

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD.
Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as
snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the
land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the
sword.”

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Isaiah 1:18-21

Thoroughly Confounded

In the fourth century St. Augustine asked Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, which book of the Old Testament he should read. Ambrose advised the book of Isaiah. Augustine followed the advice and claimed to be *thoroughly confounded* by the prophet’s sixty-six chapters. Perhaps that was because Augustine didn’t possess this study guide, or perhaps it was because the book *is*, in fact, difficult to understand.

As we work through this book we will come into a world about which most of us know little. We will find names which are hard to pronounce and historical figures of whom we have never heard. But through these 12 studies we will, Lord willing, gain a renewed vision of God, of his sovereignty, of his stern wrath, of his compassionate love and of the Messiah he was to send some seven centuries after Isaiah’s ministry.

Isaiah is a book about God. Yahweh, God’s covenant name in the Old Testament, is in control. His will will be done, his purposes will not be thwarted (46:11), his covenant will be fulfilled.

Ultimately Isaiah points to Jesus. Isaiah is the second most quoted book in the New Testament (after the Psalms). The vast majority of these references point to Jesus as the one who fulfilled Isaiah’s messianic prophecies. John, in his Gospel, quotes from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6 and then editorializes,

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.
John 12:41

Angular People

Prophets are one of God's gifts to his people. Prophets stir the pot. They stoke the fire. They don't fit in. Prophets embarrass, often they are rude. As one writer puts it, *Prophets are angular*. They see all of life from God's perspective and preach accordingly. Theirs is a message of judgment and comfort, repentance and salvation. As Eugene Peterson writes,

These men and women woke people up to the sovereign presence of God in their lives. They yelled, they wept, they rebuked, they soothed, they challenged, they comforted. They used words with power and imagination, whether blunt or subtle.¹

During Bible times, Israel enjoyed and endured the message of her prophets over a time period lasting hundreds of years. Sixteen of these prophets wrote down what they said and we can read their sermons, songs, poetry and prose when we open our Bible.² When we read the message of the prophets we find ourselves, often simultaneously, bewildered, amused, affronted, shocked and confused. The Protestant reformer Martin Luther said in the sixteenth century,

The prophets have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at.³

The Life and Times of Isaiah the Prophet

Isaiah was one of the sixteen *writing prophets*. Perhaps we could call him *the* writing prophet for the book which bears his name is generally regarded as the high peak of Old Testament prophetic writing. The beauty of Isaiah's prose-poetry is without equal. One commentator notices that the language of this prophet is so sublime that the *sensitive reader sometimes has to remind himself that all this beauty does not exist for its own sake but that it is the meaning of the words that is all-important*. (Grogan, p. 20)

Barry Webb calls Isaiah the *Romans* of the Old Testament.

It is here that the threads come together and the big picture of God's purposes for his people and for his world is most clearly set forth. (Webb, pp. 37-38)

¹ From *The Message: The Old Testament Prophets*, p. 7.

² These sixteen *writing prophets* are divided into two groups, *major* and *minor*. The major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and are called so because of the volume of their writings.

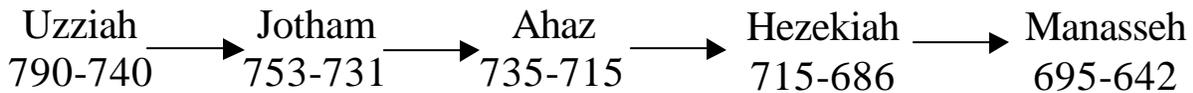
³ Quoted in Seitz, p. 2.

Isaiah begins his book with a declaration:

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (Isa. 1:1)

Isaiah was called to his prophetic task in the year of King Uzziah’s death (740 BC), the beginning of a time of severe transition for both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.¹ Isaiah was a *southern* prophet, staying in and around Jerusalem his entire life.

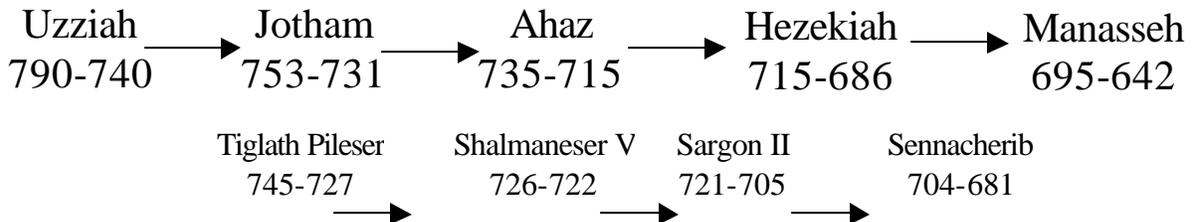
Isaiah ministered during the reigns of five kings of Judah.



← Described in 2 Kings 15:32—21:18 →

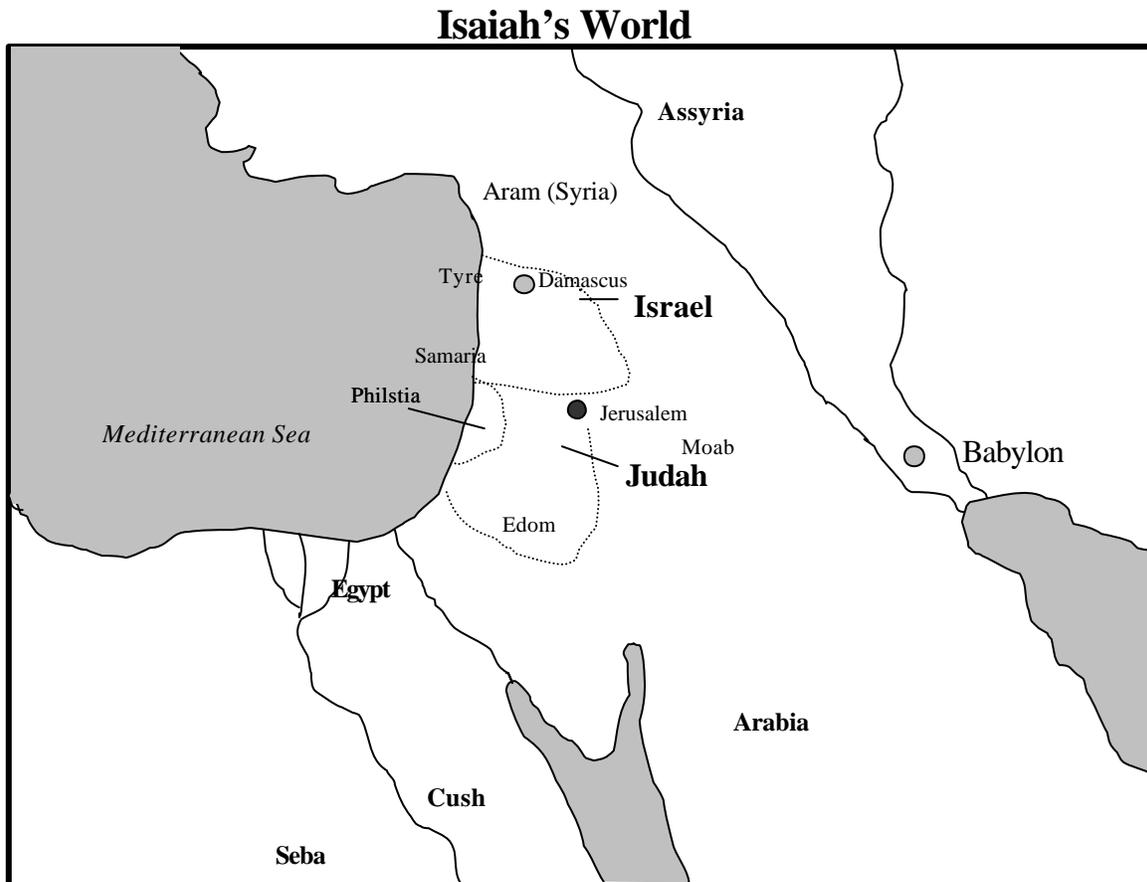
During the fifty year reign of King Uzziah both Judah and Israel enjoyed a time of peace and economic prosperity. Egypt, a perennial threat from the south, was weakened internally and externally. Assyria had her own troubles which allowed the tiny kingdoms of Israel and Judah to grow economically and militarily.

But as the reign of Uzziah drew to its close, a competent, ambitious and vicious ruler rose to lead Assyria to stunning military conquests. Tiglath-Pileser III² led Assyria to become the dominant political power of the Middle East. After the Assyrians subdued Babylon and Syria, its intentions for westward expansion were clear. Soon northern states were paying homage to Tiglath-Pileser III as they became puppet kingdoms under Assyrian control. In the year King Uzziah died the peace Judah had enjoyed was severely threatened. Four Assyrian rulers played a role in the political backdrop of Isaiah’s ministry.



¹ After the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, Israel had a civil war (931 BC) and divided into two countries: *Israel* in the north and *Judah* in the south. However, in Isaiah the name *Israel* is usually an umbrella term referring to the covenant people of God, both from the north and the south (see 1:3; 8:18; 14:1; 19:24; 40:27; 41:8, 14; etc.). On the other hand, sometimes the term *Israel* does refer to the northern kingdom as opposed to Judah in the south (see 7:1; 9:8, 12; 11:12).

² Tiglath Pileser ruled from 745-727 BC. His mother is reported to have called him simply, *Tiggy*.



After Uzziah's death, Judah endured crisis after crisis which called into question her very existence as a people.

First, in 734 BC, the kings of Israel and Damascus entered into an alliance against Assyria and tried to persuade Ahaz, king of Judah, to join them. Ahaz refused, but then wilted when Damascus and Israel joined together and attacked Jerusalem. King Ahaz turned to Assyria for protection and began to pay a hefty sum for her help.

Second, in 722 BC the Assyrians invaded and conquered Israel and incorporated its territory into their empire.¹ During Bible times it would never again regain independence.

The biblical description from 2 Kings of the fall of the northern kingdom is chilling in its startling brevity. After all of her glory as a nation, Israel was no more.

All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the

¹ The fall of Israel was provoked by King Hoshea (732-722 BC) who revolted against Shalmaneser, Tiglath Pileser's son, in 726 BC. Hoshea expected help from a revitalized Egypt (Isaiah 30—31; see 2 Kings 17:1-6) but was taken captive instead by Shalmaneser.

LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. (2 Kings 17:7-9a)

The implications of Israel's fall for Judah were monumental. The border of the Assyrian empire was now a mere 8 miles north of Jerusalem!

Third, after the fall of Israel, Judah was drawn in to her most significant crisis during Isaiah's life. When Sargon II died and Sennacherib replaced him (see chart, p. 3), the time seemed ripe for Judean revolt. The geopolitical situation was ever changing and increasingly volatile. Egypt was gaining strength from the south. To the east Merodach-Baladan was ruling in Babylon and gaining power even as the Assyrians appeared to be weakening from the north.

Was this the time for King Hezekiah to re-establish the independence of Judah? But, if so, how? Both Egypt and Babylon were making offers for an alliance.¹ Assyria was a constant threat. Isaiah, in the midst of this political tumult, makes promises from God to protect his people if they will simply trust in Him.²

Hezekiah did rebel against Sennacherib and the results were ominous.³ In 701 BC Sennacherib launched his attack. One army moved down the Philistine coast and subdued Egypt. Another army moved down through Samaria approaching Jerusalem from the north.

Sennacherib claims to have destroyed forty-six Judean cities and to have deported 200,150 inhabitants of the land, though the real number is probably close to two thousand deportees.⁴ Hezekiah was stuck in Jerusalem *like a bird in a cage* according to the Assyrian warrior. In the midst of a seemingly insurmountable situation Isaiah promises God's deliverance of Jerusalem (37:21-35).

Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria:

*[Sennacherib] will not enter this city
or shoot an arrow here.
He will not come before it with shield
or build a siege ramp against it.
By the way that he came he will return;
he will not enter this city,*

¹ The key issue in chapters 28—35 is whether Judah, and in particular its leaders, will rely on Egypt or on the LORD in the face of the growing threat posed by the ever-increasing power of Assyria. (Webb, p. 116). See Isaiah 31:1 for example.

² See, for example 28:16ff., 30:15ff.

³ Some see Isaiah 24-27, often called Isaiah's Apocalypse, as a celebration of Hezekiah's rebellion. The Assyrian troops, temporarily at least, were forced to leave Jerusalem.

⁴ Cf. Bright, p. 284. There is no question of the ferocity of Sennacherib's invasion. *Excavations at Lachish . . . reveal, along with evidences of destruction, a huge pit into which the remains of some 1,500 bodies had been dumped and covered with pig bones and other debris—presumably the garbage of the Assyrian army.* (Bright, p. 284)

declares the LORD.
*I will defend this city and save it,
for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!*

And so it was. God sent a plague to the Assyrian army, putting to death 185,000 soldiers. Sennacherib and his remaining troops fled to Nineveh.

The Internal Threat

While Judah was surrounded by military threats from the surrounding nations, her greater troubles came from her own people. The message of Isaiah consistently proclaims that God is in control of the nations. They will do what He commands. But the people's sinful practices, their participation in pagan idolatry, their lack of concern for the poor, their pride and their disregard for justice will bring the nation down.

The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted and they will be humbled.
Isaiah 2:11-12

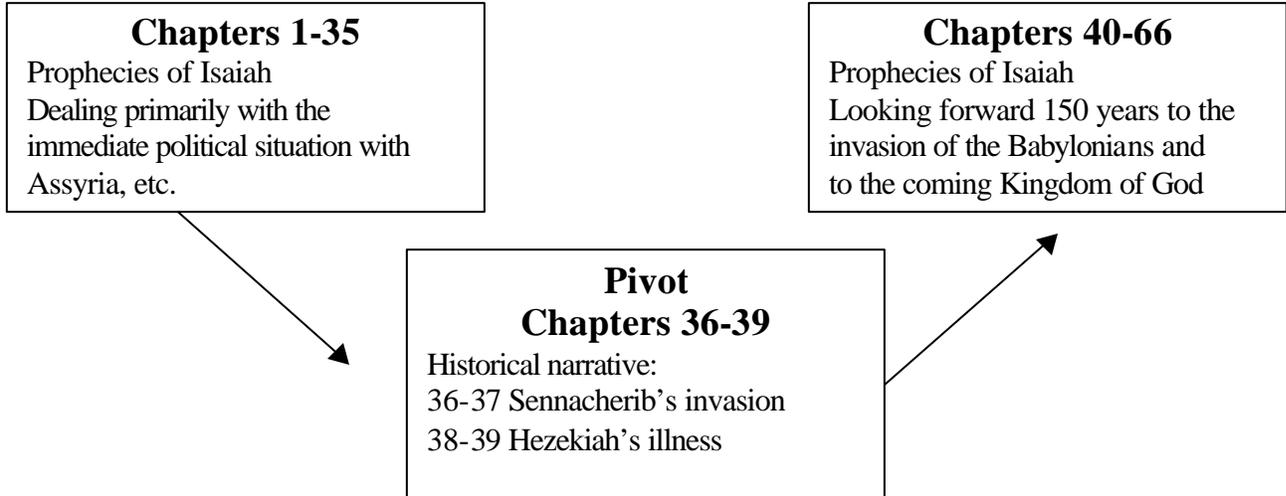
Old Testament scholar Abraham Heschel summarizes the tension in Isaiah's time.

