23:13-14)

¹³ Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; and he brought it to ruin. ¹⁴ Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.

VERSES 13-14

The *land of the •Chaldeans* was southern Babylon where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet at the tip of the Persian Gulf in southern Iraq today. The Chaldeans at times had a powerful influence over all of Babylon. In fact, there were periods when Chaldeans were the kings of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean king who depleted Judah by taking most of its people into exile, including Daniel and Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar was the Chaldean king who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. For this reason, *Chaldean* became synonymous with “Babylonian” in the Old Testament.

Isaiah pointed to Assyria’s defeat of the early Chaldeans as evidence of God’s power in the affairs of His creation. The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, had waged a war of total destruction on the land of Chaldea. The land was so devastated that Chaldea was no threat to anyone for several decades. What once was a land of formidable fortresses and magnificent palaces was turned into a ruin only fit for wild animals. As Isaiah described the desolation that came to the land of Chaldea, his message was that the same fate awaited Tyre and Sidon by the hand of the Lord.

In the same way Isaiah began this judgment speech in verse 1, he concluded this section of it in verse 14, exhorting the *ships of Tarshish* to *howl* because their source of wealth would be no more. Tyre, their fortress and security, would be destroyed. Isaiah goaded the merchants of Tyre’s lucrative, expansive empire to lament in grief over the death of their beloved city. All who put their trust in such enterprises ultimately would be disappointed. In grief and shock, these lords of luxury would witness the unimaginable happen to Tyre and Sidon. Human empires come and go, but only the kingdom of God is eternal.

How does God demonstrate His power through the affairs of nations?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace (Jer. 10:10).

GOD IS HONORED (ISA. 23:15-18)

¹⁵ And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot. ¹⁶ Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. ¹⁷ And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. ¹⁸ And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.

VERSES 15-16

Isaiah closed his judgment speech by shifting from poetry to narrative to reveal even more of what will happen to **Tyre** after its destruction. Tyre would be erased from the thoughts of the world where it once had been so prominent. The world would go about its business as if Tyre never existed. The city that once was the center of international trade and had the greatest influence on the nations in that part of the world would be a lost memory. Tyre would be forgotten for *seventy years*. Isaiah stated this was like *the days of one king*. This is likely referring to the lifespan of a kingdom (as the same word in Hebrew may refer to a king or kingdom). The kingdom Isaiah probably referred to was the Assyrian Empire. In 701 BC, Sennacherib marched his armies along the Mediterranean coast, and one of the cities he attacked was Tyre. From that time until the Assyrian Empire began to decline, Assyria maintained control of Phoenicia. Since Tyre would be irrelevant during that time, Isaiah provided no further elaboration on what would happen to it during the seventy-year period.

Isaiah then used a song about a prostitute to describe what would happen to Tyre. The song is about a prostitute whose customers have moved on to someone else, showing her no more interest. Since no one was any longer knocking at her door, she resorted to going out into the streets to play her *harp* for people to remember her. One song would not be enough. She would need to sing *many songs* to get attention. Why did Isaiah use a prostitute as his metaphor for Tyre? Tyre's entire existence was for the materialistic, fleshly appetite of humanity. Tyre's rise to prominence was fueled by catering to human desires.

VERSES 17-18

Even though Tyre would try to regain its prominence, it would only happen when the Lord decided to restore her after seventy years. Every nation and every superpower is under the providential sovereign rule of Almighty God. At that time, Tyre would resume its past ways of *fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth*. This means it would regain its standing in the world of international trade that reached as far as from Britain to India.

However, there is a twist to Tyre's resurgence. Tyre would not be like the prostitute who plied her trade for her own selfish gain. Instead, her profits would be *holiness to the LORD* and go to supply the needs of the temple and its priests in Jerusalem when the exiles returned from Babylon. When the Persian King Cyrus gave his edict proclaiming that the exiled Judeans could return home after living in exile for seventy years, he said that God had appointed him to build His temple in Jerusalem. He also declared that the people in the region should assist the returned exiles with "silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:4). The Lord turned what Tyre once used for its self-glorification into resources to be used for His own glory and the blessing of His people.

What can one conclude about the nations' relationship to God based on Isaiah 23:15-18?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is just in all He does.
- God actively directs the affairs of His creation.
- God’s plan includes all nations honoring Him.

List situations in your life that make you question God’s justice. Ask God to give you insight, committing to trust Him as He carries out His plans.

What evidence do you see that proves God actively directs the affairs of His creation? How does seeing this evidence give you confidence to remain faithful to Him? What actions do you need to take to build upon that confidence in God?

How can you honor God this week? List one action you will take to specifically honor God, and identify how that action will honor Him.

PRAYER NEEDS



God Saves

God's sovereign plan includes providing a way of salvation for those who believe in Him.

ISAIAH 25:1-10a

People who have a plan and implement that plan to success are admirable. The Bible teaches that God has a plan. His plan includes redeeming creation and assembling a people out of every nation. Every nation will be represented when God prepares His inaugural feast, and everyone in attendance will be there because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Isaiah emphasized this truth as he anticipated the destruction of death and the celebration of the Lord's salvation before His throne.

What is the importance of having a plan to address a need?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 24:1–27:13

Isaiah 24:1–27:13 serves as the climax to the previous chapters describing God’s judgment of individual nations. Once Isaiah finished addressing the nations, his focus moved from regional judgment to universal reckoning, from the immediate time frame to a distant future, and from what is temporal to what is eternal. The section is distinctly eschatological, speaking of end times. After describing what God would do to the entire earth, Isaiah’s main emphasis was on how it would affect the people of God. His message serves as a word of comfort to people as they face turbulent times.

In chapter 24 the prophet declared that no one will escape the Lord’s judgment. It is an apocalyptic picture of total destruction with the earth utterly laid waste and every inhabitant completely plundered. Isaiah indicates the reason for this cataclysmic judgment is that all the people have broken God’s laws, overstepping God’s decrees by making their own laws, and by disregarding every gracious act of God to make Himself known to humanity (24:5). Since humanity’s sin cursed the earth, the earth will become a curse to humanity and everyone but a small remnant will perish as the earth shakes and fails to provide for people’s needs. In that day, the Lord will destroy all earthly and heavenly opposition.

The people of God, however, will celebrate the Lord’s judgment on the nations and declare Him their faithful stronghold. God will prepare a victory feast celebrating His rule and will include His faithful people from every nation. The victory the people celebrate will be the victory they anticipated for ages as they see God’s intervention against the wicked and His vindication of those who trusted in Him. The bodies of the faithful who were dead will rise (26:19), and God’s people will come and “worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem” (27:13).

As you read Isaiah 25:1–10a, notice the truths revealed about what God has in store for His people. How does the promise of a future serve as motivation to remain faithful to God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SINGING PRAISE (ISA. 25:1-5)

¹ O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. ² For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. ³ Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. ⁴ For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. ⁵ Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

VERSE 1

Isaiah 25:1-5 presents a hymn of thanksgiving that celebrates God and His salvation. Isaiah began his hymn with a short but very profound declaration: **LORD, thou art my God**. In chapter 27, the prophet clearly indicated the nations of the earth would undergo terrible judgment because they had rejected the Lord as their God. However, the Lord will save those who can truthfully proclaim, “Yahweh is my God.” Personal knowledge of the Lord is the characteristic of those who will be saved.

***God is in perfect control;
He methodically and faithfully
carries out His purposes.***

Next, Isaiah declared he would exalt the Lord and praise His name because of what He has done. What has the Lord done? He has **done wonderful things**. *Wonderful things* speaks of things only God can do. From a human perspective, many of the nations God would lay low appeared invincible. But God is in perfect control; He methodically and faithfully carries out His purposes. The word translated *counsels* is associated with the Hebrew root for the word “Counselor” in Isaiah 9:6, speaking of the Messiah. Therefore,

the *counsels of old* that Isaiah sang about refer to the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His accomplishing the salvation of His people.

VERSE 2

Isaiah elaborated on the wonders God accomplished. The *city* to which he referred is “the city of chaos” in Isaiah 24:10. It is not a specific city but a metaphor to represent human strongholds of wickedness. The *city* represents the arrogant notion that humans can save themselves in their own self-sufficiency. They have concluded they do not need God. The fact that this city is fortified and called a fortress shows their resolve to defend their way of life. However, every attempt at salvation apart from the mercy and saving grace of God is doomed to fail. Just as the Lord came down and rendered impotent the people at the Tower of Babel as they attempted to elevate themselves to be equal with God, He will bring down this arrogant city. As invulnerable as the wicked city of human self-sufficiency and self-will may appear, God Almighty easily lays it to waste.

What is the importance of knowing that powerful cities come and go?
What is the benefit of believers being mindful of their inadequacies?

VERSE 3

Because God is working out His plan of salvation for His people, *the strong people* shall *glorify* the Lord and *the city of the terrible nations* shall *fear* the Lord. Isaiah described the salvation of the *nations*, known as the Gentiles in the New Testament. He mentioned this in Isaiah 24:16 when he stated: “From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous.” Part of the Lord’s “counsels of old” (v. 1) was to save for Himself a people from every nation. God revealed this plan to Abraham when He chose Abraham and his descendants for the purpose of blessing all the peoples on earth (Gen. 12:2-3; 18:18-19). Paul made this clear when he wrote, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). Isaiah was declaring that

people who were once adamant enemies of God will become part of the saved people of God.

DID YOU KNOW?

The word glorify in Isaiah 25:3 comes from a Hebrew word (*kaved*) that means “heavy” or “weighty.” It carries the sense of “assign weightiness or importance,” thus “to honor” or “to glorify.”

VERSES 4-5

The *poor* and the *needy* are the opposites of the strong and self-sufficient citizens of the city of chaos and meaninglessness which the Lord has destroyed. Yet, the poor and needy are better off because the Lord is *a strength* for the poor and needy and *a refuge* from the storms and heat of the violently wicked who seek to harm the weak. Those who thought they were strong have become weak, but those who are weak are secure because the Lord is their refuge and strength. Isaiah pits the hollow, counterfeit strength of the wicked against the strong wall of protection afforded the poor and needy by the Lord. The Lord is opposed to the proud but a champion of the weak.

Thus, Isaiah shows how the Lord receives glory in two ways. First, He receives glory by showing Himself strong for the weak. Second, the Lord receives glory by silencing *the branch of the terrible ones*, that is, by opposing those who are arrogantly self-willed and self-assured of their own power with no need for God. This is a motif throughout the Scriptures. For instance, Joseph had ten older brothers who hated him, threatened to kill him, sold him into slavery, then covered it up with a lie about his death. Taken to Egypt, Joseph ended up in prison for at least two years. Nevertheless, God was directing his ways and eventually raised him to an unimaginable place of power to bring about salvation for his family and for many nations. One witnesses this motif in the lives of people like the Israelites whom God saved from one of the greatest and most powerful nations ever known in Egypt and at the Red Sea. The Book of Judges demonstrates it in the life of Gideon who was the least in his tribe and yet led 300 men to victory over 135,000 Midianites. David was but a boy and yet defeated the mighty Goliath. The apostle

Paul wrote, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:27-29). It was because of this truth that Isaiah sang his praise to the Lord.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14-18).

FEASTING TOGETHER (ISA. 25:6-8)

⁶ And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. ⁷ And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

VERSES 6-8

As Isaiah spoke of how “the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem,” (24:23), he could not help but sing a hymn of praise to Yahweh his God in 25:1-5. In verse 6, the prophet continued declaring what the *the LORD of hosts* would do. The Lord’s reign would begin with a coronation feast. Coronation feasts were customary in the ancient Near East when a king took his throne. Referring back to Isaiah 24:23, the feast would take place *in this mountain*, Mount Zion.

The Lord would prepare a feast for His people from every nation. This is reminiscent of David’s telling the Lord, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies” (Ps. 23:5) because God silenced the song of the enemy and replaced

it with a celebratory feast of victory. What the Lord prepares for His people will enrich and satisfy them. It is a picture of nourishment, strength, and joy.

In addition to preparing a feast for His people from every nation, God would do something even more spectacular: He would destroy death. ***The face of the covering*** (or burial shroud) covers every person of every nation. We have a 100 percent death rate. However, the Lord ***will swallow up death in victory***—not just death per se but the cause of death. Adam and Eve incurred the curse of death on themselves and their descendants as consequences for their sin. Nevertheless, the apostle Paul revealed that just as death came to all through Adam, the resurrection of the dead comes through faith in Christ. What's more, the last enemy Christ will abolish is death (1 Cor. 15:23-26). Jesus bore the curse and conquered the grave by His death and resurrection. As Paul wrote, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). Such a statement is fitting for Isaiah's message as he anticipated the celebration feast of this victory over death.

The ***tears*** of the bereavement of death will be gone because death will be gone. Isaiah declared the Lord will ***wipe away*** the tears because the sin-induced shame of all of humanity will be removed from the entire earth. The Lord personally will do for His people what they cannot do for themselves. The new nature of God's people will be given full expression in Christlikeness and holiness. The apostle John saw a vision pertaining to this and recorded it in Revelation 21:3-4: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Isaiah declared it will not be a time of sorrow but a time of rejoicing, ***for the LORD hath spoken it***. Isaiah comforted God's people with the assurance that God will defeat all of their enemies when He begins His reign in Zion, and that they will then experience blessings like those that the world has never known.