The earth is full of the glory of God (6:3), but the land is filled with idols (2:8). Men are haughty and full of pride (2:11), yet *they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made* (2:8). They regard themselves as wise and shrewd (5:21), but are devoid of the simple insight with which even an animal is endowed—knowing who he is (1:3). (Heschel, p. 78)

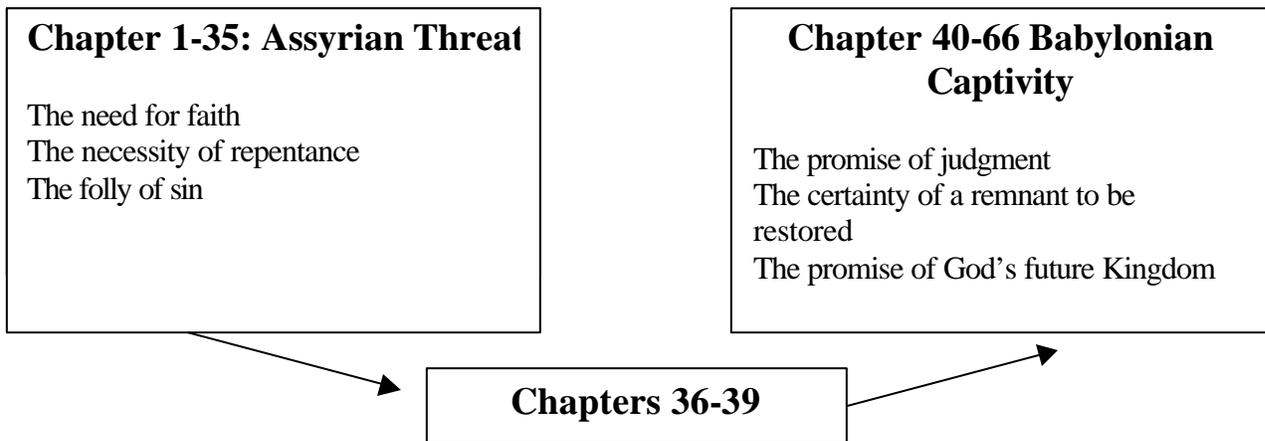
The message of Isaiah is that God will not forever be mocked. If the inhabitants of Judah do not repent, judgment is sure to follow.

The Structure of His Vision

Isaiah's 66 chapters fall into two parts.¹



Another way to see Isaiah is as follows:



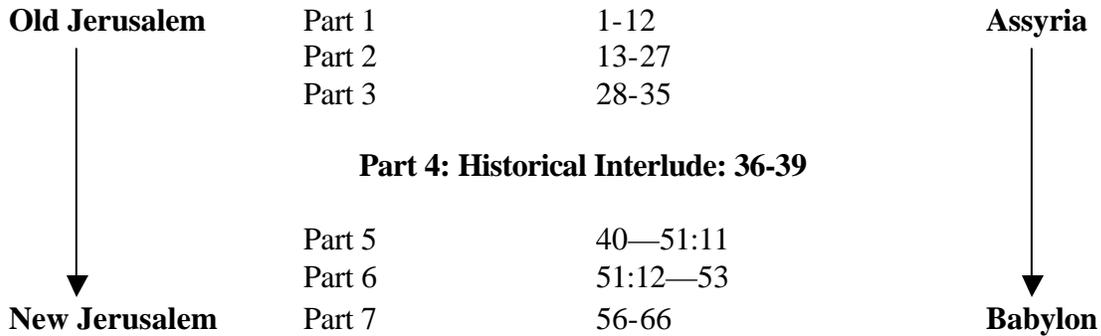
Webb points out the overall movement in Isaiah from the Old Jerusalem of Isaiah to the New Jerusalem of the Kingdom of God.² We move from a fallen people and creation to a redeemed people, from every nation, who constitute the people of God. But, as Webb points out, this movement takes place again and again. We would be mistaken to read Isaiah like a novel which tells a story in linear fashion. The movement from *Old*

¹ This study will concentrate on the first half of Isaiah. Lord willing, next fall we will study Isaiah's prophecy a second time, concentrating on chapters 40-66.

² Cf. Webb, pp. 30-33.

Jerusalem to New Jerusalem takes place again and again, with the most complete description of life in God’s kingdom being saved for the last two chapters of the book.

Consider yet another chart of the movement in Isaiah:



Webb writes,

While the fullest description of life in the new creation is reserved until the last two chapters, we are given frequent anticipations and pledges of it all the way through, especially at the conclusion of Parts 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. We glimpse the end many times before we finally arrive and rest there. (Webb, p. 30)

Notice, each of these sections ends with singing! As the end of history approaches, with God’s kingdom triumphant, His people, and even the mountains and hills and the trees (55:12) cannot keep themselves from worship!

The Threads Come Together

Isaiah’s vision is big. It draws together the major themes of the Old Testament and of the New.

What is the overarching theme of OT theology? Perhaps it is the covenant. Here in Isaiah, God’s special relationship with Israel is presupposed throughout. Perhaps it is the kingdom of God. The whole structure of the book brings out the implications of God’s sovereign control of things in the interests of his kingdom. Perhaps it is promise and fulfillment. Here we see time and again the word of divine authority being fulfilled and further fulfillment thereby pledged. Perhaps it is simply God himself, Israel’s Holy One. This book is one long exposition of the implication—for Israel and the world—of who and what he is. So this great prophecy—its whole structure unified by its teaching about the Holy One of Israel, who is true to his word, faithful to his covenant, and pursues the establishment of his kingdom—is a classic disclosure of the very heart of OT faith. (Grogan, pp. 21-22)

May God bless us as we read, study and apply the words of this book!

Study One
Woe is You!
Isaiah 5:1-30

Jesus used a whip of cords to cleanse the Jerusalem temple of his day. Prophets, from time to time, do things like that. Sometimes their activities are loaded with symbolism and significance. Isaiah walks naked, or nearly so, in Jerusalem for three years to symbolize God's deliverance over Egypt, Cush and Assyria (see

Isaiah 30). Hosea marries a prostitute to portray Israel's spiritual idolatry. Jeremiah, at the command of God, remains a bachelor, foregoing family and children because God's wrath is coming. He is to avoid funerals because God no longer has compassion on Judah (see Jeremiah 16). Later Jeremiah buys property to give the people hope when their lives seem hopeless (Jeremiah 32).

But usually prophets employ words. Jesus cleansed the Temple with a whip of chords, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel and company, used a whip of words. The sermons, songs and poetry of the prophets embarrass, even as they confront and challenge those with ears to hear. Ezekiel says his listeners were worse than prostitutes because they *did it* for free. (Ezek 16:31-34). Jeremiah is graphic when he says for Yahweh,¹

I will pull up your skirts over your face that your shame may be seen, your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution! I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean? (Jeremiah 13:26-27)

Isaiah 5 is a whip of words. *Woe to you!* Isaiah says over and over again. Structurally this chapter forms the climax of the introduction to the whole book.²

¹ Yahweh is the covenant name for God in the Old Testament. Most English translations signal the reader when this name is being used for God by using all upper-case letters, that is, LORD instead of Lord.

² Motyer's outline is both helpful and complimentary to what we saw in the Introduction regarding the structure of Isaiah. He sees Isaiah falling into three sections:

The future seems like a great question mark, for even the Lord has come to the point where he asks what more is there that can be done (vs. 4). In 1:2-31 though sin blighted life yet a bright hope was sketched in 1:26-27 for the future; in 2:1-4:6 though sin marred life's highest purposes yet cleansing and new creation was held in view (4:2-6); but now sin takes even hope away and nothing is left but the gathering darkness (vs. 30). (Motyer, p. 67)

Read Isaiah 5. Read it aloud if possible. Try to hear something of the rhythm and cadence of the prophet's words. Read the text aloud in your homegroup. Put yourselves *under* the prophet's preaching. Consider the overall structure of the chapter as you read.

The song of the Vineyard (vss. 1-7)

The bitter crop produced (vss. 8-30)

Now read the chapter a second time. Consider the two key words, *woe* and *therefore*. The *woes* introduce the sins which Israel has committed. The *therefores* speak of the judgment of God. The *woe* is a common feature of prophetic preaching.

Through the prophets, God makes predictions of imminent doom using the device of the "woe," and no Israelite could miss the significance of the use of that word. Woe oracles contain, either explicitly or implicitly, three elements that uniquely characterize this form: an *announcement* of distress (the word "woe," for example), the *reason* for the distress, and a *prediction* of doom. (Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth, Zondervan, 1982, p. 160)

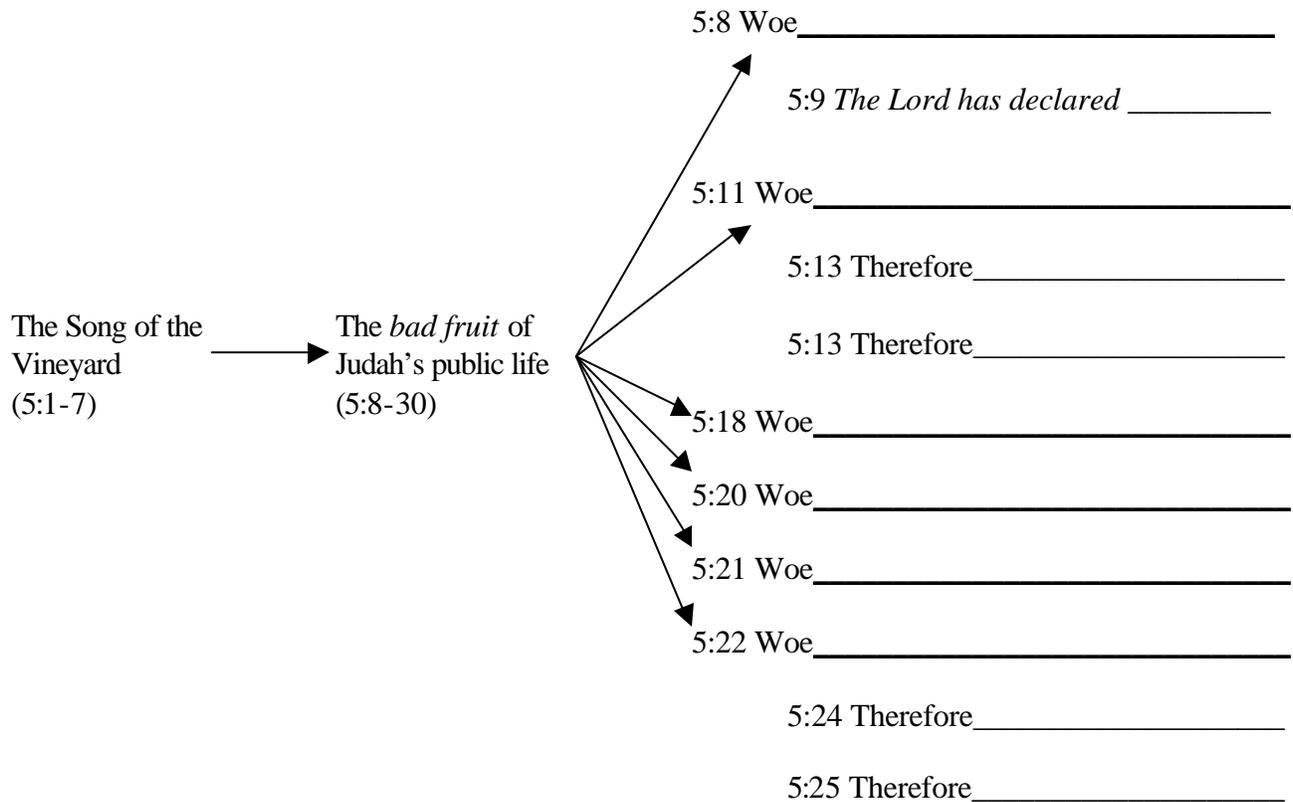
The book of the King (Isaiah 1-37)

The book of the Servant (Isaiah 38-55)

The book of the Anointed Conqueror (Isaiah 56-66)

Motyer sees chapters 1-5 as a preface to the entire book culminating in chapter 5 which is the *grimmiest section* of the preface. It speaks of the inevitability of God's judgment and of God's future grace. (Motyer, p. 67)

Note the growing intensity of God's judgment as this sermon progresses. Summarize the *woes* and *therefores* as you read.



Notes & Questions:

5:1-7 The Song of the Vineyard

Unpack this song.

Who sings this song? Is there more than one singer?

To whom is it sung?

Who is *the one I love* (vs. 1)?

What is the song about? What is the vineyard?

5:2 is graphic. The NIV reads *but it yielded only bad fruit*. The Hebrew text says, literally, *stink fruit*.

Compare John 15:1-4, 16 and Romans 7:4. Do you think of your life in Christ as a fruit-bearing enterprise? Share an example of good fruit in your life. Confess an area of *stink fruit*.

5:6 Compare this verse with Isaiah 55:9-13. Notice the beautiful symmetry of this prophecy!

5:7 is poetic in its use of assonance, words which sound alike. In the Hebrew, *justice* and *bloodshed* sound virtually the same, as do the words *righteousness* and *distress*. Judah has lost her way and cannot distinguish good from evil (5:28). Verse 9 may possibly be playing with this when it reads, literally,

In my ears! The Lord of hosts!

Israel cannot hear the difference between justice and bloodshed, but Yahweh is in the ears of Isaiah!

5:7 Israel and Judah are called *the garden of God's delight*. What was it like for God to look at that garden and see such an insensitivity toward sin? How can that be a motivating factor in your Christian life?

5:8-30 The Stink Fruit of the Vineyard & the Judgment of God

Look over the six *woes* of these verses. Isaiah is criticizing Judah. Would these same woes be leveled against America at the outset of the 21st century?

Write a paraphrase of several of these woes. Share it with your group.

5:8 Israel was to see herself as living on God's land (see Leviticus 25:23ff.). Wealth was from God and those who had it were to use it responsibly and hold it loosely (see Deut 8:18, 1 Chronicles 29:11-14, etc.). Every 50 years Israel was to celebrate the year of Jubilee: debts were to be cancelled and land was to be returned to its original owner (Leviticus 25).¹

By Isaiah's time the era of the land baron had arrived. The prophets decry the situation because of the injustice employed by the rich and powerful.

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance. . . . You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever. (Micah 2:2-3, 9; see Amos 2:6-8)

Wealth is not necessarily a bad thing from an Old Testament perspective.

➤ Proverbs 12:27

➤ Proverbs 13:4, 22

But ill-gotten wealth will profit us nothing.

Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool. (Jer. 17:11)

Why is this the first *woe*? How do the other five woes flow from this charge of wealth addiction?

What lesson(s) can we learn from this woe?

¹ There is no record of Israel practicing this celebration.

5:16 As we shall see, in study two and throughout Isaiah, the holiness of God is what distinguishes Yahweh from the people of Judah and from the gods of the ancient world. The word *holy* denotes separateness.¹ Read this verse carefully. What kind of holiness (separateness) does God possess in his character?

What does this teach us about our pursuit of holiness?

5:17 Note the power of the imagery. Think of this verse being fulfilled in Montecito, Santa Barbara, Hope Ranch or Goleta.

Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, And strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy. (NASB)

5:20 presents a picture of a moral code which has been reversed. What are some examples of this reversal in our culture? What helps you to live Christianly in such a time as ours?

5:12, 24 What is the essence of sin according to these verses?

Look again at 5:11, 12, 22-23. What do these verses teach us about our use of alcoholic beverages?

5:26-30 Notice the sovereignty of God in these verses. At God's whistle the nations heed his call and Judah will be judged.

Look at the double image in vss. 29-30. We find the roar of a lion and the despair of a sailor hopelessly lost at sea. Even his gaze at the land produces no hope.

¹ The neutrality of this word is verified in Genesis 38:21. There we read of a *holy prostitute* (*temple prostitute* in the NIV or *cultic prostitute* in other translations) because she was set apart for the work of cultic prostitution.

Study Two

Woe is Me!

Isaiah 6:1-13

The glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God.

So said Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, sometime in the second century. God's glory, his august grandeur, his stunning superiority over everything he created is indeed, *the life of man*.

One of history's greatest theologians is St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). He wrote voluminously and contributed his *Summa Theologiae* (Summary of Theology) which is read to this day. Toward the end of his life this renowned thinker was alone in a chapel and had a vision of Christ. *You have written well of me, Thomas. What will you have as a reward?* Thomas' response is legendary, *Only yourself Lord*.

St. Thomas was never the same after his vision of Christ. So moved was he that he never wrote another word of theology.

A vision of God. The very notion attracts and repels. To encounter the living God is to be changed forever. Isaiah 6:1-13 contains a description of the prophet's call to service in the midst of a vision of God's holiness.¹

Read Isaiah 6 from as many translations as you have available. What initial thoughts do you have from these 13 verses? What details stand out? What questions do these verses provoke? Can you formulate an outline of this chapter?

Scintillating Details

Troubling Questions

Coherent Outline

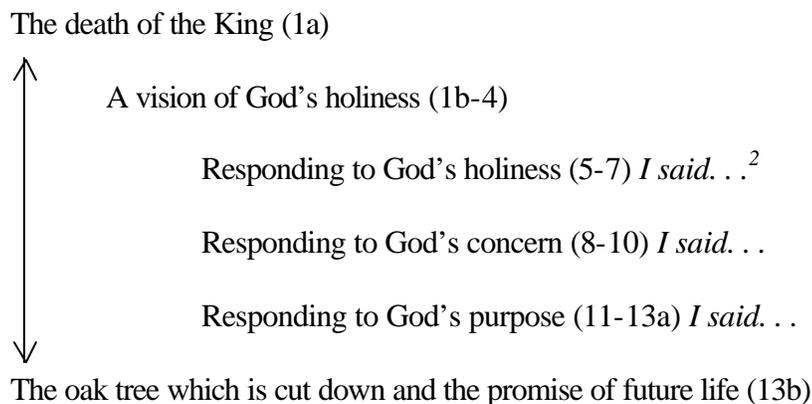
¹ The very word *prophet* comes from a Hebrew word which means *to call*. Isaiah 6 is the prophet's report of his own call.

Notes & Questions:

6:1 *In the year that King Uzziah died.* . . . Isaiah's vision takes place at the end of prosperous times. Three years before Uzziah's death in Judah, Jeroboam II, king of Israel, died in the north. Jeroboam II reigned 40 years and Uzziah reigned 50 years. Under the rule of these two monarchs, the territory of Israel/Judah was expanded to the extremes established by David. The two nations were at peace with one another and enjoyed a season of abundance.

With these two deaths the glory of Israel and Judah begins to fade. In the north, anarchy is the order of the day (cf. 2 Kings 15:8-31). In the south, Judah faces internal weakness and decay. The Assyrians are on the rise, political stability is no longer enjoyed. Look over these verses again as a whole. What comfort, if any, would this chapter provide for people who are living at such a transitional time?

The structure of Isaiah 6 is illuminating. Consider the following outline:¹



6:1-4 *I saw the Lord.* . . . We are not told whether or not Isaiah was in the Jerusalem temple. And such information seems beside the point. The puny God of Judah is now seen to be the God whose glory *fills the whole earth!* The prophet is blessed with a vision of God. His glimpse of God and his glory is never really described. The reader is only treated to a description of the accoutrements of God's holiness: God's throne, the

¹ Based on Motyer, p. 75.

² The threefold repetition of Isaiah's response, *I said, I said, I said*, (vss. 5, 8, 11) is preserved in the NASB. The NIV obscures this with *I cried* in vs. 5.

train of his robe which *fills the temple*, the seraphs¹ and their song ascribing to God his holiness and the shaking of the building.

6:3 At the center of Isaiah's vision is the ascription of God's holiness. Hebrew writers used repetition to give emphasis or to express totality. Even their superlatives (best, worst, etc.) were usually formed by repeating words.² Here we find something unique in Scripture, a threefold repetition. Motyer calls this a *super-superlative* which had to be invented to capture the majesty of Isaiah's vision.

The Hebrew word for *holy* means *brightness* or *separatedness*. Read and respond to the following quotation.

'Brightness' suggests the unapproachable God (cf. 1 Tim 6:16 with Ps. 104:2), 'separatedness' is the positive quality which distinguishes or defines God. . . . [T]he question arises what it is that makes him unapproachable or what it is that constitutes his distinctiveness. The answer is that it is his total and unique moral majesty. When people fear before God (eg. Jdg. 6:22; 13:22) it 'is not the consciousness of . . . humanity in the presence of divine power, but the consciousness of . . . sin in the presence of moral purity'. (Motyer, p. 77³)

Describe, in your own words, what it means for God to be *Holy, Holy, Holy*.

6:5-7 Compare Isaiah's response to God's holiness with your own.

When Isaiah says, *Woe is me* he means, as one translation puts it, *I'm a goner*, or as the Message reads, *I'm as good as dead*.

What three reasons does Isaiah give for being a *goner*?

¹ *Seraphs* means *burning ones*. This is the only time we find them in the Old Testament. They are thought to be angelic creatures who attend to God on his throne. See Revelation 4-5.

² For example, we never find God referred to as the *greatest* king, but as *King of kings*, or *Lord of lords*. In 2 Kings 25:15 we read of *pure gold*, but in the Hebrew we would read *gold, gold*. (Motyer, p. 76)

³ The quotation within this quotation is from H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (SCM, 1956), p. 66.

What lessons can we draw for our own lives from Isaiah's response to God's holiness?

Think of your most *religious* moments in life. When have you felt or sensed the presence of God most intimately? How was/is your response to God's holiness similar (or different) to Isaiah's? Is the holiness of God a catalyst for long-term change in your life? In what ways?

Whom did Isaiah see in his vision? Consider John 12:41 and John 1:18.

6:6-7 What is the significance of the burning coal in vs. 6-7a? Where does it come from? How is this action interpreted in vs. 7b? How do these verses testify to the grace of God?

Consider the words of A. W. Tozer with regard to this section.

The interior journey of the soul from the wilds of sin into the enjoyed presence of God is beautiful. Ransomed men need no longer pause in fear to the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His presence and live our whole life there.

6:8 Notice the swift and unilateral response of Isaiah to God's call. He doesn't know what his task will be. *Here I am, send me.* No qualifications, no need for assurance that a prophet's life will be a comfortable one. Isaiah expresses a simple willingness to do God's will, regardless of the cost.

Only when a man has been convicted of sin and has understood that the Redeemer has borne the guilt of his sin is he willing and ready joyfully to serve God, to go wherever God may call him. (Young, vol., p. 254)

Have you ever felt this way? Give examples.

6:9-10 are as troubling as they are difficult. Motyer calls them the *oddest commission ever given to a prophet.* *Tell these people not to understand and, through your preaching, effect heart-hardening and spiritual blindness.*

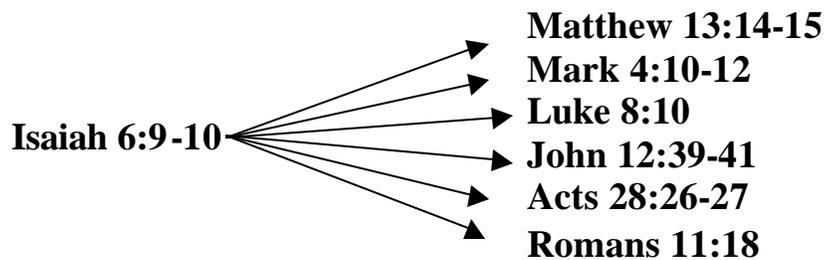
Summarize these two verses. Write your own paraphrase and read it to your homegroup.

Look at the verses again. Make a list of the body parts (or senses) referred to. List them in order. What does this list signify?

When considering these verses we should note both the sovereignty of God and the freedom of his creatures. God is going to use Isaiah's message to further harden the hearts of people whose hearts are already hard. The people of Judah have been in rebellion as the rest of this book shows. God's judgment is just.

Isaiah's ministry was to preach to stony soil, so that it might be apparent that the people were no longer the theocracy (people ruled by God), and that they were rightfully ripe for banishment from their land. God's work of hardening therefore attests to the fact that the time for banishment from Palestine was at hand (Young, vol.1, p. 259)

What is all the more stunning about this commission is that both Jesus and Paul refer to it to describe the rejection of Christ.



The six-fold repetition of these verses in the New Testament highlights their importance and forbids our glossing over their meaning. Motyer is very helpful when he asks how we should interpret Isaiah's commission.

How did Isaiah obey them? According to the criticism leveled at him in 28:9-10, Isaiah taught with such simplicity and clarity that the sophisticates of his day scorned him as fit only to conduct a kindergarten. [Isaiah] bears all the marks of a plain, systematic, reasoned approach. It is clear that Isaiah did not understand his commission as one to blind people by obscurity of expression or complexity of message. He, in fact, faced the preacher's dilemma: if hearers are resistant to the truth, the only recourse is to tell them the truth yet again, more clearly than before. But to do this is to expose them to the risk of rejecting the truth yet again and, therefore, of increased hardness of heart. It could even be that the next rejection will prove to be the point at which the heart is hardened beyond recovery. The human eye cannot see this point in advance; it comes and goes unnoticed. But the all-sovereign God both knows it and appoints it as he presides in perfect justice over the psychological processes he created (Ex. 4:21). It was at just such a point that Isaiah was called to office. His task was to bring the Lord's word with fresh, even unparalleled clarity, but in their response people would reach the point of no return. (Motyer, p. 79)

Is your heart growing harder or softer during this season of your life? What evidence would you give to support your answer?

Think about the seasons of your life as a believer. What helps keep your heart soft to God?

What causes your heart to grow hard?

Isaiah's vision of God was comprehensive (*The whole earth is full of his glory*) and transforming (*Here I am, send me!*). The call and commission of Isaiah exacted a high price. Tradition has it that the prophet was sawed in two during the reign of King Manasseh. Reflect in your homegroup on how your vision of God has or has not transformed your life. How comprehensive is your vision of God?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Three
Hope, Judgment and Hope
Isaiah 2—4

A cursory look at our era reveals an unparalleled social degeneracy in American life. Our television sets pump increasingly putrid images into our homes. *Women's Magazines* expose us to a vast array of sexual titillation and perversion as we wait to pay for our groceries. *Pop music* is laced with images and words which were once deemed obscene. Our nation's

children are producing lower and lower test scores. Marriage and fidelity are treated as a vestige from a bygone era. Wanton materialism is taken for granted while workers from the two-thirds world subsist on meager wages.¹ We have cut ourselves off at the root, yet we insist on enjoying the fruit of a dying tree.

The world, especially the modern world, has reached a curious condition of ritual or routine; in which we might almost say that it is wrong even when it is right. It continues to a great extent to do the sensible things. It is rapidly ceasing to have any of the sensible reasons for doing them. It is always lecturing on the deadness of tradition; and it is living entirely on the life of tradition. It is always denouncing us for superstition; and its own principal virtues are now almost entirely superstitions.

G. K. Chesterton

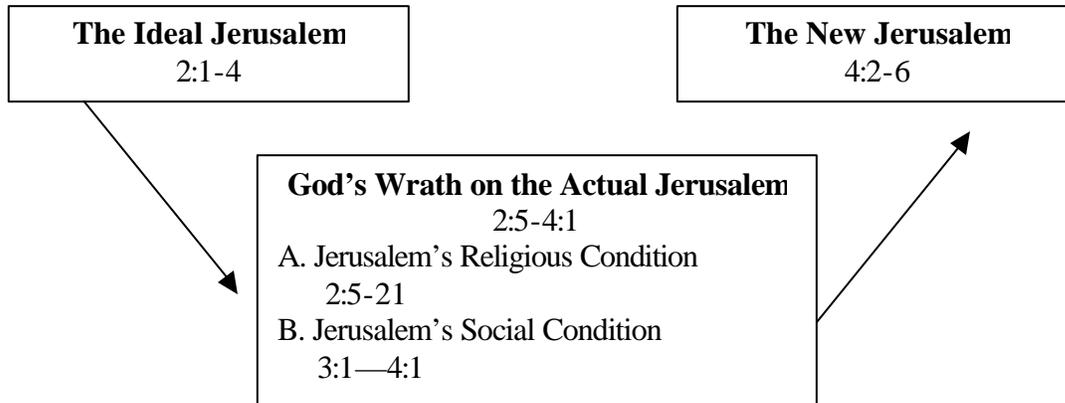
As a nation we find it possible to live abundant lives without God. We rely on our military strength, our resources, our ingenuity and our resolve. But what a fragile entity is this thing called civilization.

¹ Many estimate that about half of the world's population subsists on \$2.00 a day.

Judah, strong and prosperous under King Uzziah, is headed for collapse. Yahweh is not pleased with her ways and his judgment is around the corner.

Isaiah 2-4 contain 54 verses. In them we find structure, proportion, poetry and promise. But we also read of God's coming wrath on Judah.

As we approach this section of Isaiah consider a broad outline:



Read these verses aloud. Try to read them as if you were the prophet.¹ As you read make a few notes of those images and word-pictures which stand out. What images are confusing? Let these questions and exclamation points guide your homegroup's discussion.

God's Coming Wrath: 2:5—4:1

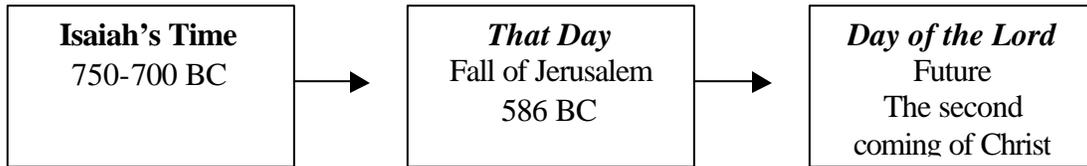
Isaiah asks his readers to look forward. The section begins with the words, *In the last days*. Notice the phrase *in that day* throughout these verses. Scan the text and find these words in 2:11, (hinted at in verse 12), 17, 20; 3:7, 18; and 4:2.

Isaiah employs what we might call *prophetic overlapping* with this phrase. On the surface *that day* looks forward about 150 years to the time when the Babylonians will

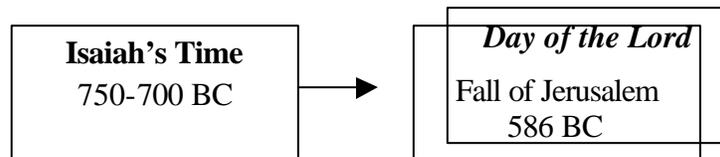
¹ Read these verses aloud in your homegroup. Assign four readers to stand (a prophetic posture) and read 2:1-4; 2:5-21; 3:1—4:1 and 4:2-6.

destroy Judah and Jerusalem. But, by 4:2 *that day* has taken on cosmic dimensions and refers to the final *day of the Lord*. This overlapping or telescoping is found in most of the prophet's writings.

From our perspective, reading Isaiah after the first advent of Jesus, the prophecy contains two future stages:



From the perspective of Isaiah's listener, the fall of Jerusalem and the final day of God's judgment tend to merge:¹



As these chapters unfold there is a growing intensity of wrath. What first appears to be a local judgment of Jerusalem (2:6-11) becomes a judgment of the nations and the world (2:12-17).