How does the defeat of death point to the peace God offers to His people?

TRUSTING GOD (ISA. 25:9-10a)

⁹ And it shall be said in that day, **Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.**

¹⁰ For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest,

VERSES 9-10a

Not only does Isaiah depict the Lord’s dwelling with His people, but we also get a glimpse of what it will be like for the people of God to dwell in the presence of God. What a glorious day it will be when the people of God see Him face to face and exclaim, **Lo, this is our God.** God will reward those who trust in Him and patiently wait on Him. Those who trust in the Lord will be saved, and the natural response of people who have been saved is to rejoice and sing the praises of the One who has saved them. On Mount Zion, the place where the Lord resides, rests the power of God unto salvation because He alone is the Savior. Salvation comes from God alone through faith alone.

How is the hope of salvation realized in the phrases used by Isaiah? What role does faith play in waiting for God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible concordance.*

Use a Bible concordance to identify instances in Isaiah where he referred to a vineyard. How does the metaphor of a vineyard develop in the book? What are the elements in the imagery and how do they connect with God and His people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God’s salvation leads to praise of Him.
- God’s peace will be enjoyed by all who trust in Him.
- God’s salvation comes through faith in Him.

Reflect on the salvation God provides through faith in His Son. Write a prayer thanking God for His salvation.

Discuss as a group ways of enjoying God’s peace today. How does the promise of a future complete with peace impact how your Bible study group functions? What changes need to be made to make your group a more peaceful place?

How would you rate your ability to whole-heartedly proclaim “look this is our God”? What needs to change in your life to more confidently make this declaration?

PRAYER NEEDS



God Protects

God is able to protect His people from enemies.

ISAIAH 31:1-9

Gold requires fire to be refined and purified. Melting the ore provides a means for separating the gold from other elements included in the raw material. The process also serves as a means for testing the gold. We too must face some type of fire for our faith to be tested, refined, and purified. This fire can come in all kinds of shapes and forms. For the Israelites, the threat of war served as a test of their faith, revealing their true character.

How does a crisis reveal a person's true character and beliefs? Why does a crisis bring out the best and worst in a person?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 28:1–33:24

Much of this section is interspersed with messages of judgment and hope. The messages of judgment begin with the word “woe.” “Woe” is an exclamation denoting an intense outburst of pain, grief, indignation, and alarm. When the prophets used this type of message, it was usually accompanied by an accusation or threat immediately followed by an announcement of judgment. The main focus of the woes in this section was the self-confident people of Judah. They needed to learn from what God was going to do to their rebellious brothers in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was going to send the Assyrians against Samaria, Israel’s capital (Isa. 28:1-7). Isaiah warned Jerusalem’s leaders to realize their sense of invulnerability was false because their covenant with foreign rulers and false gods would lead to disaster unless they returned to the Lord (28:14-29).

The Assyrians would be God’s tools to carry out His judgment against His people; they would lay siege to Jerusalem. But God promised to defeat the enemy, and in chapter 29 Isaiah foretold a future restoration of God’s people.

In chapters 30–31, the prophet warned of the consequences of seeking an alliance with Egypt instead of looking to the Lord for deliverance from their enemies. Their failure to trust in the Lord would only lead to defeat and humiliation. Only their repentance and faith in God could save them. If they would humble themselves before God in repentance and faith, not only would He save them but also give them direction, bless their land, and prosper them. Moreover, they would witness God’s glory as He defeated their enemies and put an end to the Assyrian threat. Finally, Isaiah pointed to the coming reign of the Messiah and the pouring out of the Spirit on the people in the far future. However, the immediate future for the people of God would be difficult, except for the righteous who will experience security and prosperity under their divine King (chaps. 32–33).

As you read Isaiah 31:1-9, look for what happens when the people of God turn to others instead of the Lord for help. How should a person’s trust in God be seen in all areas of life?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FALSE HOPE (ISA. 31:1-3)

¹ Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! ² Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. ³ Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.

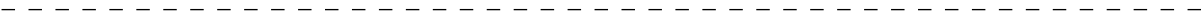
VERSE 1

In Isaiah 30:1-5, the prophet denounced Judah for turning to Egypt to save them from the invading Assyrians. Here, he warned them a second time about turning to Egypt for help. The first denouncement focused on Judah's rebellion against God by turning to Egypt, but this one focuses more on their lack of trust in the Lord. The people of Judah should grieve over the fact that their leaders had rejected the Lord and turned to Egypt for aid. The expression *go down* carries the idea of repeated activity. The leaders of Judah were repeatedly looking to human resources like those in Egypt to save them.

What did they see in Egypt? They saw an impressive military force made up of multitudes of horses and chariots, readied for war against the invading Assyrians. Judah's army was basically all infantry; therefore, the speed of cavalry and chariots logically seemed to be a big improvement to Judah's military forces. *Horses* would bring them speed, *chariots* would provide them with strength, and *horsemen* would give them trained warriors. The Judean leaders chose to disobey God's law that stated their kings should not acquire horses from Egypt (Deut. 17:16). What's more, they should have listened to Isaiah's prophecy that the Assyrians would defeat the Egyptians and take them into exile (Isa. 20:2-6). They should have known that trusting in Egypt to save them was a foolish mistake. The Judean leaders relied more on what they saw in Egypt than what they heard from the Lord's prophet. Furthermore, they saw what

they wanted to see instead of what Isaiah told them to see. If Judah looked to the Holy One of Israel, they would have seen their only true Protector and would have sought Him.

Why is it so tempting to look to something or someone else besides the Lord for help?



BIBLE SKILL: *Review earlier passages for context.*

Review Deuteronomy 17:14-20, noting the expectations for the king. Compare the expectations communicated in Deuteronomy with what you find in Isaiah 31. Which expectations were met and which were not? What does this passage tell us about the need for a better King? How does Jesus fulfill that need?

VERSES 2-3

Any attempt to get help from Egypt was futile because the Lord ***is wise, and will bring evil*** on His enemies. By looking to others, the Judean leaders not only called into question the power of God but also His wisdom. What they did was offensive to God. Unlike the leaders of Judah who had treacherously disobeyed the Lord by going to Egypt for help, and unlike the Egyptians who could only be depended upon to look out for their own self-interests, the Lord ***will not call back his words***. Regarding Judah, what God said He was going to do was grim. Judah’s attempt to get help from Egypt would backfire, and God would rise up against the wicked Judeans and anyone such as Egypt who would lend them assistance.

Next, Isaiah pointed out a stark contrast between the Egyptians and the Lord. Man is frail, temporal, and mortal. The Lord is the

Creator, the Eternal God, holy, and awesome in power. Horses are mere flesh and blood, but the Spirit of God is divine, omnipotent, and eternal. Therefore, when the Lord ***shall stretch out his hand, he that helpeth*** and ***he that is holpen*** will perish together. Judah's snubbing of the Lord and looking to Egypt was an insult to Yahweh their God. The monumental collapse Isaiah prophesied would be the consequence of Judah's refusal to trust in the Lord.

TRUE FAITHFULNESS (ISA. 31:4-5)

⁴ For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. ⁵ As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.

VERSE 4

Isaiah reminded his audience that he was the Lord's messenger. His words were God's words. God's word to His people was the promise that He would protect Jerusalem and prohibit the Assyrians from having total victory over Judah—even though Judah had been rebellious.

The promise began with the picture of a ***young lion*** growling over its prey. The youthfulness of the lion depicts its strength and aggressiveness as opposed to an old lion that is pleased to let his pride hunt for him. A lion roars for a number of reasons, but often it is to warn others to stay away from what is his. Lions invest a lot of energy into hunting. When they catch their prey, they are not likely to give it up.

The word ***shepherds*** in the Old Testament often is a reference to kings. Isaiah was saying that when the king of Assyria and the kings of its vassal nations come against ***mount Zion*** (Jerusalem), they will be unable to intimidate the Lord as He fights for Jerusalem. Additionally, God would not allow His people to be manipulated by the Pharaoh of Egypt. The blustering and clamoring of these shepherds would just be ***noise*** to God. As a young lion set to fight to protect its prey, the Lord was prepared to fight those coming to take Jerusalem. Though the leaders of Judah went down to Egypt to look for help (see v. 1), ***the LORD of hosts*** would ***come down*** to fight for His people.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Mount Zion” (Isa. 31:4) is a poetic name for Jerusalem and specifically designates the area where the temple stood (see Isa. 2:3). The first biblical mention of Zion occurs in 2 Samuel 5:6-9. Although a specific place, Zion also became a symbol of God’s presence and rule.

VERSE 5

Continuing the picture of God’s protection, Isaiah compared the Lord’s protection of Jerusalem to *birds flying* protecting their babies. This picture of God’s tender care is common in the Old Testament. (See Pss. 17:8; 61:4; 91:4.) God would protect Jerusalem by covering it and would spare it by passing over it. Isaiah chose a familiar expression associated with Passover and the Exodus to make his point. The words *passing over* describe what God did when He executed the tenth plague on Egypt and “passed over” the children of Israel who had blood on their doorposts in Exodus 12. Now, He was promising to spare them again.

Verses 4-5 form a complete picture of how God would save Jerusalem. The young lion emphasizes God’s power. The hovering birds protecting their young highlights God’s tender care. God would not only zealously save His people, He would protect His children with merciful compassion. The foolishness of Judah, the arrogance of Egypt, and the fierceness of Assyria could not stop Him.

How can one explain the display of God’s judgment and God’s mercy happening at the same? What is the significance of God’s unwavering faithfulness to believers when they are sometimes not faithful to Him?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Heb. 12:9).

REPENTANCE DEMONSTRATED (ISA. 31:6-9)

⁶ Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. ⁷ For in that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin. ⁸ Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited. ⁹ And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.

VERSES 6-7

On the basis of God's promised deliverance, Isaiah challenged the people of Judah to repent and turn back to the Lord. Even though they had sinned against God, He was ready to forgive and welcome any who would turn back and place their trust in Him. Note that their repentance was not a prerequisite for God's protection of Jerusalem. Instead, their turning back to God should be in response to God's wonderful and compassionate deeds of mercy. God would spare and save them in order to motivate them to respond with grateful repentance.

Accordingly, this was the people of Judah's moment of decision. Even though they had *deeply revolted* against the Lord, He was prepared to forgive their sin. *In that day*, the day of the Lord when He comes in power and glory and establishes His throne on Mount Zion, He will destroy all wickedness and pride (Isa. 2:1-22). However, for Isaiah's audience it would be too late. Therefore, Isaiah's urgent message was the Judean's need to repent while they had the opportunity to do so. There will come a day when everyone will reject their gods and recognize the Lord alone is God and that there is no other. The apostle Paul spoke of this day in Philippians 2:9-11. Nevertheless, when that day comes, it will be too late for those who trusted in idols and failed to turn to God. Isaiah's message is reminiscent of what God proclaimed on Mount Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments: "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:6-7).

VERSES 8-9

Isaiah's message was straightforward: God Himself would defeat the Assyrians. Judah thought it needed the horses, chariots, and trained horsemen of Egypt to save them, but God needed no help. Judah would realize the grave mistake they made in turning to Egypt for help instead of the Lord.

Isaiah described the defeat of Assyria. Many would be slain, many would flee, and many would be put to forced labor. While there is no record of Assyrians having been put into forced labor by Judah, the statement is a picture of Assyria's complete rout. In 701 BC, King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah and captured all of its cities except Jerusalem. Sennacherib recorded the invasion on a stele (a monumental commemorative stone or pillar) called Sennacherib's Stele. Second Kings 18:13–19:37, 2 Chronicles 32:21–22, and Isaiah 37:36–38 each describe what happened as Sennacherib laid siege on Jerusalem. In the night, the angel of the Lord struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrians, causing Sennacherib, probably the **strong hold** in verse 9, to return home to Nineveh in **fear** and disgrace. The rock who was the shelter and protector of this seemingly unconquerable empire fled before Almighty God. When the Lord raised His banner, the Assyrians who survived ran for their lives. Furthermore, shortly after his return to Nineveh, two of Sennacherib's sons assassinated him. The prophet Nahum foretold in vivid detail the fall of Nineveh which occurred in 612 BC. By the end of 605 BC, Assyria was no more.

The end of verse 9 recognizes that whatever the Lord declares will happen will indeed come to pass. The fire of the wrath of God would burn against all who questioned His glory and sought to destroy His people. Such a display proves the wisdom of those who put their trust in God.

What does Isaiah's message communicate about God's love for His people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Trusting in human strength rather than God’s power will ultimately lead to defeat.
- God remains faithful even when we are not.
- Trusting in God will ultimately lead to victory.

Ask God to reveal to you things you trust other than Him for your security. What changes do you need to make as a result of what He tells you?

Reflect on times in your life when you were not faithful to God yet He remained faithful to His promises. Take time to thank Him for His faithfulness. With whom can you share about God’s faithfulness?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 30:18. Discuss what it means to wait on God. What makes waiting on God such a challenge and a test of our faith? How can the group help each other better wait on God?

PRAYER NEEDS



God Listens

God hears the prayers of His people and acts to fulfill His purposes for them.

ISAIAH 37:14-20,30-35

Most people are familiar with the saying, “If you want something done, do it yourself.” The statement usually comes to mind when you have asked someone to do something, only to be let down. People sometimes approach God in this way, thinking it’s better to take matters into their own hands than to trust God with the situation. Such thinking is not only arrogant but also wrong. Recognizing one’s inadequacy and seeking God’s help is a sign of wisdom. Hezekiah realized this truth when he was confronted with a crisis.

Share about a time when you needed someone else to help you. What made you turn to that person for help?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 34:1–39:8

Isaiah 34:1–39:8 contains two sections. Chapters 34–35 are climactic, describing the culmination of the six woes of God’s universal judgment and the blessing God has in store for those who belong to Him. Next, chapters 36–39 focus on three significant events that happened in the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah.

Isaiah’s description of judgment on the nations contains cataclysmic imagery to display God’s omnipotence and wrath (chap. 34). All of creation will be affected. Isaiah singled out Edom as representative of what would happen to the nations. The Edomites had a history of taking advantage of Judah when vulnerable. Therefore, the Lord has a day of “vengeance ... for the controversy of Zion” (34:8). This message once again proved God’s faithfulness to keep His promise to curse anyone who treats His people with contempt (Gen. 12:3).

In contrast to His plans for the nations, God’s plans for His people are good (Isa. 35). He will turn the dry, wilderness lands of Judah into well-watered, lush lands that will surpass the most fertile lands in the region (35:1–2). As a result, the people of God will witness His salvation. Eyes that were blind will be opened, and ears that were deaf will be unstopped (35:5). Jesus alluded to this passage to reveal to John the Baptist that He is the Messiah (Matt. 11:2–6). Isaiah prophesied that the people of God will travel the “Holy Way” in the joyous return to Zion (35:8–10).

Isaiah 36–39 serves as a historical bridge to transition from the first section of Isaiah to its final section. Here, Isaiah turned his attention to three events in the life of Hezekiah that are also recorded in 2 Kings 18–20: (1) the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians who invaded Judah and laid siege on Jerusalem (Isa. 36–37); (2) Hezekiah’s life threatening illness, his plea for God’s healing, and God’s promise to add fifteen years to his life (Isa. 38); and (3) Hezekiah’s prideful act of showing the treasures of Jerusalem to envoys representing the king of Babylon, Merodach-baladan (Isa. 39). These events are not in chronological order, but they serve to show that even the most godly of the people, such as Hezekiah, failed in their commitment to the Lord in spite of God’s goodness to them. The Lord dispensed of the Assyrian threat, but Babylonian exile would be inescapable for Judah.

As you read Isaiah 37:14-20,30-35, what does the Lord reveal concerning the prayers of His people?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE REQUEST (ISA. 37:14-20)

¹⁴ And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying, ¹⁶ O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. ¹⁷ Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. ¹⁸ Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, ¹⁹ And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. ²⁰ Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.

VERSE 14

The verses leading up to verse 14 set the stage for Hezekiah's prayer requesting the Lord's deliverance. In chapter 36, the Assyrian king's royal spokesman addressed Hezekiah's administrative leaders at the same place Isaiah confronted King Ahaz about trusting the Assyrians. That decision led to Judah's present predicament. The spokesman's goal was to dishearten Jerusalem's inhabitants and intimidate Hezekiah so that he would surrender the city without a fight. A siege would be time consuming and costly for the Assyrians, even if they were confident of victory. The royal spokesman questioned Hezekiah's military strength, the dependability of Judah's Egyptian allies, and God's faithfulness to Judah as well as His ability to defeat the Assyrians (36:8-20).

The report Hezekiah received from his officials of the royal spokesman's message terrified him. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went to the temple. Additionally, he sent a message to Isaiah asking the prophet to pray to the Lord for help. Isaiah replied, saying the Lord heard the Assyrian king's spokesman and would deal with the Assyrians. Hezekiah must not be afraid (37:6). However, Assyria's king, Sennacherib, sent a letter to Hezekiah stating that the gods of other cities he conquered were unable to save their people, and Hezekiah's God would not be able to rescue him either.

When Hezekiah received and read this letter, he ***went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD***. Hezekiah's response was the response every child of God should have when faced with what appears to be an unsurmountable crisis; he took it to the Lord. Though God did not need Hezekiah to show Him the letter, Hezekiah asked God, "Do you see what Sennacherib had the audacity to write?" Hezekiah's actions displayed his faith in God as well as his passion for the glory of God.

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary for background.*

Read articles about Sennacherib in a Bible dictionary. Read some of the Bible passages listed in the article to gain a more complete picture of this king. What accomplishments did you discover that may have contributed to Sennacherib's feelings of invincibility? How might his traits and accomplishments have influenced Hezekiah to seek God's help?

VERSES 15-16

Commenting on the fact that Hezekiah ***prayed unto the LORD*** in this situation might seem unnecessary. After all, one might surmise that anyone in Hezekiah's situation would turn to the Lord in prayer. However, the vast majority of Israel and Judah's kings were self-willed and independent.

How much people pray to the Lord indicates how much they recognize their own inadequacy and need for Him. True humility means trusting in God. Equally important, Hezekiah's turning to the Lord in prayer was not only an act of humility but also of wisdom. In fact, Proverbs 11:2 teaches that "with the lowly is wisdom." Unlike foolish kings who relied on their own logic, alliances with other nations, and impressive military resources, Hezekiah trusted in the only One who could save him—the Lord.

What might keep a person from turning to God first? How does the urgency of a situation impact who a person turns to for help?

Hezekiah began his prayer by calling God the *LORD of hosts*. He recognized that God fights for His people. The Lord was the true leader of all of Israel's armies as well as His heavenly hosts. The *cherubims* were the powerful angelic figures carved out of olive wood and covered in gold that spread their wings over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in the temple. The mercy seat represented God's throne and the manifest presence of God with His people. Thus, Hezekiah recognized the Lord was with His people. Moreover, Hezekiah maintained that as Creator, God alone has complete sovereignty and power over all the nations to do with them whatever He pleases. What Hezekiah said about the Lord served to remind the beleaguered king of the reality of who God is. Prayer does not inform God of anything. What prayer does is remind us of what we already know, adjusting our hearts and heads to be in line with whom God is and what He is doing.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

There is one and only one living and true God (Jer. 10:10).

VERSES 17-20

Hezekiah's use of five imperatives in verse 17 demonstrates the urgency of the situation. Hezekiah was asking God to act in a way that demonstrated He knew what had transpired. Notice Hezekiah's

motivation. Referencing the letter he had spread out before him, he was appalled that Sennacherib had mocked *the living God*. Hezekiah's first and foremost concern was not his personal well-being or the security of his people but the glory of God. Sennacherib thought that the Lord was weak like the other gods who failed to defend their peoples when the Assyrians conquered their cities. But Hezekiah knew the truth. The Lord is *the living God*.

Hezekiah acknowledged the truth of what Sennacherib asserted in his letter concerning his conquests, even though Sennacherib exaggerated claiming to have brought "all the countries" under submission (v. 11). The Assyrians had at least conquered all of the countries Sennacherib mentioned by name and devastated the inhabitants and lands of those countries. In addition, when the Assyrian kings seized the nations in the region, they burned up the gods of those nations. The flames destroyed and consumed their idols of *wood and stone*. This was the Assyrians' way of communicating that their god, Ashur, was greater than the gods of these other nations. These conquests were not just national issues (one nation opposing another) or only political in nature (one ruler against another), but they were also theological (one patron god against the Lord God). The conquests were understood to be as much a battle between gods as they were between armies on the ground.

Hezekiah faced the brutal reality of his situation. His faith in God did not become clouded with foolish notions that everything was fine. He also knew that Sennacherib actually did not defeat any gods because the Lord is the one and only God. Sennacherib overestimated his accomplishments and underestimated the Lord. The Assyrian monarch thought Yahweh was just another god, but Hezekiah knew better.

Hezekiah's honest assessment of all that had transpired—of his present predicament and of everyone involved—led to his petition in verse 20. The word *now* carries the idea of "based upon all that has transpired and everything I have brought before You." Sennacherib had conquered many nations and now threatened to seize Jerusalem. This heathen king had the audacity to challenge Yahweh. Therefore, Hezekiah prayed that the Lord would save His people from this juggernaut so that all the nations might know that He is God and that there is no other. Hezekiah realized that this moment of Judah's extreme inadequacy and vulnerability was the perfect opportunity for the Lord to glorify Himself before the nations. The glory of God was Hezekiah's primary concern.

What does Hezekiah's prayer teach about priorities when praying to God?

DID YOU KNOW?

When King Hezekiah became seriously ill, he prayed that God would intervene. God answered by adding fifteen more years to Hezekiah's life (Isa. 38:1-6).

THE SIGN (ISA. 37:30-32)

³⁰ And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof. ³¹ And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward: ³² For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this.

VERSES 30-32

Upon promising that He would frustrate Sennacherib's plans and make him return home, the Lord promised Hezekiah that He would restore Judah. Hezekiah would know this by a **sign**. The sign would be that in two full years the land of Judah would be completely restored. No doubt, Sennacherib waged war on the actual land of Judah when he invaded. This was a common practice of warfare in the ancient Near East, leaving a conquered enemy weak and vulnerable for years to follow. However, God promised that the people would not do without and that after two years everything would be back to normal. God called upon Hezekiah to trust Him as the two years passed.

How important is expressing trust when praying to God? How does trusting in God's promises affect the mindset of believers when praying?

THE ANSWER (ISA. 37:33-35)

³³ Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. ³⁵ For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

VERSES 33-35

God promised to defend Jerusalem without a single **arrow** being shot, without a single infantry charge, and without even a single **bank** or siege ramp against the city. Not only would the Assyrians fail to enter the city, they would not even get the opportunity to attack the city. Before Sennacherib could lift a finger against Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in the middle of the night. God answered Hezekiah's prayer. The Lord saved His people and received all the glory by how He did it. Devastated by his losses, Sennacherib did just as Isaiah prophesied and fled back home only to be assassinated by two of his sons.

The Lord does not always deliver His people from physical crises as He delivered the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. However, the people of God may be assured they have the security of His presence in crises. They can trust in God's love, power, and wisdom as He ultimately does what is best for them and for His glory. Sometimes the Lord's salvation comes by eliminating a difficulty; at other times He delivers believers as they go through the crisis. (See Heb. 11, especially vv. 35-40.)

The Lord gave Hezekiah two reasons He would save Jerusalem. First, He would do it for His own sake, meaning He would save Jerusalem for the sake of His reputation. Fundamentally, God's purpose for His people is to use them as instruments of His glory and to make Himself known in all the earth. Second, the Lord would save Jerusalem to keep His promise to David to establish his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16). This promise to Hezekiah was ultimately fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do verses 33-35 convey about the purposes and character of God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can approach God with bold requests because of who God is.
- God calls on believers to trust Him as He responds to our prayers according to His will and purpose.
- God responds to our prayers in ways that demonstrate His power and are in accordance with His plans.

What situations have you hesitated to take to God in prayer recently? Take time to boldly approach Him, following Hezekiah’s lead. Record your thoughts after having done so.

Review your recent prayer requests. How do you need to adjust your requests so that the requests reflect God’s purposes?

As a group, discuss God’s commitment to His reputation and to keeping His promises. What affects should these divine commitments have on believers and the life of your group? Hold each other accountable for memorizing Isaiah 37:35 this week.

PRAYER NEEDS

God Renews

God provides strength for those who trust in Him.

ISAIAH 40:18-31

People like being compared to someone who is well respected in their given field. For example, a person who plays a sport usually appreciates being compared to an accomplished player in that sport. However, no one likes being compared to someone or something beneath him or her. Isaiah understood this truth and proclaimed that because everything is beneath God, nothing compares to Him. God alone is worthy of worship and trust, and the one who trusts in the Lord will not be disappointed.

Who is someone you have been compared to? How can a comparison be flattering? How can a comparison lead to trouble?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 40:1–41:29

Isaiah 40:1–41:29 is foundational for the rest of the Book of Isaiah. As the people of Judah faced the future hardships of Babylonian exile, this eighth century prophet exhorted them to remember who God is. He is the God who chose them and would be with them (41:8-10). The people of God must remember that the Lord is their Deliverer and Comforter. He is omnipotent and able to save them from any threat, vindicating and rewarding those who remain faithful to Him. Their enemies would fade away and perish (40:7; 41:11-12).

As the Creator, God has both the ability and authority to do with His creation whatever He pleases (40:12). The Lord demonstrates His supremacy over the nations by His knowledge and wisdom. He knows what is right, does what is right, and does it in the right way, at the right time, to the right extent (40:13-14). God is superior to the nations because He is superior to their idols. God created the stars and calls them by name (40:26). What have the gods of the nations done? Nothing. Their gods have done nothing and can do nothing because they are nothing; those who choose to worship them are deluded (41:21-24). Everything Isaiah said he premises on the truth that there is only one God, “the Holy One of Israel” (41:20). The Lord establishes His supremacy over the nations by pointing out they are temporal while He alone is eternal (40:21). He has not abandoned His creation, especially His people. The day is coming when God will bring down the arrogant nations and exalt His people.