Questions:

Look over **2:6—3:26**. What specific sins and attitudes provoke the wrath of God? Take some time with this. Put these offenses to God into your own words.

Which of these summarizes the essence of Judah's problem before God?

Which of these sins/offenses do you see in our nation's life?

Which do you see in your own life?

¹ We see this same *overlap* in the way the New Testament writers understand the first and second comings of Jesus. The blessing of the Holy Spirit, a consequence of Christ's life and death, is understood by Peter to be evidence that the *last days* have arrived (Acts 2:17), but James (5:3) and Peter see the *last days*, or the *last time* (1 Peter 1:5) to refer to the second coming of Christ.

What can SBCC learn from these charges?

Now look more carefully at **2:6-8**. According to these verses, why has God abandoned his people? How many reasons can you find?

Compare **2:10-11, 19, 21** with Revelation 6:15-17.

Notice in these chapters the concern over pride and arrogance. What is God's attitude toward these dispositions? How can we remain in a state of God-dependent humility when we enjoy such prosperous times?

3:13-26 is written in the literary form of a *covenant lawsuit*. The prophets frequently employ this device.

God is portrayed imaginatively as the plaintiff, prosecuting attorney, judge, and bailiff in a court case against the defendant Israel. The full lawsuit contains a summons, a charge, evidence, and a verdict, though these elements may sometimes be implied rather than explicit. (Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth (Zondervan, 1982, p. 160)¹

Look carefully at 3:13-26. Look for, and identify,

the judge

the prosecuting attorney

the defendant

the charge

the verdict

the sentence

¹ For other examples of a covenant lawsuit see Hosea 3:3-17; 4:1-19, and especially Psalm 50.

For many of us the material of Isaiah is new. Perhaps we have never read or even been exposed to portions of Scripture which detail the wrath of God. What lesson or lessons have you learned overall in our study of this book? How has your understanding of God changed in the past three weeks?

The Ideal Jerusalem 2:1-4; 4:2-6

When we read the prophets we continually bounce back and forth from despair to hope. God's wrath will come because of sin, but his love and grace will preserve a faithful remnant. God's wrath is real and it is severe. But it is not his last word.

Read these two sections again. What is the different emphasis between the two?

2:1-4 From the time of Abram's call by Yahweh, it was God's intention to bless the whole earth through his covenant people. In fact, his covenant name, Abraham, means *father of many*.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:3)

Here we see this blessing in the form of a prophecy. The earthly Jerusalem grows to cosmic dimensions *and all the nations stream to it.*¹

2:3 What does it mean for you, personally, to *walk in his paths*? Compare Ephesians 2:2 and 2:10 (using the NASB).

¹ Seitz makes sense of a section of Isaiah which might appear to us either confusing or boring, chapters 13—27. He writes, *The largest sustained section of the Book of Isaiah is concerned with establishing the God of Israel as the God of all the nations (chaps. 13-27). Both there and here, it would be an oversimplification to talk of the prophet's pronouncements against the nations. In establishing himself as Lord over all peoples, Israel's God does not adopt a stance of judgment only; and where such a stance is adopted, Israel and the nations alike stand under a similar rule of universal justice. And as with images of restoration directed at Israel, so too God has a plan and a purpose involving every nation on earth.* (Seitz, p. 39)

4:2-6 What images of God's glory do you find in the ideal Jerusalem?

Where else do we find these images in Scripture?

Reflect on your own life. What components of your life cause you to hope for the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes? How does our hope for the ideal Jerusalem enable you to endure the difficult seasons of life?

Again, consider the images of God's glory in the ideal Jerusalem. Meditate on these images, long for them. Worship! Yes!

Study Four

The Egyptian Temptation

Isaiah 29:1-24

Whether we live in America, Sudan, India or Honduras, faithful living will test us. The life of faith is always difficult. Why? Because it is a life of faith. By nature we want to hedge our bets. Woody Allen's line, *I don't believe in an afterlife, but I'm bringing a change of underwear just in case*, speaks for all of us. We trust in God *and* our careers. We say God is the source of our security, but we find ourselves a bit stingy with regard to our giving habits because our retirement portfolio isn't up to snuff. We say with the Psalmist that God is the *lifter of [our] head*¹ and then spend a good deal of time in front of the mirror, in the weight room or jogging around the track. Again, we want to live by faith, but find ourselves taking a change of underwear.

What is the Bible about? What is the point of the story? Anyone who has taken the trouble to read the Scriptures would agree that two themes, at least, stand out. First, God is God. He will share the spotlight with no one. We find this on virtually every page of the Bible. *The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome. . .* (Deut. 10:17). Second, God demands absolute loyalty of those who desire to be called his children. God's repeated call is the call to faith and fidelity. Thus idolatry (the worship of other gods) is the most reprehensible of sins. The *first* commandment testifies to this.

You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)

The command could be translated *beside me*. Yahweh wants no god or no other power at his side in the minds and hearts of those who worship him.

Isaiah 28-35 is a section of the book which could be called, **The Egyptian Temptation**,² that is, the temptation to trust in both God and Egypt.

¹ Psalm 3:3.

² We could outline this section as follows:

The Egyptian Temptation (28—35)

- a. Woe to Scoffers (28)
- b. Woe to Schemers (29)
- c. Woe to Those who Trust Alliance with Egypt (30)
- d. Woe to Those Who Rely on Egypt (31:1—32:20)
- e. Woe to Assyria—But Blessings for God's People (33)
- f. The Judgment of the Nations (34)

Recall the historical situation. When the Assyrians were weakened militarily, Hezekiah sensed the time was ripe for independence.¹

A simultaneous uprising in the east and west offered the best opportunity to capitalize on Assyria's weakness, and it looked as though it would have to be now or never. This time Hezekiah did not hesitate. He hazarded all by throwing his hat unreservedly into the ring. He withdrew tribute, forced the reluctant Philistines to fall into line, and strengthened Jerusalem's defenses.

It was a fateful move; well-intentioned perhaps, certainly courageous, but dreadfully mistaken, and it brought Judah to the brink of extinction. (Webb, p. 23)²

King Hezekiah's and Judah's problem was that they put their confidence in the wrong place. Isaiah 31:1 pinpoints the problem:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help,
who rely on horses,
who trust in the multitude of their chariots
and in the great strength of their horsemen,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel,
or seek help from the LORD.

By now we are becoming schooled in prophetic writing. Understanding Isaiah is not yet easy, but the prophet's words are probably growing more comprehensible as we work through his prophecy. Read Isaiah 29. Notice two broad divisions (judgment and hope).

29:1-16 The Judgment of Jerusalem

29:17-24 The Transformation of the World

How many of Isaiah's images and symbols make sense? Explain these to your homegroup.

g. The Future Joy of the Redeemed (35)

Based on Isaiah (NavPress, 1987), p. 19. As in chapter 5, this section has 6 *woes*: 28:1; 29:1, 29:15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1.

¹ Take a moment to review the material in the Introduction (p. 5) regarding Hezekiah's desire for independence and his willingness to make an alliance with Egypt.

² See I Kings 18:7ff.

Make a list of the major points in this chapter. Discuss these in your group. What images are particularly confusing?

Notes & Questions:

29:1-2 Ariel? It is fairly clear from the context of these verses that Isaiah has Jerusalem in mind. Ariel is the city where David settled! The second king of united Israel overtook Jerusalem from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5). But why give the city this name? Jerusalem is nowhere else called by this name. Probably because in Hebrew the word *Ariel* sounds like *hearth* (vs. 2). Ariel then becomes a word-play depicting judgment in that the altar hearth of the temple was the place where sacrifices were burned completely.

Notice again what we have called *prophetic overlapping*. Verses 1-5 sound very much like the events of 701 BC when Sennacherib came to Jerusalem. But with verses 5-8 the scene takes on cosmic proportions.

Compare these verses with

- Zechariah 14:1-5
- Revelation 20:7-9

29: 9-16 What are the reasons for God's judgment of Jerusalem? How many can you find?

29:11-12 is confusing. Grogan explains:

The whole point of vv. 11-12 is that Isaiah's own God-given vision was a closed book to the people of Jerusalem. To the one who could read—perhaps the professional prophet, who knew something of the technical language of prophecy—the vision contained mysteries his eyes were closed to (v. 11). He who could not read—perhaps the ordinary inhabitant of Jerusalem—was at once removed further still from understanding (v. 12). The seeming advantage of the professional prophet did not really place him ahead of the common man, for neither in fact understood the vision. (Grogan, p. 188)

29:13 is used by Jesus to describe the attitude of the Pharisees. Read Matthew 15:1-9. How does this illumine Isaiah 29:13? In what ways do you see this same tendency in your own life? What can you do about it?

29:14 God says, *Once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder.* Literally this would read, *doing wondrously and a wonder.* The emphasis is on surprise and astonishment! Something will happen which can only be attributed to God's hand.

What is this wonder? Notice how the apostle Paul understands the fulfillment of this promise. Compare 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

29:15 Here we find the 5th woe of this section. Some secret negotiations with Egypt to form an alliance against Assyria are implied. But God was left out of the conversation.

It is truly astounding what depths of inconsistency religious people are capable of, especially in positions of leadership, where backroom decisions and policies all too often belie the faith in God that is professed in the pulpit. The *Woe* of verse 15 will be picked up in 30:1 and elaborated in terms of the determination to pursue an alliance with Egypt. This is the faithless plan which the leaders of Isaiah's day were hatching in the dark. (Webb, p. 125)

Think about the last *big* decision you made (going to graduate school, getting married, moving, changing jobs). How did you involve God in your plans? Share with your group how this worked at the nitty-gritty level.

29:16 contains a popular image favored by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Paul. God is portrayed as a potter and his people are the clay. The verse begins with a rare Hebrew word which depicts reversal (the noun is found only in Ezekiel 16:34). Motyer translates the beginning of this verse *Oh your reversal*, while Young's translation reads

Your Perversion! Is the potter to be reckoned as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, He made me not, and the thing formed say of its former, He does not understand? (Young, vol. 2, p. 322)

Notice the second sentence of Young's translation, *Is the potter to be reckoned as the clay*. Isaiah's imagery is shocking. The clay looks at the potter and says, *You are just like me!*

Compare the use of this image (and others like it) in the following verses.

- Isaiah 10:15

- Isaiah 45:9-11

- Isaiah 64:8

- Jeremiah 18:1-6

- Romans 9:19-25

God is the potter, you are the clay. What does this mean? Put this truth into your own words.

When, specifically, have you experienced this potter-clay relationship with God?

What helps you remember and enjoy this fundamental truth of the Christian life?

When are you most tempted to forget this truth?

29:17-24 These verses are *vintage* Isaiah. Notice another use of the phrase *In that day* (vs. 18). Isaiah looks forward to both the restoration of the world and to the restoration of God's people (*Jacob* in 24:22).

How do we apply these verses to our own lives? How should these promises of future restoration help us in avoiding *The Egyptian Temptation*?

Because the people succumbed to what we have called *The Egyptian Temptation* they became *blind* (29:9) and unable to see the glory of God (29:11-12). Notice in verse 18 the spiritual transformation where *the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.*

Give some examples from you own life of areas where God has led you away from wickedness into a life of holiness. Encourage one another with these changes you have experienced.

Spend time as a homegroup praising and thanking God for his mercy and persistence in molding and transforming our lives.

Study Five

The Triumph of God

Isaiah 24-27

Ernst Hemingway once said, *Life is one damn thing after another*. Shakespeare's Macbeth uttered a cry of despair saying, *Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*.

Are Hemingway and Macbeth right? Is there no grand purpose to history? In the end are there no winners or losers? Do we live, die and end up in an abyss of nothingness?

The people of Judah asked similar questions as they watched their once secure nation begin to unravel. Is God there? Will Yahweh have the last word or is Judah on a merry-go-round of meaningless cycles of repetition and decline?

The Heidelberg Catechism (1576) consists of a series of questions and answers which were intended to teach the Christian faith to children and new believers. The 27th question concerns the providence of God, or, as we might paraphrase, the significance of history.

What do you understand by the providence of God?

The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were, by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven and earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea all things come to us not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.

The answer of the Heidelberg Catechism is the burden of Isaiah 24-27. Here the prophet labors to show God is in control. Yahweh will reign in his judgment. His people will be secure on Mt. Zion.¹ These chapters form a unit and are a fitting climax of chapters 13—27 which labor to show Yahweh's supremacy over all the nations. Ultimately they point to the triumph of God over everything.²

Obviously we cannot study in detail all that is found in this unit.³ But what cannot be studied in detail can be read and enjoyed. Read these chapters keeping in mind their

¹Zion probably means *stronghold* in Hebrew. The word occurs 150 times in the OT and is usually synonymous with Jerusalem. The term is often used to point to the heavenly city of God, or the *new* Jerusalem (see Heb. 12:22; Revelation 14:1; Psalm 132:13-14).

²The similarities of these chapters with the book of Revelation are apparent. Many have called chapters 24—27 *Isaiah's Apocalypse*. Webb writes, *Admittedly there are great differences of style, but the basic vision is the same, as well as many of the images: the two cities, the eschatological banquet, the song of the redeemed, etc.* (Webb, p. 105)

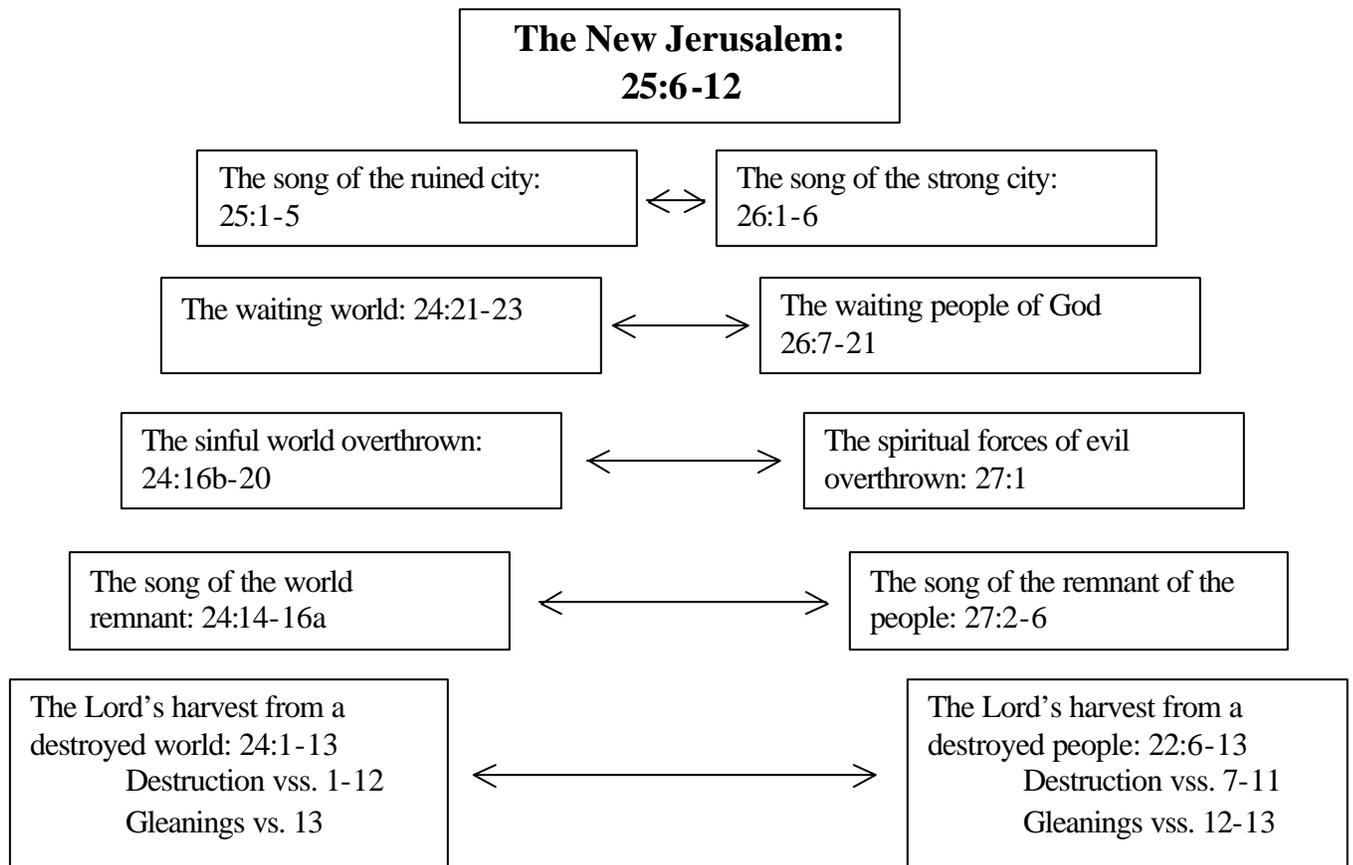
³This study will concentrate on chapters 24—25. When we come back to Isaiah next year we will concentrate on chapters 26—27.

unity. Look at the following chart as you read.¹ Make a few notes as you read. Be prepared to share your gleanings from these chapters with your homegroup. Look for the following themes:

God and his sovereignty:

God's judgment:

God's restoration and grace:



¹ Based on Motyer, p. 194-195.