As a shepherd cares for his sheep, the Lord will tenderly attend to the needs of His people (40:11). God will manifest His sovereignty over all of humanity by love and not by compulsion. God’s faithful love will compel His people to respond to Him in faithful obedience. This display of loving kindness and powerful deliverance of His people will prove God’s love for His people. Those who reject Him will fall but those who trust in the Lord will soar on wings like eagles (40:31).

As you read Isaiah 40:18-31, look for the contrast between God and His creation. What do the comparisons reveal about God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

LIVING (ISA. 40:18-20)

¹⁸ To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? ¹⁹ The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. ²⁰ He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.

VERSE 18

The questions of verses 18-19 arise from the truths about God in the preceding verses. The Lord comforts His people. He forgives and restores them as a loving Father who disciplines His children. The Lord will intervene for His people, and all humanity will see His glory. Life on earth is temporal, but God and His Word are eternal. He will come with strength, establish His rule, and reward those who have been faithful. He will protect His flock like a shepherd and gently lead them as if they were nursing lambs. He is awesome in power as Creator. God is also inherently holy in His knowledge and wisdom, meaning His knowledge and wisdom are far beyond human understanding. Unlike humanity, He needs no instruction; God has always been and always will be complete in His knowledge and understanding apart from external sources. The nations are nothing before Him.

Based on these truths, Isaiah challenged the people as he raised the question: *To whom then will ye liken God?* The Lord created all things, so who or what could compare to Him? The inescapable conclusion is that there is no other God but the God of Israel.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience (1 Tim. 1:17).

VERSES 19-20

The idols of the nations are no comparison to God, since *a graven image* is nothing more than a human creation without power even to

stand on its own. Isaiah described the manufacturing of a metal idol that began with a *workman* pouring a molten metal into a mold to form the idol. Next, the *goldsmith* beat paper-thin plates of gold and covered the image with it. After that, the metalworker completed the idol by making *silver chains* for it. These silver chains may have been decorative or more likely they served the purpose of chaining it down to its pedestal or to the floor so that it would not fall over.

In verse 20, Isaiah described an *impoverished* person who could not afford to have someone construct him an expensive gold-plated idol. Therefore, this person looked for a skilled craftsman to carve an image out of a hard *tree* that would not rot. It would have required a great deal of effort to carve. Additionally, it needed a firm foundation so that it would not topple over by the wind or by someone bumping into it.

Isaiah highlighted the absurdity of going to so much trouble to worship what is ultimately worthless and nothing. How can such temporal things made by human hands compare to the omnipotent, omniscient eternal God who is the Creator? Idols may look impressive and be quite exquisite, but in the end they are just wood, stone, clay, or metal. Their worshipers construct them with material created by the living God.

Humanity must always recognize the infinite distance between God and His creation. To lose the distinction between the Creator and His creation is to fall into the sin of idolatry. To think of God as just another god or to compare Him with other idols is blasphemy. It is dishonoring to God's name, character, work, and attributes. Isaiah sought to show his audience that the false gods were based on delusion and absolutely no comparison to the glory of the God of Israel. Given all that God had done for His people, they should have already known this.

Why are people often more impressed by the work of human hands than all that God has done?

SOVEREIGN CREATOR (ISA. 40:21-26)

²¹ Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations

of the earth? ²² It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: ²³ That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. ²⁴ Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. ²⁵ To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

VERSE 21

Isaiah used rhetorical questions to make his point. Here, the first and fourth questions go together and the two in the middle go together. Such an arrangement is common and Bible teachers often refer to it as a “chiastic structure.” It is a literary device where the biblical writer presents a sequence of ideas and then represents them in reverse order. In this instance, ideas A and B are repeated in reverse order with B and A. Normally, the idea in the middle is the most emphatic point. Isaiah’s first and fourth questions indicate that his listeners should have known the fundamental truth that the Lord is the Creator and nothing compares to Him. It is a matter of general knowledge.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare passages with a similar theme.*

Compare Isaiah 40:21 with Job 12:7-9 and Romans 1:20-23. How do these passages point to the reality of God? What are the common themes found in these passages? What can we learn about God from His creation?

The two central questions of verse 21 get to the heart of the matter: the people's unwillingness to listen to God's word. Since God created the heavens and the earth, the people not only saw evidence that God is the Creator, but also the Lord's prophets repeatedly told them God is the Creator. Nevertheless, Isaiah's audience refused to listen.

VERSES 22-24

God is not only greater than the gods of the nations, He is also over all the nations. God sits on His throne above the earth. The ***circle of the earth*** may refer to the horizon of the earth or the sky above it. The vastness of God's reign is magnified by the minuteness of humanity and every other creature inhabiting the earth. Compared to God, humans are as tiny and powerless as grasshoppers that on average grow to about two inches long. In contrast, God is so great He requires the whole expanse of the heavens to serve as His tent.

Officials who sit in the highest seats of leadership among the nations may appear to have great power, but they are under the rule of Almighty God. Isaiah described the powerlessness and temporariness of world leaders using the metaphor of young plants that wither. Isaiah makes it clear that these leaders are ***planted***. In other words, they do not establish themselves by their own power. It is God who "removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Dan. 2:21). Therefore, as impressive as Sennacherib appeared when the Assyrians invaded Judah and surrounded Jerusalem, and as imposing as Nebuchadnezzar would seem when his Babylonian hordes captured thousands of Judahites, marched them off to exile, and destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, they were nothing to God. God drove out Sennacherib, and He would bring down Nebuchadnezzar.

Sennacherib's reign lasted about twenty-five years, and Nebuchadnezzar would rule his vast Babylonian empire for about forty-four years. From a human perspective their reigns were impressive. However, God would exhale and blow them away like useless ***stubble*** that remained on the field after the harvest. No strenuous exertion on God's part was required.

VERSES 25-26

Verses 25-26 make up the fourth section of rhetorical questions in Isaiah 40. The questions of verses 18-20 contrasted God with the idols the people worshiped. The questions of verses 25-26

contrast God with the heavenly hosts many of the people worshiped. Both sections communicate one truth: the Holy One is incomparable. God’s calling Himself “the Holy One” conveys the truth that nothing compares to Him. God was saying that He is so transcendent—so far above and beyond His creation in every way—that it is impossible to compare anything to Him.

DID YOU KNOW?

Religions in the ancient world believed that the stars in the sky were gods. Even some Israelites during the time of Isaiah’s ministry “bowed in worship to all the stars in the sky” (2 Kings 17:16).

Therefore, while the starry hosts of heaven may reveal a glimpse of God’s glory, He is their Creator. They reflect His glory. Human beings can only guess how many stars there are, but God knows how many there are and *calleth them all by names*. It does not just mean God knows their names; it means God is the one who has given them their names. Furthermore, God is the Holy One who by His great power sustains them. Not only did He bring them into existence, but also He is the one who keeps them in existence. Consequently, as creations of the Holy One, the heavenly bodies are unworthy of worship; only their Creator is worthy of worship.

How should knowing that God is the Creator and is directing the affairs of His creation affect a believer’s daily life?

TIRELESS SOURCE (ISA. 40:27-31)

²⁷ Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

²⁸ Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. ²⁹ He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he

increaseth strength. ³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. ³¹ But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

VERSES 27-28

The Lord asked His people why they complained that He had been ignoring them. The grammar conveys a continual complaining. There is a hint of sarcasm as they called Him *my God*. In other words, “Supposedly, You are ‘my God,’ but what good are you to me if You refuse to listen to me?” The God who continually sent Israel His prophets, gave them His word, dwelt among them, and saved them on numerous occasions was told by this people—who hardly ever listened to Him—that He was ignoring them.

One might expect the Lord’s response to their complaint to be harsh. Instead, God points out they needed to acknowledge what they already know and listen to what they have already heard. The God of Israel is Eternal God. He never tires, and there is no limit to what He knows and understands. They must never doubt His capability and must never assume they can understand His ways.

Why are the people of God prone to forget what they have heard and know about the Lord?

VERSES 29-31

God is capable of strengthening the failing and empowering the powerless. Even young men with vigor and strength eventually grow weary, stumble, and fall as do all who trust in their own strength. However, those who patiently trust in the Lord and look to Him for strength will not be disappointed. Rejuvenated, they will have renewed strength. Hope in the future provides strength in the present. Drawing on the Lord’s strength, the dragging one will *mount up*, weary legs will *run*, and the fainting person will be able to *walk* a great distance. Mounting up (soaring), running, and walking all imply forward movement. While they may move at different paces, God’s people will never be stuck. They have no reason to despair.

APPLY THE TEXT

- All idols are human creations and fall short in comparison to the one true God.
- God alone is the Creator of the universe, directing the affairs of His creation.
- God strengthens those who place their trust in Him.

Examine your life, looking for potential idols—things you place more trust in than you do God. Confess your idolatry to God as you discover each idol. What actions do you need to take to keep God first in your life?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 40:31. Discuss what difference it makes in the lives of believers when they completely place their trust in God for both the present and future. How can the group help each other to continue to place their trust in God?

PRAYER NEEDS



God Acts

The one true God is incomparable; He will complete His plan to save His people.

ISAIAH 46:3-13

Many of us will “plan our work, and work our plan” when seeking to accomplish a big task. Doing so may require a singular focus. We may even choose to participate only in activities that contribute to the plan’s success and abstain from involvement in anything that gets in the way of us working our plan. Isaiah 46 indicates God has a plan and is committed to it. His plan is to save His people, and nothing will keep Him from accomplishing this plan of salvation, not even the hardheartedness of the people He will save.

Share about a time you completed a task by following a specific plan. How important was following your plan in successfully completing that specific task?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 42:1–48:22

Isaiah 42 begins with the first of four “Servant Songs” in the Book of Isaiah that describe the person and work of the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah. Being the first of these songs, Isaiah 42:1-9 introduces the Servant of the Lord saying, “Behold my servant ... mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” God chose Abraham and his descendants to be a blessing to every nation (Gen. 12:1-3). However, as a nation, the Lord rebuked Israel for failing to fulfill this purpose. Therefore, God would do with Israel what it failed to do. He would raise up one from the nation to fulfill His purpose to bless all the nations.

In chapters 42–44, Isaiah’s message revolved around four proclamations. The first was that God would intervene on behalf of His people, even though they are spiritually blind and deaf (42:13-17). The Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel would bring about a new exodus, bringing His people out of Babylonian exile (43:14-21). The second was an exhortation to listen to and obey God’s word because He was the one who would remove their sins (42:18-25; 43:22-28). Third, the Lord was their salvation (43:1-7; 44:1-5). The fourth proclamation was that the Lord is sovereign over all the nations and superior to all their false gods (43:8-13; 44:6-20). Isaiah declared that Israel needed to remember these things and turn back to Him because they were God’s chosen people and He would never forget them. God chose to glorify Himself through His people. While the nations formed their gods, Yahweh, Israel’s Redeemer, formed His people (44:21-24).

God promised Israel that He had chosen to use Cyrus to rescue the people and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (44:28–45:13). When the nations witnessed what God had done for Israel, they would recognize the futility of their gods and that the God of Israel is the one true God. The Lord’s call of salvation would go out to the nations (45:1-22). In chapters 46–47, Isaiah described God’s judgment on Babylon. God’s judgment on Babylon would be severe because of how harshly Babylon treated the people of God. God also recognized many of the people of Israel had an outward religion without true devotion to God, but God offered them a new beginning with their deliverance from Babylonian exile (Isa. 48).

As you read Isaiah 46:3-13, look for ways the one true God demonstrated that He is incomparable. How do these demonstrations instill trust in God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE TRUE GOD (ISA. 46:3-7)

³ Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: ⁴ And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. ⁵ To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? ⁶ They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. ⁷ They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

VERSE 3

In verses 1-2, we find the beginnings of a contrast between Bel and Nebo—two of the main Babylonian gods—with the Lord. Similar to the Canaanite title for their god, Baal, Bel means “lord,” and it was a title the Babylonians gave to their patron god, Marduk. They believed Marduk was the king or lord over all the other gods. Nebo is the Hebrew transliteration of Nabu, the son of Marduk. Nebo was especially popular among the Babylonian upper class, the nobility and intellectuals. He was the god of wisdom, writing, and divine interpretations. Nebo appears in the name of Nebuchadnezzar. Mount Nebo, the place where Moses scanned the promised land before he died, got its name from this god.

In verses 1-2, the Lord stated He would determine the future of Bel and Nebo. They would be defeated and carried away as spoils of war. These gods were a burden for weary animals to carry and were impotent and unable to rescue those who worshiped them.

Accordingly, these false gods themselves would be carried into captivity alongside their worshipers. The irony is that the climax of the Babylonian festival for the New Year was a processional where they carried their idols to a temple accompanied by the religious leaders and the king. In contrast to these weak and conquered gods, the Lord had shown Himself strong for His people. He exhorted them to listen to Him as He reminded them that even before their existence as a nation, He had sustained Israel or “put them on His back” and *carried* them. By necessity, beasts of burden carried the Babylonian gods, whereas the Lord Himself carried His people through the entire course of their existence. The gods of Babylon did not compare to the God of Jacob.