Look over these chapters one more time. Notice the repetition of the phrase *In that day* (see pp. 24-25) in these chapters. Clearly Isaiah has the end of history in mind. What happens on *that day*? Make a list.

➤ 24:21

➤ 25:9

➤ 26:1

➤ 27:1

➤ 27:2

➤ 27:12

➤ 27:13

Notes & Questions:

24:1-23 What key words and images does Isaiah use to describe God's judgment?

24:1 reads in the NRSV, *Now the LORD is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate*. God will judge and his judgment could happen at any moment.

Respond to the comment on this verse by J. N. Oswalt:

Only a God whose control of history is so complete that he could bring it to a close at any moment is worth worshipping.¹

24:5-6 is the equivalent of Romans 3:23. What is the fundamental reason for the judgment of God? How do these verses protect the fairness and justice of God in his judgment?

¹ From *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1—39*, (Eerdmans, 1986), p. 444.

24:7-13 What are the images (word pictures) of judgment can you find in these verses (you should be able to find at least three or four)? What do these images convey?

24:23 What is the result of God's judgment? Compare translations.

25:1-12 Is there a more beautiful collection of verses in all of Scripture? Read this chapter aloud in your homegroup. What thoughts and emotions does it provoke?

If Isaiah 25 was the only chapter of the Bible you had in your possession, how could you use it to lead a friend to Christ?

Picture here

25:1-5 has been called The Song of the Ruined City. Why does Isaiah praise God in these verses? List the reasons. How should these verses inform our praise?

25:6 Who is invited to the feast? Notice this same teaching in 27:12-13. Where does the feast take place? What is provided for the guests?

25:9-12 Ultimately Isaiah 25 leads us to celebrate God and his grace. At the end of history *they will say, Surely this is our God!* The words *they will say* are singular in Hebrew and could be translated, *Each will say* because it leads to the plural testimony of verse 9.

Look at what's happened! This is our God!
We waited for him and he showed up and saved us!
This God, the one we waited for
Let's celebrate, sing the joys of his salvation.
God's hand rests on this mountain!
Isaiah 25:9 (The Message)

Motyer is exuberant:

They are (at last!) face to face with God in Zion (Ps. 84:7). In wonderment they say to each other, '*surely/ 'look' this is our God. . . This is the LORD [Yahweh]!*' Subjective experience, *our God*, joins hands with objective reality, *this is the LORD*. The work of salvation is all his; no human action, co-operative or contributory, was needed, only waiting . . . for what the Lord would do and rejoicing in it when he did it. (Motyer, p. 210)

The church of the twenty-first century is quite squeamish about the very notion of God's wrath. Preachers are uncomfortable preaching about hell. We like to quote John 10:10 and shy away from the teaching of Jesus in John 3:36. (Yes, it would be a good idea to look up those verses.)

Respond to the following quotation by Barry Webb.

In the end there will be a great gulf fixed between those who are at the feast and those who are not. It will not suffice to have belonged to a group close to the kingdom, to have stood on its very threshold, or to have known some who entered. Either repentance will bring you to the feast or pride will keep you away, and the consequences will be unsullied joy or unspeakably terrible judgment. The alternatives which the gospel sets before us are as stark as that. (Webb, pp. 109-110)

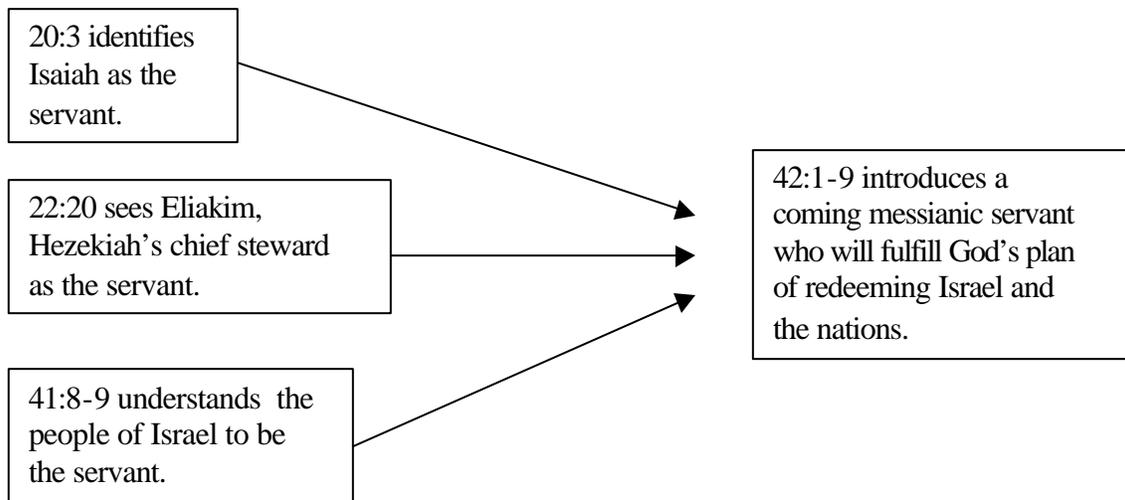
Considering the progression of chapters 24 and 25, from God's judgement to God's restoration, is there anything in the habits of your life you want to modify or change? If so, how will you make this change?

Spend time as a homegroup praying for the continued growth of each person's comprehensive commitment to our sovereign God.

Study Six
My Chosen Servant
Isaiah 42:1-25

What should be very clear by now is the fact that Judah needed help. The Assyrians threatened to destroy Jerusalem and, according to the prophet Isaiah, the Babylonians were going to do so in the future. Throughout Isaiah's prophecy, a *servant* is mentioned who enjoys the Lord's favor and will be used by God to deliver his people.

Who is this servant? As we should suspect by now, the servant's identification is not as simple as we would like. *The servant* is identified alternatively as Isaiah, Eliakim and as the faithful remnant of Israel. But eventually *the servant* is seen to be the coming Messiah.

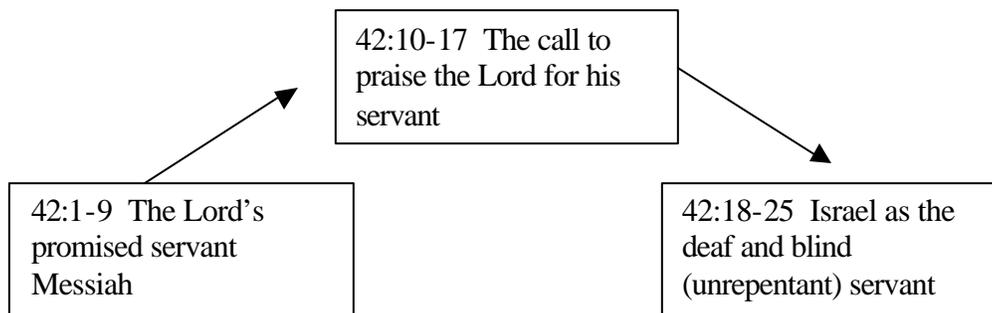


Grogan explains:

It seems therefore that we have here a kind of pyramid pattern . . . in the presentation of the servant. The servant is first of all, outside the songs, Israel; then he is the remnant, the spiritual heart of Israel; then he is an unique person,

suffering unjustly at the hands of sinners and yet in fulfillment of the divine purpose of atonement. (Grogan, p. 18)¹

This multi-identification of the servant even takes place within Isaiah 42.



Read Isaiah 42 with the above three-part outline in mind. What initial thoughts do you have as you read?

¹ To make matters even more interesting, Acts 13:47 seems to apply Isaiah 49:6, a servant passage, to Paul and Silas! Then Acts 26:23 applies this same verse to Jesus.

Notes and Questions:

42:1-9 is the first of four *servant songs* which celebrate the person and work of the one coming to save Israel. Motyer shows the parallels in these four songs.¹ Read these songs. Make a list of the character qualities, personal characteristics and activities of the coming servant.

The Servant			
42:1-4	49:1-6	50:4-9	52:13—53:12
Biography	Autobiography	Autobiography	Biography
The Servant's task	The Servant's task	The Servant's commitment	The Servant's completion of his task
He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	He is endowed with the word	
	He experiences despondency	He experiences suffering	He experiences suffering
Tailpiece (42:5-9)	Tailpiece (49:7-13)	Tailpiece (50:10-11)	Tailpiece (54:1—55:13)

Character Qualities

Personal Characteristics

Activities

Notice how the New Testament writers use these servant songs with regard to Jesus.

- Matthew 8:17
- Matthew 12:17-21
- John 12:38
- Acts 8:30-35

¹ Motyer, p. 15

The servant song is a definitive contrast from the idol-gods of chapter 41. The NIV obscures the contrast. Notice the repetition of the word *behold*.

Isa. 41:24 **Behold**, you are of no account, And your work amounts to nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination.

Isa. 41:29 **Behold**, all of them are false; Their works are worthless, Their molten images are wind and emptiness.

Isa. 42:1 **Behold**, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one {in whom} My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

Motyer explains:

‘Look at the idol-gods’ (24); Look at the idolaters’ (29); and now ‘Look at my servant’ (42:1). The servant steps onto the stage specifically to perform a world-wide task of revelation, the Lord’s remedy for the emptiness, and particularly the absence of a sure word of God (41:28), which marks the Gentile world. (Motyer, p. 318)

42:1-4 What is the key word in these verses? (Hint: it occurs three times.)

42:2-4 Make a list of the things the servant will *not* do. In the Hebrew text this negative occurs seven times. Why would Isaiah write his song in this way?

42:6-7 Compare these verses with Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:1-6. What is behind John’s question? What is the point of Jesus’ answer? How does this interchange help us understand the meaning of Isaiah 42? How does Jesus’ answer inform us of his understanding of himself?

42:10-12 calls the whole world to sing to God! What follows (vss. 13-17) are the undergirding reasons for this jubilation.

42:10 speaks of *you islands*. We read this and say, Huh? But in the Jewish mind the term was virtually synonymous with Gentiles, or nations. See especially Isaiah 11:11. The point is, when the servant comes God's blessing will extend to the whole world!¹

42:13-14 Isaiah uses two startling images of God in these verses. What are they and what do they teach us about God? How do these images of God inform your daily surrender to God?

42:18-25 should shock the reader. We have seen the servant as the one who will *be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open the eyes that are blind* (42:6-7). Now Israel is the servant who is blind!

Consider these verses. Why is Israel responsible for her own blindness? See 42:21.

42:23 Notice the severe providence of God in this verse. The surrounding nations which have besieged Israel and Judah are under God's authority. What does this verse teach you about your own trials in life? Compare Deuteronomy 8:5 and Deuteronomy 12:10-12.

42:24b What does this verse teach us about sin and disobedience?

Isaiah 42 is both comforting and challenging. The comfort of the servant songs lead to exuberant praise (vss. 10-17) and then to a final challenge (vss. 18-25). While the chapter ends on a very dark point, Isaiah quickly assures his readers of God's abiding commitment to them and moves on to discuss Judah's future deliverance.

¹ Motyer writes, *The word [islands] occurs thirty-eight times in the Old Testament, of which seventeen are in Isaiah. In chapters 40-55 it is found nine times and is virtually a technical term for the Gentile world.* (Motyer, p. 126)

What are the areas of blindness and deafness in your life (you may ask for help from your spouse or roommate).

Pray for one another to the end that the Holy Spirit would soften our hearts and make us eager to surrender every area of our lives to the sovereign God of the universe!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Seven

The Prayer of Hezekiah

Isaiah 36—37

There are times in each of our lives when we are sorely tested. When every prop around us seems to be giving way, when every support system seems to have failed. There are seasons and places in one's journey where the situation appears to be hopeless, where no conceivable strategy is plausible, where every proposed solution is unrealistic.

King Hezekiah faced two such crises toward the end of his life which are recorded in Isaiah 36—39. In the first two of these chapters the long march of the Assyrians appears to be coming to its climax. Jerusalem is surrounded, weak and ready for surrender.¹

As we learned in our introduction, the book of Isaiah falls into two parts. Chapters 36—39 are a pivot on which Isaiah's prophecy turns. They are an abrupt transition in the book. We move from the glory of the coming kingdom (35:1-10) to the imminent doom of the present kingdom. These chapters sound as if they are from one of the books of Kings or Chronicles. Before reading any further, consider the structure of Isaiah as outlined on page 7.

Chapters 36—37 show Judah, Jerusalem and specifically King Hezekiah at the moment of testing. The armies of Sennacherib have made their advance toward the City of David, Jerusalem (see the map below). When we read in 36:1 that *Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah* we are reading of the near collapse of Judah! This Assyrian king claimed to have conquered forty-six of Judah's *strong cities, walled forts, and . . . the countless small villages in their vicinity*. He also claimed to have Hezekiah locked in *like a bird in a cage*.² The account in Isaiah skips over some of the desperate measures taken by Hezekiah to protect Judah's autonomy from Assyria. In 2 Kings 18:13-16 we read of Hezekiah paying tribute to Sennacherib in order to keep him at bay. He actually took the gold from the temple doors and gave it to this foreign monarch.

In the midst of this precarious situation, a final decision needs to be made. Will the feeble city of Jerusalem compromise her faith in Yahweh and capitulate to the Assyrians?