VERSE 4

There comes a point when parents can no longer carry their children. However, the Lord promised that His tender loving care for His children not only began before they were born but that it would also continue through their infancy, their childhood, their adulthood, on through their old age when their hair turns gray. They would never become a burden to Him. His arms would never tire. He *made* them. He would *bear* them as His load, lift them up, *carry* them, and in doing so *deliver* them from the Babylonian captivity in which they would find themselves. The Babylonian gods would be unable to come to the rescue of those who worshiped them much less save them from going into captivity. However, the Lord would faithfully care for His people and save them.

How might we describe the difference between idols that are carried and God carrying His people? How does God carry His people today?

VERSES 5-7

In verses 5-7, the Lord mocked the idols of Babylon along with the craftsmen who made them. In verse 5, He began with rhetorical questions asking who can compare to Him. In verses 6-7, He derisively concluded that certainly those who hired skilled workers to make the idols, the artisans who actually crafted the idols, and the idols themselves did not compare.

The Lord's four rhetorical questions in verse 5 served as declarations: "No one compares to Me," "No one is My equal," "No one measures up to Me," and "No one is like Me." In Hebrew, normally a three-fold repetition of the same idea is the way to express superlative emphases, the most or utmost. The use of four statements was the Lord's way of saying His incomparability is even beyond that. Just as it is impossible for people to comprehend the idea of thinking of something greater than the greatest thing they are capable of imagining, it is impossible to compare anything to the incomparable eternal God.

In verses 6-7 the Lord mockingly proposed three possible contenders who could have compared to Him. The first candidates are those who poured out their gold and silver to have idols made. Surely, they had to pay the craftsmen for their labors, but the gold and silver here refers to the large amount of these costly metals needed to produce impressive and exquisite graven images. The Babylonians constructed their idols with a hard wood center plated with gold and silver and clothed in expensive robes with gold and silver spangles or sequins. Their craftsmen used precious jewels to represent the eyes and ears of the idols. These idols were extremely costly, and after a dedication ceremony, they represented a manifestation of the god whose images they bore. As the worshipers knelt and bowed down before these gods, they believed they were in the actual presence of the god. They worshiped the thing that they just paid an enormous amount of money to have made.

Verse 7 points out these lifeless idols could not move, so their devotees had to lift them on their shoulders and carry them. Otherwise, an idol just stood in its appointed place in its temple doing nothing. Its powerlessness to move on its own shows its inability to do anything for anyone. These realities stood in strong contrast to Yahweh. While He chose to make His manifest presence known at the temple in Jerusalem, He is everywhere. In Isaiah 40:22, the prophet said, "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."

What promises are offered by the man-made gods of today? How do these man-made gods compare to the one true God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Memorize Scripture.*

Seek to memorize Isaiah 46:4. Review each phrase, identifying ways you have seen this true in your life and the lives of others. Reflect on the impact this passage may have on believers as they contemplate God's faithful care and salvation.

THE TRUSTWORTHY ONE (ISA. 46:8-11)

⁸ Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. ⁹ Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ¹¹ Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

VERSES 8-9

The Lord told His audience to *remember this*. To what does *this* refer? It refers to *the former things of old*, all the magnificent things God had done for them. If they would listen to this command, they would know that Yahweh was the only One who was trustworthy. If the people would just think about the impotence of the idols and remember what God had done for Israel even before its existence, it would strengthen their faith and give them a proper perspective.

The Scriptures clearly teach the importance of the people of God remembering what He has said and done. For example, Moses told the Israelites to remember how God led them and provided for them for forty years in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2). God instructed the Israelites to set up memorial stones to remind the people of His faithfulness (Josh. 4:21-22). The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a memorial of what God did to save Israel from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 13:1-8), just as the Lord's Supper is a memorial of what Jesus did to save us from our bondage to sin (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

God commanded these *transgressors* to *bring it again to mind*. He called them *transgressors* because they deliberately disobeyed God and were willfully unfaithful to Yahweh by worshiping

idols. *Bring it again to mind* means the people needed to seriously consider all that God had done. God commanded them to do what David did, remembering God's works and reflecting on them. (See Ps. 77:11-15.)

If only the people in Isaiah's day would have listened and done what David did! God told them that if they truly remembered what He had done for them in the past, then like David, they would have recognized what the Lord emphatically stated. Certainly, He is God, there is no other, and no one is like Him.

***God is not figuring things out as He goes,
and He does not act on a whim.***

VERSES 10-11

These verses describe what the incomparable God is able to do. First, He foretells events before they happen. It is evidence of His omniscience. He knows what is going to happen ahead of time, and the Lord revealed the future through His prophets. Second, the Lord accomplishes what He plans to do. The past, present, and future all proceed according to God's purposes. The Lord has a plan, and He will carry out all of it down to its finest detail. God is not figuring things out as He goes, and He does not act on a whim. God is sovereign. He will do whatever is His pleasure, and no one can thwart Him.

In verse 11, God provided evidence of His sovereignty and part of His plan to use King Cyrus of Persia. God would cause Cyrus to come and conquer the Babylonians. He would be God's instrument of judgment and carry out what Yahweh intended, His *counsel*. Cyrus would swiftly fly in like a *ravenous bird* and defeat his enemies. The Lord concluded this verse with two parallel statements for emphasis: *I have spoken it* and *I have purposed it*. Both statements confirmed God's established will, and the statements *I will also bring it to pass* and *I will also do it* were emphatic ways of saying "You can count on Me to do it!"

How should God's omniscience and sovereignty over all of history be a source of strength and hope for believers today?

THE JUST ONE (ISA. 46:12-13)

¹² **Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness:** ¹³ **I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.**

VERSES 12-13

The Lord called them *stouthearted* and commanded them to *hearken* to Him. To call them *stouthearted* was to say they were callous, resistant, stubborn, and unreceptive to God’s word. To be *far from righteousness* means they were unrighteous, that is, unbelievers. Those who are far from justice or righteousness are those who are far from being justified or righteous before God. Nevertheless, God demonstrated His mercy by calling them to listen and by communicating His word to them. The kindness God showed these sinners by even speaking to them one more time is incomprehensible.

God then promised to bring His *righteousness* near to them, declaring that it *shall not be far off* and His *salvation* would come quickly. Salvation would come at God’s initiative, by His mercy and grace. The people would not do anything to deserve it. It would be the Lord’s righteousness and the Lord’s work of salvation, and it would be *for Israel my glory*. These words to Israel are similar to words the apostle Paul spoke to the Romans as he reminded them that salvation was near and was available to those who confessed and believed in Jesus. (See Rom. 10:8-9.)

How should the mercy and grace God shows hardhearted rebels against Him affect how believers relate to God, other believers, and unbelievers?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

APPLY THE TEXT

- The one true God is able to save His people.
- The one true God continues to demonstrate His power and trustworthiness.
- The one true God provides His eternal plan of salvation for His people.

Discuss as a group ways of sharing the truths found in this passage to help people understand their need for Jesus. With whom can you share the truth about idols and any item that gets in the way of worshiping God? How can you use the truths from this passage to help them understand the need for trusting Jesus alone for salvation?

In what areas of your life are you in need of God’s assurance? How does this passage give you assurance in those areas? Thank God for being faithful to His plans.

Examine your life, looking for places where you are hardhearted and unwilling to trust God. What actions do you need to take as expressions of faith in God?

PRAYER NEEDS



God Comforts

The one true God is compassionate; He comforts His people.

ISAIAH 49:1-13

Some things in life seem impossible. A doctor's diagnosis, the emotions of an ended relationship, or being called into the boss's office can make us feel like there is no tomorrow. The people of Israel faced the seemingly impossible in the form of conquering armies, guilt of moral failure, and God's judgment for their disobedience. Isaiah reminded them that God was preparing the way for His Servant. Through this Servant, He would accomplish His purposes and reward those who faithfully serve Him.

What or who gives you comfort when you are facing a seemingly impossible situation? How does that item or person give you comfort?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ISAIAH 49:1–50:11

Isaiah included four Servant Songs in his prophecy. Of the four, two are included in this week’s context passage. Although Bible scholars sometimes disagree on the precise number of verses included in the Servant Songs, Isaiah 49:1-13 contains the second Servant Song and 50:4-11 contains the third. In the ancient Near East, ambassadors, trusted envoys, chosen emissaries, or personal representatives of kings were often called “servants.” The “servant” in Isaiah is a royal figure who represented God and did His work.

God chose Abraham and his descendants to be a blessing to the nations. The Servant’s identification with Israel in Isaiah 49:3 indicates He was Abraham’s chosen seed who would not only fulfill Israel’s purpose to be a blessing to the nations but who also would restore Israel back to Yahweh. He would mediate a new covenant with Israel. The Servant would accomplish what Israel had failed to do. He would be despised but God would vindicate Him. World leaders would bow before Him in recognition of who He is. In Acts 3:13, the apostle Peter identified the Servant as Jesus.

Isaiah 49:14–50:3 indicates the Servant’s work would have a significant impact on Zion—another name for Jerusalem—and the people of Israel. The city’s inhabitants felt like the Lord had forsaken them. The Lord responded by declaring He had more compassion for Israel than a mother nursing her child. Even though Israel experienced the consequences of its sin, God had not abandoned His people, and He would not leave them in exile. Using foreigners, God would defeat their oppressors and bring many of His people back to Zion.

In the third Servant Song (Isa. 50:4-11), the Servant proclaimed that He was taught how to encourage the weary. Though He endured severe opposition and mistreatment, He was resolved to obey God, knowing that one day God would vindicate Him before His enemies. The Servant’s instruction to the people of God was to remain faithful and trust the Lord. He then warned that those who failed to do so would suffer God’s judgment as the consequence of their unbelief.

As you read Isaiah 49:1-13, note the actions to be taken by the Servant. How are these actions seen in Jesus and His work?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INCLUDED (ISA. 49:1-4)

¹ Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. ² And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; ³ And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. ⁴ Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

VERSE 1

These are the words of the Servant of the Lord. (See v. 3.) They begin in verse 1 with a command to the *isles* and the *people, from far*. Whenever the Old Testament writers used the word *people*, they were referring to the nations. Thus, this message was universal, addressed to everyone everywhere. The command was for the peoples to *listen*. The insistence for the people to *listen* is common among the prophets and reveals that the Servant was a prophet. However, the expression, *listen ... unto me*, is unique to the Book of Isaiah, and only the Lord used this phrase as He addressed the people.

What does this reveal about the Servant? The Servant was going to proceed by revealing what God planned for Him to do. He began with how God called Him. Just as God spoke to Abraham and called Israel to be a blessing to the nations before Israel was a nation, the Lord also called the Servant for a specific task. Moreover, since Yahweh issued the commission, the Servant came at God's bidding with divine authority to do God's will. Consequently, the command to listen to Him is as authoritative as was God the Father's command concerning Jesus when He said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Mark 9:7).

VERSES 2-3

Like a sharp sword, the Servant's message would pierce the hearts of those who were near. Like *a polished shaft*, it would pierce the

hearts of those far off. His gospel would reach those both far and near. Everyone would have to respond one way or another to His message. When the apostle John saw Jesus in a vision of the future, he wrote: “Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword” (Rev. 19:15). The writer of Hebrews wrote: “the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Furthermore, as the Servant carried out His mission, He would be secure in the hand of His heavenly Father, and the Lord would protect and keep the Servant hidden like arrows in a *quiver* until it was time for the Servant to reveal Himself.

The Servant revealed that God called Him *my servant, O Israel*. It seems straightforward. However, verse 3 needs to be understood in light of the immediate context and in the context of all of Scripture. In verses 5-6, the Servant would “bring Jacob again to him.” He would raise up “the tribes of Jacob” (Israel) and restore “the preserved of Israel.” Clearly, the Servant, an individual, was doing these things for Israel. It was not Israel doing them for itself. In Isaiah 50:5, the Servant said “I was not rebellious,” and 53:9 indicates the Servant would suffer and die even though “he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” These descriptions certainly do not pertain to Israel. Isaiah realized that Israel as a people could not accomplish what was needed for the salvation of the nations, let alone their own salvation.

So why did God call His Servant (Jesus) *Israel*? First, He did it to reveal the Servant was a descendant of Abraham. God’s promise to use Abraham to bless the nations was fulfilled in Jesus. Paul wrote that God’s purpose was “that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:14). Second, God called Jesus *Israel* because He was the ideal Israel. The Servant would succeed and embody in perfect obedience what Israel as a nation had miserably failed to do. He would be everything they should have been.

In Hebrew, verse 3 has a strong grammatical break between *Thou art my servant* and *Israel*. Therefore, it could be read, “You are my servant; Israel, in you I will glorify myself.” God used Israel as an instrument of blessing to bring forth His Son, the Servant of the Lord, who would glorify His heavenly Father in His work of salvation.

VERSE 4

Verse 4 reveals the Servant would be rejected and would not see a great response to His message. John wrote of Jesus: “He came unto

his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). At times, it would appear He *laboured in vain*. He suffered ridicule and abuse, and poured out His life for His people. In the end, one of His disciples betrayed Him and only one went with Him to the cross while the rest abandoned Him. Nevertheless, the word *yet* indicates a strong contrast because the Servant knew the Lord would vindicate Him and ensure that the Servant would completely accomplish all His Father sent Him to do. The Servant’s confidence was in His heavenly Father, and the Servant would trust His Father with the results.

How can knowing that God vindicates His children help believers learn to trust Him with the results and timing?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar passages.*

Compare Isaiah chapter 40 and chapter 49. Make a list of the promises of chapter 40 and similar phrases in chapter 49. How will the servant of the Lord fulfill God’s plan to comfort His people? Look up 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2. What connections do you see between this passage and Isaiah 40 and 49? Note them in your list. How do Jesus’ actions as the servant of the Lord apply to believers today?

CALLED (ISA. 49:5-7)

⁵ And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. ⁶ And he said, It is a light thing that

thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. ⁷ Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

VERSE 5

This verse stands in contrast to the despondency at the beginning of verse 4. The Servant would lead a remnant of the people of Israel back to the Lord. Whatever discouragement there was that tempted the Servant, it quickly dissipated with the knowledge that God had prepared Him for His mission from the very beginning. The task that looked like it would defeat the Servant was what God had prepared Him for—*to bring Jacob again to him*. Even though Israel had abandoned the Lord, He would not abandon them. Therefore, God sent His servant to go get them and restore them. It was to be much more than just a mere rescue from Babylonian exile. It was to be a spiritual deliverance. Like a shepherd, the Servant would go, gather them, and bring them back to God.

What would bring God the greatest glory would be the salvation of people from every nation.

VERSE 6

The Hebrew word translated “glory” literally means “to be heavy.” Thus, God told the Servant it was not glorious enough for the Servant to restore Israel alone, only one nation. What would bring God the greatest glory would be the salvation of people from every nation. Therefore, God told the Servant He would make the Servant *a light to the Gentiles*, to be God’s salvation *unto the end of the earth*. With this purpose in mind, the Servant would fulfill God’s promise to Abraham and his seed to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). The salvation of people from every nation always was and still is God’s purpose.

VERSE 7

Initially, people would despise and abhor the Servant; those He came to save would scorn Him. Furthermore, this chosen Servant of the Lord would submit Himself before human rulers. Jesus certainly did this before Pilate and Herod (John 18:33-37; Luke 23:6-12). However, the day will come when the kings and princes of this world will recognize the Servant for who He is and bow before Him because He is God's chosen One.

In the New Testament, believers are identified as bearers of the light and given the responsibility of sharing that light with others (Matt. 5:14-16). We are called on to share Christ with all, pointing them to the comfort found in the Servant.

What role does today's believer play as a bearer of the light, one who carries the message of the gospel? How does that role relate to the work done by the Servant?

VINDICATED (ISA. 49:8-13)

⁸ Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; ⁹ That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. ¹⁰ They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. ¹¹ And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. ¹² Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. ¹³ Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

VERSES 8-12

The *acceptable time* and *the day of salvation* is when the Servant would accomplish the work of salvation for Israel and the nations.

The apostle Paul quoted verse 8, “I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. All of the covenant promises and blessings are embodied in Him. Consequently, union with God comes only through Christ for the Israelite and Gentile alike.

Verses 9-12 paint a picture of the Lord’s blessing on His restored people. Like a shepherd, He would feed His people in secure places, protected from hunger, thirst, and sweltering heat. With compassion, He would lead them to springs of water. He would transform their obstacles into clear paths. It is difficult to determine the location of *Sinim*, but the point of verse 12 is clear: the people of God would stream to Him from all over the earth. The return of the exiles from Babylon would foreshadow this much greater event in the future when people of every nationality will experience the blessings of provision, protection, and compassionate guidance that come with the Lord’s salvation.

VERSE 13

Isaiah concluded this Servant Song with a call for the *heavens*, the *earth*, and the *mountains* to rejoice in the Lord’s salvation of His people. The phrase, *his people*, refers not only to physical descendants of Abraham but also to all whom the Lord will graciously save through their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God will save those who are afflicted by sin and struggle in darkness, and those who deserved God’s judgment will experience His compassion.

Define the rejoicing experienced by a person who trusts in Jesus for salvation. How is the Servant (Jesus) honored through our rejoicing in the salvation He provides?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end (Heb. 9:27-28).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can find comfort in knowing that God includes them in His redemptive plans.
- Believers are called upon to compassionately deliver the message of God’s salvation to all people.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God will vindicate them.

Discuss as a group the comfort found by those who know God has included them in His plan of salvation. How can your group help others discover this truth? List actions to be taken by the group.

How can you demonstrate your thankfulness for God’s salvation? Reflect on ways you rejoice in God’s salvation. How does rejoicing in His salvation give you comfort?

PRAYER NEEDS



God Justifies

The one true God is forgiving; He justifies believers by taking their sin on Himself.

ISAIAH 53:1-12

We honor parents who work multiple jobs to provide a brighter future for their children. We place the names of public servants who died while on duty on bridges and buildings. We commemorate the sacrifice paid by soldiers who fought and died in battle. Most of us willfully celebrate the sacrifices made by a person for the benefit of others. Isaiah told of a Servant who would come for the purpose of paying for our sin so that we could have peace with God. Through faith in the sacrificing Servant, we find forgiveness and restoration.

How do you celebrate the sacrifice others have made for you? How does their sacrifice impact you today?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 51:1–57:21

Isaiah delivered a message of hope and encouragement that focused on God's deliverance of His people. He began with an exhortation for the faithful to remember how God used Abraham and his barren wife Sarah to do what appeared impossible and bring forth the nation of Israel in fulfillment of His promise to them. In the same way, God promised the people in Isaiah's day that He would restore the ruins of Jerusalem and fill it once again with joy, thanksgiving, and melodious song. God's salvation would also extend to the nations (Isa. 51:1–52:12).

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 contains the last of the four Servant Songs in Isaiah. This song elaborates on the themes of the Servant's suffering and vindication, providing a detailed description of the Messiah's suffering. Isaiah begins with a promise of His ultimate triumph, as He will cleanse many people. In spite of this, the song reveals the people of God would reject the Servant because of His humble beginnings and unimpressive appearance. When the Servant suffered, the people would think God was inflicting judgment on Him because of His own sins. In truth, He would be suffering for their benefit as their substitute, bearing God's judgment for their sins and paying the price for their sins. Nevertheless, the Servant of the Lord would rise again to see the reward of His sacrifice.

Because of the Servant, Jerusalem had a bright future. God would protect it and bless it with beauty, peace, and righteousness (54:1–15). The Lord exhorted His people to come to Him and receive the blessings He offered while there was opportunity to do so. He desired an eternal covenant with the nation like the one He made with David. If the people would seek the Lord and turn from their wicked ways, He would compassionately forgive their sins. On the contrary, judgment awaited those who opposed God and persecuted His people. Only those who repent and turn to God, whether Israelite or foreigner, would be part of this future community of faith (55:1–57:21).

Underline in Isaiah 53:1–12 the things the Servant would endure. How do these experiences help us understand our sin?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DESPISED (ISA. 53:1-3)

¹ Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? ² For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

VERSE 1

The questions that begin verse 1 are more exclamations of dismay and amazement than actual questions. The first question exposes hearing without believing, and the second question displays seeing without believing. People would hear the message and witness in person the saving power of the Lord’s Servant, *the arm of the LORD* (see 52:10), and still not believe. The Lord rescued Israel out of Egypt with His outstretched arm, and He would use it to bring about an even greater salvation again.

Isaiah was articulating the general unbelief in the world and in Israel in particular concerning the revelation of the Servant. This Servant of whom Isaiah spoke is Jesus. John’s Gospel records how Jesus performed many signs before a crowd, yet they refused to believe He was the Messiah (John 12:37-38). John indicates that what happened was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s rhetorical questions here in verse 1. Additionally, much like Isaiah, when Jesus went to Nazareth to minister to the people, He too “marvelled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6:6). The apostle Paul quoted this verse when speaking of those who reject the gospel (Rom. 10:16).

DID YOU KNOW?

Isaiah 53 is quoted or referred to in 41 verses in the New Testament. New Testament writers identified the servant of Isaiah 53 as Jesus of Nazareth. (See, for example, Acts 8:30-35.)

VERSES 2-3

Isaiah spoke of the future in the past tense. The New Testament clearly teaches Jesus is the fulfillment of this song. In Hebrew, *a tender plant* refers to a shoot that grew and was usually cut off from the roots of an established tree. It may be a reference to Isaiah 11:10 that speaks of the Messiah coming from the “root of Jesse” and was thus a descendant of David. In the context, it points to His unimpressive appearance. The description, *a root out of a dry ground*, emphasizes His frail appearance, His poor family background, and His struggles. The Servant did not fit the stereotype of a savior for His people.

In verse 3 Isaiah described how people viewed the Servant. They wanted nothing to do with Him and abandoned Him. Many considered Him contemptible and disgusting and consequently rejected Him. Pain and suffering were distinctive characteristics of His life, and it was so bad that people did not want to look at Him. *Grief* refers to the consequences of sin as made clear in verse 4. Therefore, the Servant knew what it is like to live in a fallen world.

The gospels speak of these things. Jesus was sinless but pitched His tent among us (John 1:14). He identified with sinners. He knew what it was to live in a fallen world. His people rejected Him (John 1:11-13) and His family thought He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21). When soldiers arrested Jesus, His disciples deserted him (Mark 14:50), and one of His inner circle publicly denied Him (John 18:15-18,25-27). On top of all these rejections was the ongoing hostility of the political and religious leaders of His day, along with the fickle crowds.

SUBSTITUTE (ISA. 53:4-6)

⁴ Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

VERSES 4-5

Verses 4-6 are central to the song. They focus on how the Servant offered Himself as a substitute for others by taking the full

penalty of God's judgment of their sin on Himself. The idea of one suffering for another was not foreign to the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, a common person could take the place of a king and receive the suffering that a king rightfully deserved for his actions. In the end, the substitute was put to death. While there is no direct parallel between what the Servant did and this Mesopotamian practice, it shows the concept of substitution was understood at least by some in the ancient Near East. The irony is that with the death of Christ, it was the King of kings offering Himself as a substitute for commoners. The Passover and the sacrificial laws in the Old Testament also demonstrate the idea of substitution. They are examples of ways God prepared His people for the coming of the Servant. Unfortunately, most failed to connect these things with the mission of the Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Four words in verse 5 describe the Servant's suffering. He was **wounded**, a verb used in the context of someone being killed. **Bruised** refers to oppression or a crushing that is fatal. **Chastisement** refers to discipline or corrective reproof. **Stripes** refers to open bruises. Jesus incurred these from His beating (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1). The Servant endured all of these things because of our **transgressions** and **iniquities** against God. *Transgressions* refers to willful resistance to God's rule and *iniquities* is our perverted fallen nature. It is both our choice and our nature to sin against God. As our substitute, the Servant bore the punishment we deserve.

The Servant suffered these things for **our peace** and healing. Because of our sins, God was not at peace with us. Isaiah 59:2 says, "your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." However, through His vicarious punishment, the Servant secured our peace with God. Paul wrote, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). In addition to this, the Servant's wounds healed us in that by His suffering, our relationship with God was restored and we are made whole.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Jesus honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

VERSE 6

The bookends of this verse, *all we* and *us all*, and *we* in the second line emphasize that this means everyone. Going *astray* like sheep means to wander off and reveals the foolishness of our sin and failure to recognize its danger. The phrase *we have turned* points out the willfulness of our sin. There was nothing accidental about it. We chose to go our own way. Even so, the Lord *laid on* His Servant *the iniquity of us all*. The Servant did not become sinful like us but suffered the punishment we deserve.

What single phrase stands out to you the most in verses 4-6? Explain.

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary to examine a term.*

Review articles about substitutionary atonement in a Bible dictionary. Read the Bible passages included in the article. How do the passages examined give you deeper understanding into Isaiah 53? Write a summary statement of how you would explain Jesus’ substitutionary atonement.

WILLING (ISA. 53:7-9)

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. ⁸ He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. ⁹ And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

VERSES 7-9

Even though He was mistreated with physical violence, like sheep going to *slaughter* or to the *shearers*, Isaiah emphasized the Servant quietly and willingly submitted Himself to His antagonists. Sheep do not realize what is about to happen to them, but the Servant knew and submitted to everything that was going to happen to Him. He not only felt the excruciating physical pain of it all, but before and during what He experienced He fully understood and experienced the emotional and mental anguish of it.

He was cut off out of the land of the living means He died. The word “wounded” in verse 5 indicates His enemies killed Him. Why did the Servant submit to this death? Emphatically, Isaiah wanted everyone to understand the Servant died as a substitute for the transgressions of His people.

Verse 9 speaks of the Servant’s burial. His executioners disgraced Him by treating Him like a criminal. Nevertheless, the Servant was given an honorable burial. Matthew is the only one to mention that Joseph of Arimathaea was *rich* (Matt. 27:57). Jesus’ body would have most likely been taken along with the bodies of the two criminals who died alongside Him. However, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus ensured Jesus received an honorable burial (John 19:31-39).