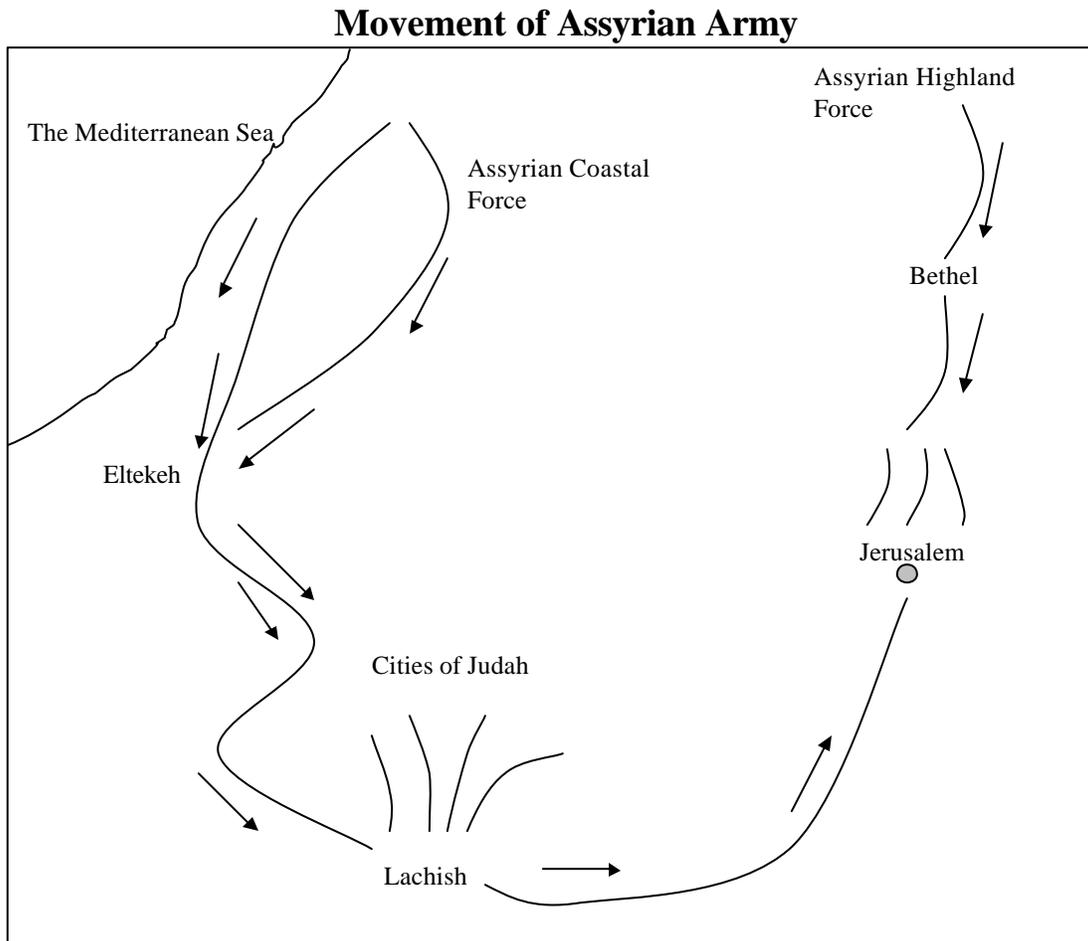
¹ In chapters 38—39 King Hezekiah's very life is at stake. We will study these chapters next year.

² cited in Webb, p. 148.

Or will Hezekiah trust God to deliver him, against all odds? The key question is put to Hezekiah, and to us, by the field commander in 37:5, *On whom are you depending?*

Contained in these chapters is some of the high drama of Israel's history. Here we see the most powerful king on earth stand toe to toe with the Davidic king.

. . . [the] scene is set for a key demonstration that the Lord rules the world, that he is steadfast in keeping his promises and that it is his purposes which are sovereignly accomplished. (Motyer, p. 276)¹



Read Isaiah 36:1-22. There are a lot of funny sounding names in this chapter. Don't let this detract you from the drama of the story. On your first reading make a list of the following:

¹ Motyer continues, *In chapters 6—12 Isaiah contended that divine grace would triumph in the coming of the divine Davidic king to the throne, not only of Judah but of the whole world. Chapters 13—27 explored this world panorama further, envisaging one Lord reigning as the one king over one world. Egypt and Assyria in particular were used (19:23ff.; 27:13) to typify the incoming of the nations into the single people of the Lord.* (Motyer, p. 276)

- 36:1 When does this take place?
- 36:2 Where does the meeting take place?
- 36:3-4 Who is present when Sennacherib's letter is read?
- 36:11-20 What is the strategy of the field commander when he insists on speaking in Hebrew? (Note, Aramaic was the language of diplomats and would not have been understood by common workers.)

36:4-10 Read the message of the Assyrian field commander carefully. Webb calls this speech *a classic study in the Satanic art of sowing doubt and unbelief through subtly twisting the truth*. (Webb, p. 148) Sennacherib uses no fewer than four separate arguments to coerce Judah into peaceful submission. Look for the following:

1. Egypt won't protect you.
2. Hezekiah has reduced the places where you can worship your God, so surely He won't protect you.
3. Even if we Assyrians supplied you with horses, you wouldn't have the army to ride them.
4. Your God told me to attack you!

What is true in this speech? What is false?

Think of a time in your life when a situation appeared to be hopeless (perhaps that time is right now). What kinds of questions or doubts were raised during that time? How were these doubts and thoughts parallel to the deceptive arguments Sennacherib posed to Hezekiah?

36:12-20 Note the further monologue of the field commander to the people of Jerusalem. The images are graphic (see 36:12). What, specifically, are his arguments? What is he trying to do with this speech?

What is the people's response to the field commander's message and arguments? What is the lesson for us in their response?

37:1-20 contains Hezekiah's reaction to Sennacherib's threats. Jot down some notes on the progression of events in these verses.

- What is Hezekiah's first response to the threat (37:1)?

- Consider 37:8-9. Why does this news add urgency to the drama?

37:14-20 Read and ponder the prayer of Hezekiah. Note the parallels to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Write an outline of the prayer.

What is there in your life today that needs to be laid before the Lord in prayer?

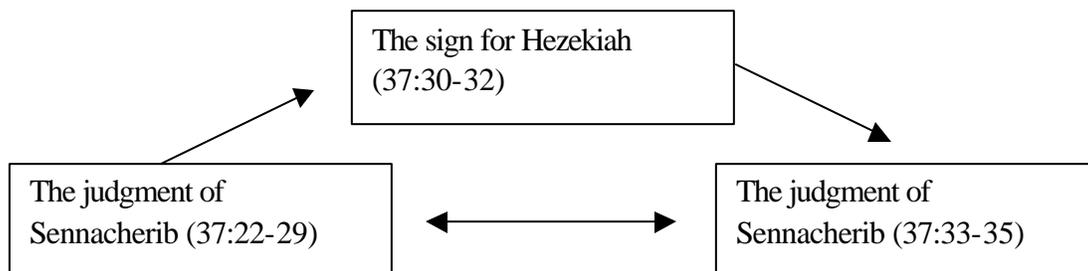
In the midst of insurmountable adversity Hezekiah places his trust in God. Webb writes,

What a magnificent prayer! And how feeble it makes our own prayers by comparison! It begins and ends with God, and its overriding concern is that God might be glorified in the situation. . . . Hezekiah's prayer is so magnificent because it arises from a deep and true understanding of who God is, and is fundamentally an act of worship. Such praying lifts people out of themselves and into the presence of God. And in that context, present problems are not lost sight of; they are just seen from a new perspective, and the cry for deliverance becomes a cry that God's kingdom may come and his will be done. (Webb, p. 20)

What circumstances, events or seasons in your life have led you to pray in this way?

37:21-38 contain God's response to Hezekiah's prayer. Notice the words of verse 21, *Because you have prayed. . .*

What happens because Hezekiah prayed? Consider the following outline:



37:36-37 What Old Testament story does this event bring to mind? What are the parallels between the two events?

How does Sennacherib meet his demise?

37:32 One commentator calls this verse the *most important* verse of the chapter. Why would this be the case?

37:35 What is the purpose of God's deliverance?

Isaiah 37 demonstrates an awe inspiring thought. History can be turned by prayer. Motyer writes,

What neither armaments (36:9) nor diplomacy (30:1-2) nor money (2 Ki. 18:13-14) could achieve, prayer has done. (Motyer, p. 282)

But notice 37:26. God planned this long ago. Somehow, mysteriously to our minds, God responds to the prayers of Hezekiah which are according to his foreordained purposes! Praise and prayer should be our response!

Study Eight

Immanuel: A Sign For Ahaz

Isaiah 7:1-25

Trajectory. Do you know the word? One dictionary defines trajectory with the following:

1. The curve that a body (as a planet or comet in its orbit or a rocket) describes in space. 2. A path, progression, or line of development resembling a physical trajectory.

Each of our lives is on a trajectory toward or away from God. We are either growing closer to God, in reverence and holiness, or we are not. C.S. Lewis spoke of this in Mere Christianity.

The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but still call themselves by that name: some of them are clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so.¹

As we read Isaiah we find a nation and, more particularly, a king, on a trajectory of destruction.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

2 Kings 16:2-4

How does a king become corrupt? The veins of King Ahaz flowed with good blood. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were among the best of Israel's kings (see chart

¹ Book Four, chapter 10, paragraph 4.

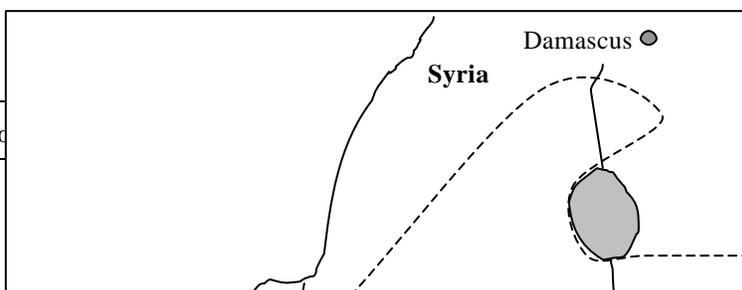
on page 3). Yet this king squanders his family heritage by making compromise after compromise in his life as a monarch. His reign was disastrous for Judah at every level—militarily, spiritually, economically and diplomatically. By the end of his reign King Ahaz brought into Judah the most vile of practices, the worship of heavenly bodies, witchcraft, necromancy (communicating, in theory, with the dead) and child sacrifice.

Before turning to Isaiah 7, read two brief accounts of the life of King Ahaz. Jot down any thoughts which come to mind.

2 Kings 16:1-19

2 Chronicles 28:1-25

Isaiah 7 takes place early in the reign of King Ahaz. This chapter tells the same story found in 2 Chronicles 28, from a slightly different perspective. Ahaz is faced, or so he thinks, with two bad options. He can submit to the northern kingdom of Israel which has made an alliance with Syria (Damascus) against Assyria. As we read chapter 7 King Rezin of Aram (Damascus) and Pekah, king of Israel are marching on Jerusalem. Their desire is to overthrow Ahaz and install a puppet king who is *the son of Tabeel*.¹ A second option for King Ahaz is to submit to the Assyrians themselves and hope for protection against the Israel-Syrian alliance. At the time of this crisis the Assyrian warrior Tiglath-Pileser III is preparing to march from the northeast on the kings of the area shown on the map below.



¹ What? Have you

Sea of Galilee

The Dead Sea

With this background in mind read Isaiah 7. As you read, remember that *Ephraim* is another name for Israel.

Keep the following outline in mind as you read:

1. The dilemma of King Ahaz (vss. 1-12).
2. The sign of Immanuel (vss. 13-16).
3. The coming judgment of God (vss. 17-25).

The name of Isaiah means, *a remnant will return*. How does this name fit into the chapter?

7:7-9 What are the specific components of Isaiah's prophecy? Make a list. (See p. 4 of the Introduction if you need help understanding 7:8.)

7:7 Isaiah could not be more specific with Ahaz. *It will not take place, it will not happen.* What does Ahaz do with this prophecy? See 7:10-13.

7:9 Ahaz thinks he has but two bad options (see above). Notice the black and white options Isaiah paints with regard to faithfulness or non-faithfulness. What lesson do we find in this verse for our lives as disciples?

7:13-16 are well known verses to readers of the New Testament. 7:14 is as problematic as it is wonder-provoking. Matthew applies it to the birth of Jesus.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” —which means, “God with us.”

Matthew 1:22-23

But how would these verses have been understood in Isaiah’s time?

At the outset, notice that verse 14 is a sign of judgment to Ahaz because of his lack of faith.

We must ask what Isaiah intended this verse was to mean for his original readers. Who was the *virgin* and who was the *child* in 7:14? Did Isaiah intend only to look hundreds of years to the future? Or was there an immediate application for King Ahaz and his contemporaries?¹

¹ As we might expect, the scholars are rigorously divided. Who is the mother? Who is the child?

Viewpoints abound:

1. The mother is the queen and therefore the child is a royal prince. The future King Hezekiah is one candidate.
2. The mother is Isaiah’s wife and the child is one of her sons.
3. The prophecy refers to mothers in Judah who will produce faithful offspring.
4. The mother is the virgin Mary and the child is Jesus (see Grogan, pp. 62-63).

Grogan points out that a satisfactory interpretation of this passage must come to terms with the following:

Webb answers this last question with the following paragraph. Take a few moments and work through his comments. Be prepared to explain them to one in your homegroup who doesn't understand.

Zion has already been pictured as a woman (literally, 'daughter Zion') in 1:8. Now, in the crisis of invasion and imminent siege, she is depicted as a sexually mature woman (literally, 'young woman', '*alma*) who has already conceived and is even now in the pains of childbirth. The central statement of verse 14 is literally: 'The young woman has conceived and is giving birth to a son . . .' If the 'young woman' is Zion, then her *son* is the faithful remnant who will emerge from her sufferings.¹ That is why he is given the name *Immanuel*, 'God with us'. God will be with the faithful remnant who gather round Isaiah (*cf.* 8:16), not with the unbelieving Ahaz and the rebellious nation as a whole. This is the implication of the ominous shift from 'your God' in verse 11 to *my God* in verse 13. (Webb, pp. 62-63)

With the above in mind, read 7:18-25 again. The fulfillment of these verses was virtually immediate. Syria fell to the Assyrians in 732 B.C., Israel in 722 B.C., and Judah was besieged in 701 B.C.

Notice the similarity of the *sign* in 7:14 to the *sign* God gave Moses.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Exodus 3:11-12

Page Kelley writes,

-
1. The mother and child must be seen as a sign to Ahaz (or to the whole Davidic dynasty).
 2. The answer must explain the meaning of the word *virgin* (NIV) or *maiden* (RSV) or *young woman* (NRSV) and what its significance is in this verse. There is a reason for the variations in translations. The Hebrew Bible uses a word which is ambiguous and could refer to either a young woman or to a virgin. When the Bible was translated into Greek, about 250 B.C., a more specific noun was used which definitely meant *virgin*. When Matthew quotes the verse he relies on the Greek translation of the Old Testament.
 3. The tense of the verb which is translated *will be* in the NIV. It could read *will be*, *Is*, or *has been*. Grammatically all three are possible.
 4. Does *Immanuel* mean *God is with us*, or *God with us*? Both are possible.
 5. Do *curds and honey* suggest plenty and security in the promise land (*cf.* Ex. 3:8, 17; Deut. 6:3; 11:9; 32:13-15), or do they represent the opposite in a well-developed agricultural society? *Do they simply designate the normal diet of a recently weaned child? Do they even reflect the mythological diet of Babylonian gods, so suggesting his divinity?* (Grogan, p. 63)

¹ See Isaiah 66:7-8 where this is more explicit.

This is the only promise God ever makes to his servants. They are not promised success, riches, popularity, or an easy life. The only assurance they have is the assurance that if they are obedient to God's will they will never walk alone (cf. Matt 28:19-20). (Kelley, p. 33)

Think through the truth of this promise in your life. How have you experienced this reality?