**How does the willingness of the Servant demonstrate His love for people?
How does it demonstrate His love for the Father?**

SACRIFICED (ISA. 53:10-12)

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

VERSES 10-11

Verse 10 reveals God Himself not only caused the Servant to suffer but was the One who inflicted the suffering on the Servant. ***It pleased the LORD to bruise him.*** The Lord had had enough burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle. He had no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats. (See Isa. 1:11.) The Servant was the only sacrifice acceptable to God, and the Servant's suffering and death provided the necessary sacrifice for salvation. ***An offering for sin*** was most concerned about restitution, paying what needed to be paid for an offense. What the Servant accomplished was exactly what needed to be done to make restitution to God for our sins.

To ***see of the travail of his soul*** refers to life after death. Isaiah revealed the Servant would live again and see the rewards of His accomplishment—many spiritual children and God's pleasure. The Servant would know exactly what He needed to do to ***justify many***. He would bear their sins so they might stand righteous before God. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul explained that God made the One who did not know sin (the Servant) to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Everything is dependent on the righteous Servant's substitutionary work and the faith of those who believe in Him. Believers have been declared righteous because God sees those who respond to the good news of the gospel by repentance and faith in light of the righteousness of the Servant.

How does the cost paid by Jesus to secure salvation for all who place faith in Him support the idea that there is no other way to the Father? How does what the Servant did for you strengthen your love and commitment to Him?

VERSE 12

This Servant Song concludes with God's declaration that He would honor and reward the Servant when He accomplished the work of salvation. Having defeated sin and death, the Servant would enjoy the spoils of war because He ***poured out his soul unto death***. Jesus said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17-18a). Additionally, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy

of being *numbered with the transgressors* when He was crucified between two criminals (Mark 15:27; Luke 22:37). God promised to exalt the Servant because of His willingness to bear *the sin of many*, and now as their mediator He intercedes for them to God (Rom. 8:34).

What impact should knowing that the Servant intercedes for those He has saved have on believers?

APPLY THE TEXT

- The Servant faced rejection to secure our salvation.
- The Servant bore our sin, taking the judgment in our place.
- The Servant willingly paid the price for our sin.
- The Servant provides salvation to all who accept His sacrifice.

Memorize Isaiah 53:5. Compare various translations to gain a deeper understanding of each phrase. How is this verse central to understanding the gospel?

Share about your spiritual pilgrimage. How did you come to know of your need for a Savior? What was your response to Jesus’ offer of salvation? With whom can you share your story? If you have not trusted Jesus, review the information on the inside front cover and visit with your Bible study leader.

PRAYER NEEDS



God Expects

The one true God is just; He expects His people to demonstrate their faith through right living.

ISAIAH 58:1-12

We laugh when a friend tells us to drive at the speed limit when we know he rarely does. We may give a puzzled look when a sister who rarely helps clean up after a meal directs others to do so. We might even be angered if our neighbor tells us how to mow our grass yet his yard is the least kept on the block. We know hypocrisy when we see it. Yet being hypocritical is one thing humans have in common, one way or another. The prophet Isaiah revealed God is always consistent and does not put up with spiritual hypocrisy in His people.

Why are people so upset with the hypocrisies of others and yet so seemingly blind to their own hypocrisies?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ISAIAH 58:1–60:22

This section begins with God’s condemnation of Israel’s hypocrisy. The Lord saw through the veneer of false piety and recognized meaningless rituals. None of these meant anything when accompanied by insincerity. Religious formalism is as offensive to God as idolatry. Fasting that pleases God involves emulating the character of God in one’s life. Therefore, God told the people of Israel they needed to help those who could not help themselves. Only then would God respond to their prayers (Isa. 58:1-12). Additionally, the people disregarded the Lord on the Sabbath and did whatever they wanted. If His people would honor Him and delight in Him, then they would receive His blessings (58:13-14).

God was able and more than willing to save Israel. God was not the problem. What separated the people of Israel from God was their constant rebellion and sin. The Lord would not tolerate their violence, bloodshed, dishonesty, and injustice. They were constantly thinking of ways to sin. No matter how much they tried, they could not hide their sin from God. Isaiah acknowledged God’s indictment of Israel and lamented the depraved condition of his people. He humbly confessed how the nation rebelled against God and harmed their neighbors. In response to Isaiah’s confession, God promised to repay the nations for their offenses against His people and would come to them as their Redeemer and save them. He would put His Spirit on them and His words in their mouth as an eternal covenant with His people (59:1-21).

In the future, Israel would become a light to the nations and a blessing to the nations, just as God promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). The nations would use their resources to help rebuild Zion as an expression of God’s compassion and justice. The Lord would be Jerusalem’s everlasting light, peace, and salvation. Its inhabitants would be righteous and possess the land forever (60:1-22).

As you read Isaiah 58:1-12, identify phrases that point to hypocritical worship and that point to true worship of God. Why is religious hypocrisy so offensive to God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TRUE STATE (ISA. 58:1-5)

¹ Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

² Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. ³ Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. ⁴ Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

VERSE 1

The way for God's people to be reconciled to Him is by true repentance and renewed faithfulness. God was able and willing to forgive and restore those who had strayed from Him. His desire was for them to repent by turning away from their sin and turning back to Him. Note that He referred to them as *my people*, indicating His covenant relationship with them is still in place. Therefore, it was imperative that Israel hear Isaiah as he proclaimed God's message. God told Isaiah to *cry aloud* and to *spare not*, to raise his *voice like a trumpet* so that all of His people could hear the message. Messengers often used a ram's horn to get the attention of the community. In order for them to repent of their sins, Israel needed to know what their sins were. This was an expression of God's grace.

God's confrontation of His people with their sins was His way of giving them one more opportunity to return to Him and experience His forgiveness. Isaiah had already told Israel that God was waiting to show them mercy and compassion (Isa. 30:18). Instead of being quick to punish, this verse displays God's incredible patience with sinners and His desire for them to repent. God's desire is to show mercy, not to execute judgment.

VERSE 2

The people looked like they were devoted to the Lord. The Lord said they were seeking Him every day. The word *me* in the first phrase is emphatic in Hebrew. It is literally, “Me—day after day you seek!” The word *seek* carries with it the idea of devotion. What is more, they delighted to know God’s *ways*. In other words, they acted as if they wanted to know and do God’s will for their lives. In reality, they were unrighteous and had abandoned the Lord’s compassionate ways of justice. They acted like a godly nation when in actuality they were not a godly nation. God saw through their hypocrisy. Outward religious activities are no substitute for inward devotion and faith. It is impossible to be right with God and not be doing the right things. On the other hand, it is possible to be involved in the right kinds of activities and still not be right with God.

It is possible to be involved in the right kinds of activities and still not be right with God.

VERSES 3-4

Verse 3 begins a dialogue between His people and God. It contains their hypocritical complaint against the Lord and His response to them. They complained because God did not appear to pay attention to their fasting. They fasted, hoping God would do something for them, but He did nothing.

What is apparent is these people were fasting—denying themselves of food—in an attempt to manipulate God. They placed more confidence in what they did than in the Lord. It was not about them serving God but about God serving them. They thought that because of their religious piety and sacrifice God owed them. God did take notice of their fasting but was not pleased with what He saw.

In verse 4, God reiterated that the people’s behavior did not correspond to what fasting should have involved. Instead, they fought with one another, hoping to get their own way. All that their fasting really accomplished was to make them irritable and contentious with others. They failed to understand that their relationship with God and their relationship with others were related. Therefore, God said there was no way they could act like they were acting and expect Him to listen to their prayers. The Lord would not pay attention to the fasting and prayers of such people.

Displays of devotion in one area do not cancel out demonstrations of deviance from God’s ways in another.

Why are insincere acts of worship offensive to God? How does ritual worship apart from obedience leave worshipers empty and disillusioned?

VERSE 5

In verse 5, God used rhetorical questions to show the people they really had no concept of who God is if they thought He would be pleased with their actions. The first question was, “Is the fasting I just described the kind of fasting I would approve of?” Of course not! The second question follows up on the first: “Is the purpose of fasting really just to bow down one’s head like a reed and lie down in sackcloth and ashes?” This question did not express disapproval of fasting or the actions involved in an appropriate fast. What it addressed was the symbolic meaning of these things. They were symbolic of humility and one’s dependence on God. Just because one goes through the motions does not guarantee one is pleasing God in the process. These actions are pleasing to God only when what is in one’s heart corresponds to these outward expressions. Furthermore, what is in one’s heart will reveal itself in how one relates to others.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Bible depicts three forms of fasting. A normal fast consisted of totally refraining from food (Luke 4:1-2). An absolute fast involved abstinence from both food and water (Ezra 10:6). This type often lasted no more than three days (Esth. 4:16; Acts 9:8-9). A partial fast entailed a restricted diet instead of total abstinence (Dan. 1:8-16; 10:3).

TRUE WORSHIP (ISA. 58:6-10)

⁶ Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to deal thy bread

to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? ⁸ Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. ⁹ Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; ¹⁰ And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

VERSES 6-7

Isaiah presented more rhetorical questions, but these are emphatic statements meant to communicate what is acceptable fasting to God. Acceptable fasting and worship involves total devotion to the Lord, accompanied by caring for others. This is what Jesus taught when He replied to questions asking which commandment is the most important. Jesus answered: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

KEY DOCTRINE: *Christian and Social Order*

We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick (Matt. 25:35-40).

Therefore, true fasting involves opposing any wrongdoing that oppresses and abuses others. It not only means liberating others from bondage but also doing what it takes to ensure the oppression never happens again. It means fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves instead of fighting for oneself, as the people of Israel were doing. (See v. 4.) It consists of getting involved in the community and representing the One who is known for delivering people out of bondage. It is illustrating physically what God has

done both physically and spiritually for His people. Furthermore, true devotion and worship involves giving food to the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, clothing those who are in need of clothes, and at the same time caring for those in one's own family. It is imitating the God who has done all of these things both materially and spiritually for His people, pointing others to Him.

BIBLE SKILL: *Examine cross references.*

Use a study Bible to identify cross references listed for Isaiah 58:6-7. Read the passages listed, making notes about what you discover. How do the passages you read connect to Isaiah 58:6-7? How do these passages help you better understand what Isaiah was proclaiming?

VERSES 8-10

If the people's fasting looked like what God just described, then they would be a light shining forth for others to see. Their exemplary acts would reflect well on them and glorify God. Moreover, the undesirable consequences of their sin would come to a quick end. Instead of having a humiliating reputation before the nations, a new reputation would go before them: the *righteousness* of God. Just as the Lord went before His people and at the same time followed them to protect them as a rear guard when He delivered them from Egypt, He would once again do the same for His people.

There would be even more benefits to those who fought to liberate people in bondage and who committed themselves to feeding the hungry and helping those in need. First, when they cried out to God, God would hear and answer them. God hears and answers the prayers of those who have turned away from their sinful ways and put their trust in Him. Faith in God is demonstrated by obeying His Word. The beginning point of serving others is having a real relationship with God and maintaining intimate fellowship with

Him. When believers do this, they will be a *light* that scatters the darkness. The noonday sun will replace the *darkness* of the past.

If there is such tremendous blessing when people obey God, then why are people so reluctant to do so?

TRUE SATISFACTION (ISA. 58:11-12)

¹¹ And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. ¹² And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

VERSES 11-12

Isaiah explained that God would lead, satisfy, and strengthen His obedient people; these were the ones who would enjoy God's blessings. His message looked forward to the day when the people of God would be able to return home from Babylonian exile. Even though they would return to a city in ruins, God would satisfy them like a well-watered garden and a refreshing spring that would never run dry. Water was the most important resource in the region. No water meant no life. But here is the promise of life.

Not only would God restore the people but also the city of Jerusalem. They should not be discouraged when they returned to the city in ruins. Some of them would restore the *foundations*, some would repair the *breach*, such as those in Nehemiah's day, and some would restore the *paths* of the city. God's chosen holy city and God's chosen holy people would no longer be a reproach to the nations. Instead, they would be restored and glorify the Lord.

How do these verses demonstrate how God can change a life or situation in ruin into something beautiful?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Ritual worship apart from obedience displeases God and ultimately leaves worshipers empty and disillusioned.
- Meeting the needs of others in obedience to God brings honor to God.
- Satisfaction comes to those who obediently follow God.

As a group, identify needs in your community. Which need can your group meet? Record the next action steps required for your group to meet that identified need.

Identify roadblocks you face when it comes to being fully obedient to God. What joys are you missing by not being fully obedient? How can knowing the potential joys help you overcome the roadblocks you identified?

PRAYER NEEDS

13

God Restores

The one true God promises to restore His creation for His people through faith in His Son.

ISAIAH 65:17-25

Life's challenges can cause us to lose hope. If we are not careful, we can begin to believe all is lost and our best days are behind us. When that happens, the present becomes darker and we lose sight of the lessons we can learn. The Bible teaches that the future should impact how believers live in the present. Isaiah revealed to his audience glimpses of what God would do in the future so that they might be encouraged to be faithful as they wait on Him. Hope in the future gives strength in the present.

How does having hope for a greater future give people strength in the present?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ISAIAH 61:1–66:24

In Isaiah 61, the prophet told of the appearing of the Messiah. In His first coming, He came to save His people. Here, Isaiah described how the Messiah would come a second time to vindicate His people. Their shame would be replaced with honor and blessing, and they would be ministers of God as they rejoiced in His salvation and righteousness. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue and proclaimed that He was the fulfillment of this prophecy. (See Luke 4:21.)

Isaiah 62 focuses attention on Jerusalem. Even though sin had separated God and His people in Jerusalem, there would come a time when God fully restored their relationship. The Lord would delight in Jerusalem like a groom delights in his bride.

Isaiah 63–64 turns attention to God’s judgment on the nations and the vindication of His people. Edom serves as a representative of every enemy of the people of God that would experience His wrath. Either Isaiah or the people as a whole then recounted how God saved His people from their enemies in the past, especially at the Red Sea.

In chapters 65–66, the Lord answered their prayers, promising to judge idolaters and to deliver and bless the righteous. For God’s righteous remnant, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and their lives and work will flourish with great abundance. God will respond to their prayers immediately. They will ultimately experience peace, even though leading up to that time their enemies will torment them. When God finally deals with their enemies, there will be a rebirth of His people and God’s glory will extend to every nation. Those who trust in God will be saved, while those who reject Him will experience enduring judgment. People’s eternal destiny will be determined by their faith in the Lord or their rejection of Him.

As you read Isaiah 65:17-25, circle the things God says will no longer happen. How does the elimination of the things circled give hope?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A PLACE OF JOY (ISA. 65:17-20)

¹⁷ For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. ¹⁸ But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. ¹⁹ And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. ²⁰ There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

VERSE 17

Verse 17 expounds on the promises the Lord made in verses 13-16 concerning His servants. The word *for* is the key word that makes this link. Verses 13-16 contrast what will happen to those who reject the Lord with the blessings God has in store for His servants. Verse 17 answers these questions: “How will God turn things around from the present disaster and the humiliation of His people? How will He do what appears to be the impossible?”

The answer to both questions literally begins with “For behold I” in Hebrew. The word *for* often functions to indicate suitability or fitness to accomplish something. God was saying emphatically: “Look at Me; I am able to do these things.” Often believers have difficulty believing God’s promises simply because they have a skewed perspective of Him or are not looking to Him at all. If only they would look at Him and see Him for who He really is, then there would be no question about how God will do whatever He promises.

God was saying emphatically: “Look at Me; I am able to do these things.”

What did God promise? First, He promised to *create new heavens and a new earth*. In the Old Testament, God is the only subject of the verb *create*. God is going to do what only He can do. The new era that God will create for His new creations in Christ

will commence with the creation of a new heaven and new earth. God will not merely patch things up. He will create everything new in the heavens and the earth. His work will be comprehensive. It fits with Isaiah's promises of a future newness. He spoke of "new things" (42:9; 48:6), "a new song" (42:10), "a new thing" (43:19), and "a new name" (62:2). This message corresponds to the messages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who prophesied of a future when God would give a new covenant and His people would have a new heart and new spirit (Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 18:31). This new era will be so wonderful that the Lord's second promise is that the burden of past regrets and sufferings will be no more. God's new creation will usher in a holy forgetfulness where human failure and sin along with its consequences will be remembered no more.

VERSES 18-20

The only appropriate response to such amazing news is gladness and rejoicing. Therefore, the Lord exhorted the people to ***be ye glad and rejoice for ever*** in what He was creating. The people of God need to cast away their disappointments and discouragement and look to what God is going to do. The old Jerusalem will be replaced with a new one that will bring joy to God, to Jerusalem's inhabitants, and to others. Jerusalem, along with its inhabitants, will be a place of holiness, harmony, and happiness. As God delights in them, they will be a delight to others as they reflect God's character.

Like a father who takes delight in seeing his child's joy, the Lord will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in His people. This is in contrast to what God would do with Jerusalem in its near future. Before this future time of restoration, there would be a time of tearing down, and the Lord would be the one who did it. In Isaiah 29, God said He would oppress Jerusalem, and there would be mourning and crying. He would encircle it, lay siege to it, and bring it down as He would lead many nations against it. Over a hundred years after Isaiah's prophecy, these words came to fruition as God directed the Babylonians, along with many nations under their control, to execute God's judgment on Jerusalem and its inhabitants. When a remnant returned to Jerusalem from exile, they came home to a city in ruin and mourned over the reproach that the city had become.

However, in the new era God has in store for His people, not only will the city be rebuilt and restored and the past be forgotten (v. 17),

but God's righteous anger against Jerusalem and its inhabitants will be replaced with the Lord's rejoicing and gladness in them. This message also echoed David's words concerning the Lord and His people: "For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). The people's rejoicing will replace their weeping, and God's delight in Jerusalem and its inhabitants will replace His disfavor. God will eradicate every possible source of sorrow for His people.

God will eradicate every possible source of sorrow for His people.

When God created the heavens and the earth, He looked at His creation and saw that it was "good." Nonetheless, it was only after He created man and woman, He saw all that He had created was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). No doubt, when God creates a new heaven and new earth it will be good, but the object of His greatest delight will be His holy people who reside there.

What is the difference between joy and happiness? What is the significance of Isaiah using joy to describe the reaction to the promised future?

Verse 20 provides examples of how things will be different for the people of God in this future new era. Premature death was common for children and adults alike during Isaiah's day. However, the children who are born on this new earth will not die in infancy, and adults will live to a ripe old age. The Israelites appear to have understood seventy years to be a normal lifespan (Ps. 90:10), but in the new era, a man who would live only one hundred years would be thought of as having died young and if a man died younger than that then he would be *accursed*. God was rhetorically making the point that people will live long lives; the context suggests a premature death will not occur in this new age. Having children and living a long and healthy life were both understood to be signs

of God’s blessing in ancient Israel and as God’s rewards to those who served Him in faithful obedience. (See Ps. 127:3-5a; Prov. 9:11; 10:27.) The passage indicates that in this new era the people of God will be devoted to God and He will bless them immensely.

What do God’s plans for His people in the future reveal about His disposition toward His people?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end (2 Pet. 3:7-18).

A PLACE OF PROSPERITY (ISA. 65:21-23)

²¹ And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. ²² They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.

VERSES 21-23

Deuteronomy 28:15-68 is a list of curses where Moses described what would happen when the Israelites broke God’s covenant by disobeying His law. These curses involved agricultural disaster, foreign invasion, deportation into exile, the reproach of foreign nations, and famine. Deuteronomy 28:30b particularly states that because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord the Israelites would build houses but not live in them and plant vineyards but not eat the fruit that they produce. This implied that others would come and take these things away from the people.

In Isaiah 65:21-22a, the Lord stated just the opposite. He repeated this idea in both verses in order to emphasize the stark contrast between what the people had experienced with what they would experience in the future new era. The people of God would enjoy living in the homes they build and eating the fruit from the vineyards they plant. The implication should be apparent. Those living in the new creation will be devoted to Yahweh and keep their commitments to Him. Consequently, they would enjoy the blessings of the new covenant with the Lord. Their inheritance would be safe and secure. What God has in store for His people is imperishable, unspoiled, unfading, and eternally secure.

In the last part of verse 22, the Lord spoke of more blessings: longevity of life, productivity, and the satisfaction of enjoying the fruit of their labors. The Lord used the simile of a tree to represent the vitality and durability of His people. The expression *mine elect* serves as a reminder that all of these blessings are expressions of God's incomprehensible grace toward His people. God chose them to be His treasured possession even though they had done nothing to deserve it. He did it in spite of them.

How should the blessings God has in store for His people affect how they live today?

A PLACE OF PEACE (ISA. 65:24-25)

²⁴ And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

VERSES 24-25

The Lord emphasized that the new heaven and earth would be characterized by peace between the created and the Creator—*before they call, I will answer*—and peace between creatures—*the wolf and the lamb*. God will be attentive to the needs of His people. When they had strayed away from God in rebellion against Him,

apparently, He had ignored their cries, but that would be no more. Thus, it indicates the sins that separated the people from God will be no more (Isa. 59:1-2). What is more, the harmony the people of God will enjoy with God will extend to all of creation. Nevertheless, the curse on sin will continue to stand as indicated by the serpent’s food being dust. Evil will be unable to destroy what God will establish on His *holy mountain*. God gave His word on it.

How do the expectations of the coming of the Messiah a second time compare to the expectations of His first coming?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary.*

The Hebrew concept of *shalom*, often translated “peace,” occurs in Isaiah 66:12 and pervades this week’s study passage (65:17-25). Read the article on “peace” in a Bible dictionary. Read some of the Bible passages included in the article, recording insights gained from those passages. How does the description of the new heaven and new earth point to peace between God and humanity? How is peace with God different from peace with a nation or group of people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can live with hope, knowing that God will one day create a new heaven and a new earth.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that they will experience God’s blessing for eternity.
- Believers can live with expectancy, knowing that God’s peace will reign in eternity.

What situations and challenges do you face that rob you of hope? List ways the promise of a new heaven and earth restores hope while facing those situations.

Review the characteristics of the new heaven and new earth described by Isaiah. What can you do today to live in anticipation of one of these characteristics?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 65:17. Discuss why you look forward to sin being forgiven and forgotten in the new age as Isaiah 65:17-25 describes. How should that future reality impact how your Bible study functions today?

PRAYER NEEDS

Getting the Most Out of Your Personal Study Guide



Getting the most out of your Personal Study Guide (PSG) requires you to begin early in the week. Life tends to get busier as the week wears on. Starting early gives time to reflect on the passage and the truths discovered throughout the week. Reading the study a few minutes before the group meets doesn't give much time to process anything. Completing steps 1 through 4 during Monday lunch would be a great way to start the week.

The Bible Reading Plan found near the front of the PSG organizes all the verses in the Bible book or books being studied that quarter into a quarterly reading plan. You may want to read these each evening right before going to bed.

STEP 1

Read the core Bible passage for that session in your Bible.

Use the observe question(s) printed at the end of the Understand the Context section to give some focus to your reading. Make notes as you read.

- Complete the Bible Skill.
- Reflect on what the passage means. Use the questions included in the Explore the Text section to process the meaning of the core passage.

STEP 2

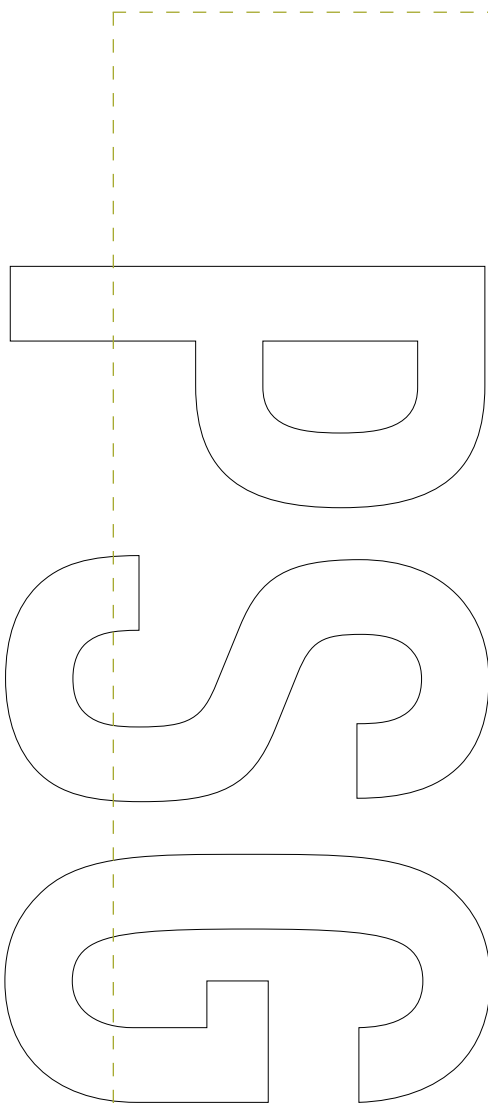
Read Understand the Context for that session in the PSG.

This will help you get a clearer understanding of how the core passage fits into the whole.

STEP 3

Study the core Bible passage.

- Read the Bible text, following the outline in Explore the Text.
- Review the commentary for each verse (or set of verses) to gain a clearer understanding.
- When needed, look at the map on the inside back cover.
- Review any included key words (see Word Wise on p. 6) for clarification.



STEP 4

Record your thoughts and questions.

Highlight sentences and paragraphs that are especially meaningful or helpful. Identify sentences needing clarification or that raise questions by placing a question mark near it.

STEP 5

Read the core Bible passage each day, reflecting on the words or phrases that stand out to you.

STEP 6

Review your notes and what you have marked in the PSG prior to leaving for the Bible study group meeting.

STEP 7

Make sure you carry your PSG to the Bible study group meeting.

Once the meeting starts, participate in the group time by sharing your comments and questions and comparing notes with others in your group. Record additional insights gained from others in the group.



Prophets of the Eighth Century



ISAIAH

If there is one prophetic book people are familiar with, it is the Book of Isaiah. This is due, in part, to the fact that the New Testament quotes Isaiah extensively. Yet many do not understand the full scope of what it meant to be God's prophet. Isaiah was not a mere delivery person giving someone a certified letter. He felt for his people. He longed for their redemption and hurt at the prospect of their judgment by God. But he also exulted in God's saving work. The knowledge that God was working toward the redemption of His people gave Isaiah hope to continue his mission when it would otherwise have been completely distasteful. Isaiah is one of the Bible's most majestic books, and in studying it we too will find reason to hope in the everlasting power and glory of God.

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