In what ways is the coming of Jesus the ultimate sign of *Immanuel*, God with us?

King Ahaz became a vile king gradually. He made compromise after compromise and eventually descended to moral reprobation. He sacrificed his own son to the god Molech. The trajectory of his life took him a million miles from God. All because he failed to trust in the sign of Immanuel.

Think of your own life of faith and practice. In what ways is your life based on this sign? Do the decisions you make reflect a conviction that, indeed, God is with you? What are the areas of life where you have difficulty trusting in this sign? Spend some time together, as a group, thinking aloud together and praying for one another with regard to the trajectory of our lives.

Study Nine
A Child is Born
Isaiah 8—9

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Isaiah 9:6

How will this thing turn out? is a question everyone asks from time to time. *Does history have a purpose? Will God triumph in the end?*

Think of Israel’s history. God promised Abraham land, numerous descendents, prosperity, and the assurance that his family would be a blessing to all the earth (Genesis 12). After a period of enslavement, God delivered Israel out of bondage—into the desert!

After 40 years of wandering, the people finally entered the promised land and endure the era of the judges. Finally, in desperation and un-faith they asked for a king. *A king will get us off this ferris wheel of life. With a king we will finally have stability.* But what Israel received was really more of the same. From Saul to David to Solomon to civil war and a divided

kingdom, Israel clearly yearned for more.

Isaiah 8:1—9:7 complete the unit begun in chapter 7. Isaiah stands against the tide as he prophesies the downfall of Judah’s threat, Israel and Syria (see the beginning of study 8). Our text for this study consists of several oracles or sermonettes, delivered by the prophet. They show both the coming judgment of God and the emerging hope which arises out of that judgment.

Look over these verses with the following outline in mind:¹

1 st oracle: The name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz	8:1-4
--	-------

¹ Based on Webb, p. 64.



Darkness	2 nd oracle: A tale of two rivers 3 rd oracle: The stumbling-stone Isaiah's first reflection: The present darkness	8:5-10 8:11-15 8:16-22	Judgment
Light	Isaiah's second reflection: The coming dawn 4 th oracle: A child is born!	9:1 9:2-7	Salvation

Notes & Questions:

8:1-4 The First Oracle: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz

Notice the parallels between this sign and the sign of Immanuel in chapter 7. While the sign to Ahaz was more private, this sign is to be tested by the experts. Uriah the priest and Zechariah are to be witnesses to the sign. But both signs point to the imminent fall of Syria and Israel. The birth of a child is at the center of both signs. Both are addressed to the people of Judah to provoke faith in the midst of what seems to be a hopeless situation.

Ahh, the world of the prophets. Isaiah makes a poster and then makes a baby with his wife. He then gives the child a special name which means, *speed-spoil-haste-booty*. Motyer points out, the name *is impressionistic rather than grammatical*. . . *It is intended to provoke questions, not to answer them*. (Motyer, p. 90) While the specifics of the name are not clear, it was evident that this child was a sign of the destruction of Israel and Syria. And the sign would be fulfilled within about a year of the child's birth (8:4).

8:5-10 The Second Oracle: A tale of two rivers

Read these verses. There is much we might miss as readers who are so far removed from Isaiah's time.

Keep the following in mind:

Jerusalem was a well-fortified city. Its chief problem was its water supply. The inhabitants of the city relied on the spring Gihon which flowed into Jerusalem on the stream *Shiloah*.

First, [Shiloah] stood for the Davidic monarchy (for it was at Gihon that the monarchy passed from David to his sons; 1 Ki. 1:33-34, 45), and secondly it stood for Jerusalem as the city of faith. In 7:3 Ahaz, under threat of invasion and siege, was looking at his vulnerable water supply. Though Jerusalem occupied one of the most impregnable sites of the ancient world, its source of water was outside the city walls and the supply ran overground in conduits into the city. To live in

Jerusalem, therefore, required faith that the Lord would stand by his promises that this was the city he had chosen and which he would defend.¹ (Motyer, p. 91)

So, instead of having faith in God (and in the water he supplies), Israel chose *Rezin* (king of Damascus) and *the son of Remaliah* who was Pekah, one of the last kings of the northern territory of Israel.

Notice the humor of verse 7. *You want water? Water you'll get!* The *mighty flood waters of the Euphrates* will flood both the north and the south (vs. 8). Recall the setting of this prophecy. King Ahaz has a choice to make. He can either surrender to Israel-Syria, surrender to Assyria or trust in God. When Assyria was destroying Israel-Syria the inhabitants of Judah were relieved. But here Isaiah says, *Don't be smug. The flood waters will overflow into Judah as well.*

8:8, 10 Notice the two references to *Immanuel* in these verses. What do they signify? How do they tie in with the sign of Immanuel in 7:14?

8:11-15 The Third Oracle: The stumbling-stone

8:12-13 How is a believer to regard the power of nations?

8:13-15 Notice the two-fold reaction to the holiness of God. He can be a sanctuary or a stumbling stone. God himself is a place of refuge for a people in turmoil (see Ezekiel 11:16). Yet for those who refuse to *fear* God, he will be a stumbling stone, *a rock that makes them fall* (8:14).

In what ways have you experienced God as a *sanctuary* and as a *stumbling stone*?

8:13 describes a God-centered worldview. How do the decisions you are making in life reflect (or not reflect) the worldview presented in this verse?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-8, concentrating on verse 8. Notice the way Peter uses this verse. Why do people stumble over the *stone*? Does this verse help make sense of your experience of God?

8:18-22 Isaiah's First Reflection: The present darkness

¹ For more on Jerusalem's water supply see Isaiah 22:9-14

Read this section. Notice the beginning of what is called a *remnant theology* in Isaiah. Isaiah reflects to himself and, possibly to his small gathering of disciples.

Webb explains:

... [S]omething profoundly important has been happening in the second half of this chapter. There has been a marked sharpening of the demarcation between the faithful and unfaithful within the visible community of God's people, between those who respond to the word of God with obedient faith and those who do not, between the true and the false. This will happen more and more as the book runs its course until it becomes a major strand of its message in the final two sections (51:12—55:13 and chapters 56-66). This should not surprise us, for the Bible never confuses formality with actuality, mere participation in the externals with the heart response which alone can make those externals meaningful. (Webb, p. 67)

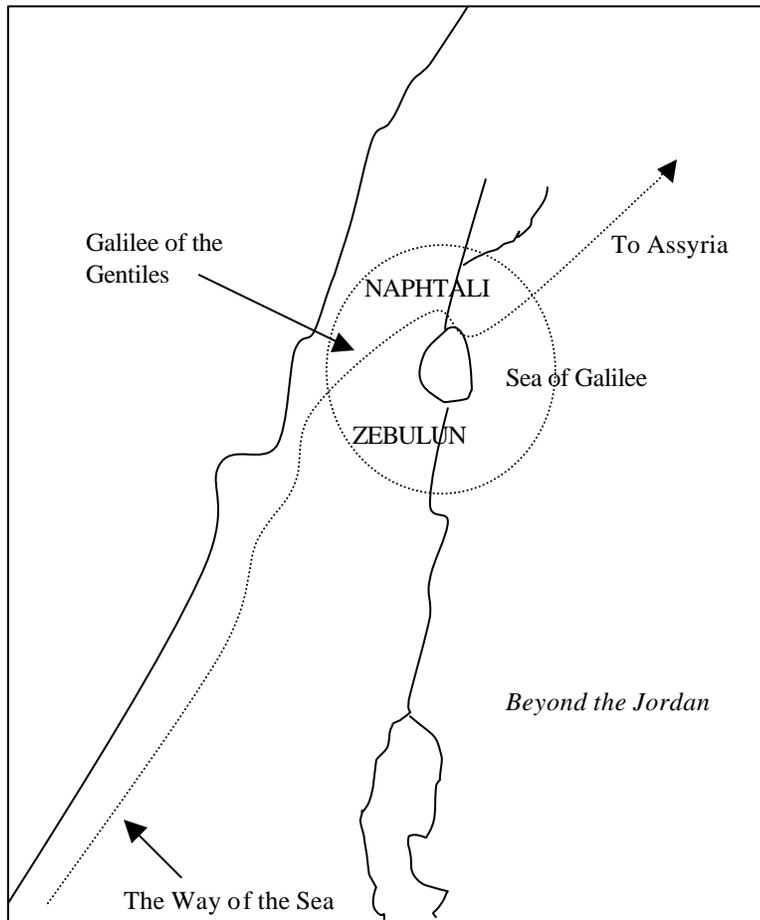
What about the proverbial *fence-sitter* in church life. Over the years many have come and participated in the life of Santa Barbara Community Church and never really committed their lives to Christ. How should the church relate to such a person? Consider the above quotation as you formulate your answer.

What about the unbeliever who attends Santa Barbara Community Church? Many come to our weekly worship services (and to our homegroups) who do not know and trust Christ. How can we create an environment where the unbeliever is both welcomed and challenged? Is the *feel* of SBCC in this regard on target? Are we too *easy* on the unbeliever? Too *hard*? Explain.

8:19-22 Notice the darkness of Judah in these verses. What parallels do you find in our times?

9:1 Isaiah's Second Reflection: The coming dawn

Read this verse with the following map in mind. Find the various places Isaiah mentions.



Now read Matthew 4:12-17. Consider the our map as you read. The Gospel of the Kingdom had its first hearing in the northern regions of Israel! Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Matthew wants his readers to ponder this great truth.

9:2-7 The Fourth Oracle: A child is born!

Read these well-known and awe-inspiring verses. Make a list of the promises given when this *child is born*.

9:6 Before going on in this study, make a list of the titles which are given to this child.

These titles are so grand that no earthly ruler can be in Isaiah's mind. *Wonderful Counselor* means, literally, *a wonder of a counselor*. *Mighty God* means *God of a hero*. *Everlasting Father* is literally *father of eternity*.

Isaiah has in mind nothing less than the fulfillment of the visions introduced in 2:2-4 and 4:2-6 (read these). As Webb points out, *In the final analysis the languages of verse 6 can apply only to one who is God incarnate*. (Webb, p. 69)

9:7 Read this verse carefully. If this were the only verse in your possession, what could you tell someone about the coming kingdom of God?

Look at **9:7** again. What does the believer have to look forward to? Your list should be fairly comprehensive. Write out several sentences describing what this *child* will bring about. Share these with your group.

Read John 1:9 and Luke 1:32-33. Celebrate as a homegroup the first advent of our *Wonderful Counselor*. The endless cycles of the *ferris wheel of life* have come to an end. *Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end*. Praise! Yes!

Study Ten

Stricken by God

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

Sin is a biblical code-word for crud. It refers to our failure to attain perfection. Literally the word sin means, *to miss the mark*. It is not too much to say that sin is the fundamental problem of every thing and every one. Sin affects our environment, our politics, our economics and our social relations. At the top of the list is the truth that sin alienates each one of us from our creator.

But your iniquities have
separated you from your
God; your sins have hidden
his face from you, so that he
will not hear.

Isaiah 59:2

The breach between sinful men and women and their God is profound. God's majestic holiness coupled with his divine righteousness make fellowship with sin-infected creatures impossible. If we find ourselves thinking, *Why can't God simply forgive me the way I forgive my spouse from time to time?* we fail to appreciate either the gravity of our own sinfulness or the purity of God's being. As Carnegie Simpson writes,

[F]orgiveness is to man the plainest of duties; to God it is the profoundest of problems.¹

The book of Isaiah is, in the final analysis, a book about the resolution of this profound problem. The prophet decries the sins of Judah, foretells the Babylonian captivity and then repeatedly speaks of a future glory for the faithful people of God. In the second half of Isaiah, the prophet gives the reader a glimpse of both the goodness and the vastness of God's coming kingdom.

Along the way we meet a character called *the servant* (see study 6, p. 41). This chosen servant may be identified as Isaiah, Eliakim or even with the faithful remnant of Israel.

¹ Cited in John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (IVP: 1986), p. 88.

But as the prophecy of Isaiah develops, the reader is left with the distinct notion that the servant is none other than the Lord's messiah.

Who then is the servant? The Christian, guided by the use made of the Servant Songs in the NT (eg., in Matthew 8:17; 12:17-21; John 12:38; Acts 8:30-35 et al.), is likely to immediately say, "Jesus." Certainly there is not a word of the songs that cannot be applied to him, even when the servant is called "Israel" (49:3); for, as Matthew clearly saw, Jesus was the perfect expression of what God intended Israel to be (cf. Matt 2:15 with Hos 11:1-2). (Grogan, p. 18)

From Isaiah we learn of the broad plans of God for this servant. Through the servant God will bless the whole world!

And now the LORD says. . . *It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*

Isaiah 49:5-6

But how? How can Messiah accomplish such a grand purpose?

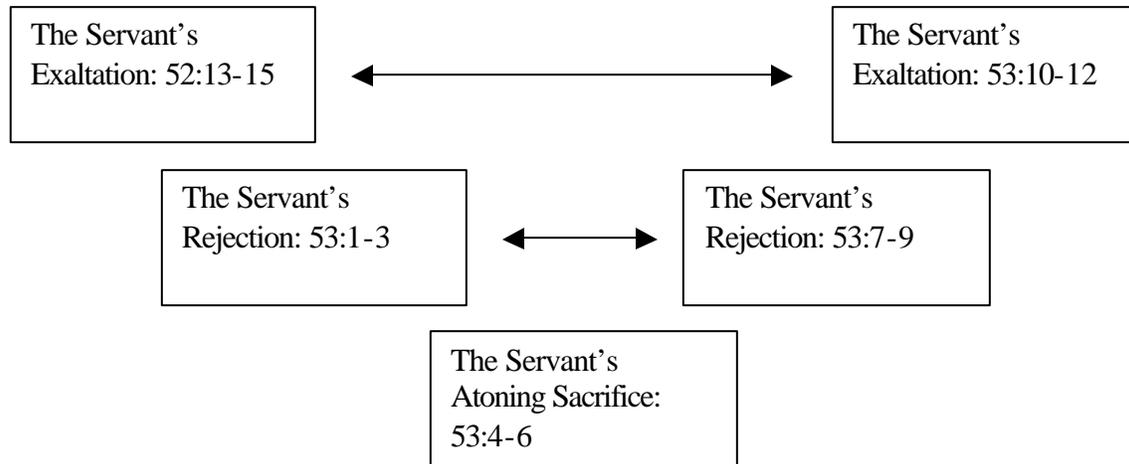
Isaiah 52:13—53:12 give us the answer. Edward J. Young calls this a passage of *unspeakable beauty and force*.¹ Barry Webb exclaims, *These few chapters reveal the riches of God's grace more brilliantly than any other part of the book. They bring us to the very heart of Isaiah's gospel*.²

Before going on in this study read these 15 verses. Read them slowly. Draw some preliminary conclusions as you ponder this rich section of Scripture. See if you can ascertain who is the speaker in the various sections of this passage.

¹ Cited in Young, vol. 3, p. 334.

² Webb, p. 204. *These chapters* refer to Isaiah 51-55. Isaiah 51—52 are pregnant with the expectation of deliverance from Babylon. If time allows, a thorough reading of these five chapters will be spiritually exhilarating. Later Webb speaks of this song in particular (52:11—53:12). *This fourth Song is the most elaborate and poignant of them all. It is the jewel in the crown of Isaiah's theology, the focal point of his vision.* (Webb, p. 209)

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner points out that this poem [song] is *unusually symmetrical*. [It] is in five paragraphs of three verses each. (Grogan, p. 300) Consider the following structure as you read through this beautiful Servant Song one more time.



Notes & Questions:

It is probable that Isaiah 53 sounds very familiar even to those who have never read this book. The reason for this is that the New Testament quotes these verses often. Consider the following verses. What insight do they lend to the meaning of our passage?

- Matthew 8:16-17
- John 12:38
- Acts 8:30-35
- Romans 15:21

We might see the phrase *He was led like a lamb to the slaughter* as the centerpiece of this song. The idea, for the Jewish mind, is the substitutionary sacrifice of an unblemished lamb at Passover (Exodus 12). Find seven statements regarding this sacrifice from the reader's viewpoint (53:1-6) and from God's viewpoint (53:8-12).

Human Viewpoint

1. vs. 4 he took *our* infirmities
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Divine Viewpoint

1. vs. 8 he was stricken for *my* people
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

53:10 is one of the most stunning verses in all the Bible. Here we read *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him* (KJV). The NASB reads, *But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting {Him} to grief. . .* The verb *to please* is the same Hebrew verb used in Isaiah 1:11.

“The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?” says the LORD. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

In our time we don’t sacrifice animals to God on an altar. What some equivalent offerings we might make to God which God could view as meaningless due to the attitude of our hearts?

53:10 speaks of the cross of Christ. What the death in *burnt offerings* couldn’t accomplish (Isaiah 1:11) the cross did accomplish. Notice the force of 53:10. The death of Jesus was not the result of an accident of history, a misunderstanding by the Jews or hostility by the Romans. It was *the Lord* who sent Jesus to the cross. It was the Father who *was pleased* to bruise Jesus.

Compare the following verses with this stunning truth.

- Ephesians 5:2
- Romans 3:23-26
- John 10:17
- Hebrews 2:9

➤ Philippians 2:8-9

We learn best by repetition. Look through this section once again and make a list of the reasons why the Father would be pleased to crush the Son.

52:14 Consider what is being said in this verse. The servant is so disfigured that he doesn't even appear to be a man! But out of this disfigurement comes the sprinkling of *many nations* (53:15). What is in mind is the purification of the nations.

The purpose of the sprinkling was not decontamination, but to obtain ritual purity; hence the one doing the sprinkling must himself be pure and innocent.¹ (Young, vol. 3, p. 338)

52:1 The *arm of the Lord* is synonymous with the *power* of the Lord. One scholar paraphrases 53:1b, *Where has God's power ever been seen—but here?*²

53:4 speaks of the servant being *stricken by God*. The verb used here has the same root as the Hebrew word for leprosy. The similarity is such that a Jewish tradition arose holding that the Messiah would be a leper.

Notice the objective and subjective sides of the servant's suffering in this verse (*stricken by God* and *afflicted*).

Think about these verses. They are highly personal. The Hebrew text literally reads, *Surely, it was our infirmities he took up, our sorrows he bore*. How do they inform your understanding of the cross? What is your emotional response to 53:4-6?

¹ Compare Lev. 14:6-7; 8:11.

² Clines, *Isaiah 53*, p. 15, cited in Motyer, p. 427.

1 Peter 2:21-25 is the New Testament equivalent of Isaiah 52:13—53:12. Read these verses. How do they illuminate Isaiah’s prophecy?

Recall the dual intention for God’s servant (Isaiah 49:6). The stricken servant suffered at the hand of God to fulfill these purposes. In subsequent chapters Isaiah will make this abundantly clear.

*. . . to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I
have kept.*

*I will also make you a light for the
Gentiles, that you may bring my
salvation to the ends of the earth.*

Isaiah 54:10

Isaiah 55:3-5

Pray Isaiah 53:4-6 together as a homegroup. *Surely you took our infirmities. . . and carried our sorrows. . .* Allow these verses to take you into a time of both confession and celebration.

Study Eleven
My Unfailing Love
Isaiah 54

Think of what it must have been like to be a God-fearing Jew in the time of Isaiah. You live in Jerusalem, the City of David. This was the place *the Lord chose* (2 Samuel 7:10-11). Though you know this to be true, you are terrified by the presence of the Assyrians who are encamped a mere 8 miles from your home (See Introduction pp. 4-5). As you listen to a street preacher named Isaiah, you hear him tell all who will listen that the Assyrians will not besiege Jerusalem. . . but the Babylonians will! Hopeless.

But then Isaiah preaches about God's Suffering Servant. Yahweh *crushed* his servant to accomplish the forgiveness of *many* (53:10-11).

. . . [H]e poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.
Isa. 53:12

The punishment of the Servant brought *peace* to God's people (53:5).

Peace (*shalom*) is perhaps the richest word in the Old Testament. It was the word the priests used to bless the people in the name of the LORD, and the word the people themselves used to greet and bless one another, as Jews still do today. 'Shalom' stands for complete wholeness, the sum total of covenant blessing, the full enjoyment of all that God has promised. (Webb, p. 214)

Read

- Isaiah 9:6-7
- Isaiah 26:12

➤ Isaiah 52:7

The people's deep yearning for peace is accomplished, finally, in the Suffering Servant.

What is the response to this stunning reality? God's people are to sing (54:1). Even the hills and mountains will sing as the trees *clap their hands* (55:12). Isaiah 54—55 depict the future, glorious kingdom of God. These chapters paint a picture of what God has in store for his people. Because *he bore the sin of many* (53:12) they will have *great peace* (54:13) and will be *led forth in peace* (55:12).¹

Read Isaiah 54 (aloud if possible). Take your time with these 17 verses. Jot down any thoughts or questions you may have on your first reading. What is your favorite verse in this chapter?

Notes & Questions:

Look over this chapter again. Notice how Isaiah structures his prophecy in the context of prior covenants God made with Israel.²

54:1-3 The Covenant with Abraham. Consider the symbols Isaiah uses: *barren woman, tent and descendants*. Each of these looks back to the covenant God made with Abraham and to Abraham's difficulty in producing children with Sarah (Genesis 11:30; 16:1 etc.).

What is the parallel between Abraham and Sarah's situation and the predicament of those to whom Isaiah spoke? In what ways can 54:1-3 lend comfort to your life?

Read Galatians 4:21-27. How does the apostle Paul see the fulfillment of these verses? How should Paul's interpretation of Isaiah 54 inform our understanding of these latter chapters of Isaiah?

¹ Note that though these are future promises from Isaiah's perspective, they are written in the past tense. *Just as in chapter 53 the atoning death of the Servant is already viewed from the divine perspective as already accomplished, so here in chapters 54 and 55 it is assumed as the basis of a new covenant of peace which will be the fulfillment of all previous covenants.* (Webb, p. 215)

² A covenant in the Old Testament refers to a contract or an agreement whereby a weaker party (or nation) would pledge loyalty to a stronger party in return for protection. God enters into several covenants with his people throughout Old Testament history.

54:4 What do you think Isaiah has in mind with the phrase *You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood*? What was the shame and widowhood of Israel's youth?

54:9-17 look back all the way to the time of Noah (Genesis 6). The covenant God made with Noah was universal as it involved all of humanity (Genesis 9:1-17). The work of the Servant *is like the days of Noah*. . . (54:9). What is the specific parallel which is being highlighted here?

54:8, 10 use the word *lovingkindness* (translated *everlasting kindness* and *everlasting love* in the NIV). The Hebrew word is *hessed*. This is the Old Testament word for grace (see Deut. 7:9).

54:10 What a promise! God's *unfailing love*, his grace, is more unshakable than the mountains. What are the personal implications of this truth in your life? How should this verse affect you?

54:11-17 bring us to the image of the city.

Again, consider what it must have been like to be alive during the time of Isaiah. According to his prophecy, Jerusalem will be razed and its inhabitants will be deported. What, then, will become of this city? How can it be said that Yahweh is faithful to his promises if this city falls?

J. Alec Motyer says the whole of Isaiah could be called, *The book of the city*.¹ Accordingly we read of both the fall and the restoration of Jerusalem. But it is a *new* Jerusalem which is described.

¹ Isaiah loves to speak of the city. He uses the word 31 times. He speaks of
The Davidic city (1:26ff).
The city as an ideal world-center (2:2-4).

To be sure, its scope is 'Judah and Jerusalem' (1:1), but in [Isaiah's] vision the fate of Judah is sealed in the city, and the restoration of the city is the restoration not merely of the people but of the world. (Motyer, p. 16)

As the book of Isaiah develops (and throughout the Scriptures) we find Jerusalem becomes a metaphor for heaven.

Isaiah's book rests on the contrast between the city humankind builds without God, which ends in destruction, and the city of God in all its eternal glory. (Motyer, p. 449)

What are the promises for the people of God in this passage? Interpret the images used. Which do you look forward to the most?

Compare Isaiah 54:11-17 with Revelation 21:9ff. Notice that in John's revelation the bride (the church) *is* the Holy City. How does John's vision compliment Isaiah's? Again, what do you look forward to the most?

Barry Webb's summary of verses 54:11-17 serve as a fitting conclusion to our study.

What a grand vista opens up before us in verses 11-17 - a whole renewed universe! And at its center is the *city* of God, the point where heaven and earth meet and God is present with his people for ever (11-17). This city is the final resting-place of *the servants of the LORD*, the reward and *vindication* for all that they have suffered because of their faithfulness to God (17). Subtly, but quite unmistakably, Isaiah links them to the greatest Servant of all. As he was a

The cleansed city (4:2-6).
The joyful city (12:1-6).
The tumultuous city (24:10).
The universal city (25:1-9).
The strong city (26:1ff.).
The redeemed city (35:10).
The fallen city (47:1).
The raised city (52:1).
The comforted city (66:1ff.). (see Motyer, p. 449)

disciple, taught by the LORD (50:4), so are they (13). They have suffered affliction (11) as he did (53:4). And as he will surely be vindicated (50:8), so will they be (17). The 'servants of the LORD' follow in the footsteps of the perfect Servant. They share his sufferings, and will also share his glory. They are 'his offspring', the fruit of his sacrifice (53:10), and the city of God will be their home for ever. (Webb, p. 216)

Yes!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twelve

A Shoot and a Root

Isaiah 11:1-16

We have spent twelve weeks in Isaiah's prophecy. We have examined his major themes and tasted the delicacies of his teaching. Throughout the 66 chapters of Isaiah's book we find, again and again, the call to repentance, the certainty of judgment and the promise of hope.

Judah's basic problem was Judah. Her kings cowered in fear in the face of foreign adversaries and then led their people accordingly. In turn the peoples' hearts were far from God.

James Newsome writes,

They have allowed their love of material wealth to lead to the suppression of the rights of the weak and the defenseless. Isaiah would have been aware that the coronation of every Davidic king involved the imperative laid upon the monarch to protect the interests of the poor and powerless (see Ps. 72:1-4, 12-14).¹ The failure of the king and those about him to fulfill this charge was loathsome in God's eyes. . . . They allow the pure worship of God to be compromised by their awe of magicians and fortune-tellers and by their worship of false gods (2:6-8). There is drunkenness and debauchery (5:11-12, 22-23), and the sinfulness of the nation has caused even the proper rituals of worship to be repugnant to God (1:10-11). (Newsome pp. 63-64)

Isaiah 11:1-16 looks forward to Messiah's kingdom. It is a magnificent prophetic oracle of the hope of Israel and the world. It follows chapter 10 in which the Assyrian tree is felled by the axe of divine judgment. From 9:8—10:4 Yahweh's judgment is poured out on Israel and Judah.² While Assyria is felled, never to recover, there will be a *shoot from the stump of Jesse*.

¹ Webb makes the interesting observation, *In a sense every king of Judah, from Saul onwards, had been the messiah*. (Webb, p. 75). Why would he say this? The Hebrew word for messiah means *anointed*. Every king was anointed for his office. *The Lord's anointed* is another way of referring to the king (see 1 Samuel 24:10, etc.). The Greek equivalent of *messiah* or *anointed* is *Christ*.

² 10:1-4 shows Israel-Judah oppressing the poor. Our passage shows messiah doing the opposite (11:3-5).

Read Isaiah 11. Read it aloud with your family or with your roommates. Observe Isaiah's poetic genius. How would these words have engendered hope in the people of Israel? How does this passage offer hope to us as New Testament Christians?

Notes and Questions:

Isaiah uses two, seemingly contradictory, images: *a shoot* (11:1ff.) and *a root* (11:10ff.).

The *shoot from the stump of Jesse* is an offspring of the Davidic royal family.¹ How would this text have been understood by its original readers? The passage was, at one level fulfilled in the reign of King Hezekiah (see Introduction). But, of course, the reforms of Hezekiah fell far short of the promises made in 11:1-10.

The earliest Christians, therefore, realized that only in Jesus Christ could the sweeping claims of the prophets find their fulfillment. (Newsome, p. 77)

How has Christ fulfilled these prophecies? Are these words yet to be realized?

11:1 The *stump of Jesse* is an accurate metaphor for the condition of Israel at the time of the birth of Jesus. The Davidic dynasty had not been on the throne for nearly 600 years and the nation was under the yoke of Roman rule.

11:2 speaks of the Spirit of the Lord resting upon this offspring. The new king will receive the Spirit as David did in 1 Samuel 16:13. The Spirit will endow the king with a number of qualities. Make a list of these qualities. How have these been manifest in the person of Jesus?

¹ Jesse was the son of Ruth (a Moabitess) and Boaz. He was from the tribe of Judah and was the father of David (see Ruth 4:17, 22; 1 Chronicles 2:12; Matthew 1:5-6; Luke 3:32).

As Christians we have been given the Spirit and mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; 6:19). In a sense our lives should be characterized by these same qualities. Take some time to examine your life. Are you growing in these areas? Be prepared to share with your homegroup.

11:3a What does it mean that *he will delight in the fear of the Lord*?

Do you *delight in the fear of the Lord*? Compare Isaiah 33:5-6. How can you cultivate a delight in the fear of the Lord?

11:3b-4 is good news. Ever since the fall of Adam (Genesis 3) the world has been subjected to the frustrations of sinfulness. The oppression of various groups of people is often the result.

The word “judgment” has an ominous ring to us; but when used of the poor, it is almost a synonym for salvation. Where there is corruption in the law courts, it is the poor who long for a righteous judge. (Grogan, p. 88)

In what ways is your life characterized by *righteousness* and *justice*? How are the poor and the oppressed of the world affected by the decisions you make in your life? How can you grow in this area?

11:5 *Righteousness* and *faithfulness* will characterize the rule of the new king. In Ancient Near Eastern garb the belt or sash was the garment that stabilized the entire outfit. To “gird your loins” (KJV) was to get ready for work. *The Messiah would be prepared in character for his work of judgment.* (Grogan, p. 88)

11:6-9 Read these verses again. Which of these promises do you look forward to most?

11:10-16 Isaiah employs the words *in that day* over 40 times in his prophecy. The phrase signals the reader that Isaiah is speaking of Judah's ultimate hope (see pp. 24-25). Notice the comprehensive scope of this promise. The Root of Jesse is *for all the peoples, the nations will rally to him*. . .

Read the following sections of Isaiah. Notice how the themes of these passages are fulfilled when Messiah comes.

- Isaiah 2:2-4
- Isaiah 4:2-5
- Isaiah 35:10

Surely Isaiah had in mind something bigger than any of his readers could have comprehended. This tiny nation nestled in the Middle East becomes an image of God's blessing poured out on the whole world. It extends from *Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea*. (11:11). All the nations will be there, worshipping, serving, enjoying and living in the presence of the King of kings.

And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant — these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Isaiah 56:5-6

Maranatha!