

I AM GOD

there is no other...

Isaiah

SANTA BARBARA
COMMUNITY
CHURCH
FALL 2021

Calendar

Week Of	Study Number	Page	Sunday Teaching Topic / Date
9/6	Introduction	13	<i>Overview of Isaiah</i> Sunday, 9/12
9/13	Study #1 - Isaiah 5 <i>A Crop of Stink-Fruit</i>	17	<i>The Call of Isaiah - Isaiah 6</i> Sunday, 9/19
9/20	Study #2 - Isaiah 7-8 <i>The Sign of a Child</i>	21	<i>The Coming of Immanuel - Isaiah 9 & 11</i> Sunday, 9/26
9/27	Study #3 - Isaiah 13-14 <i>Babylon is Doomed!</i>	27	<i>The Self-Sufficient Jerusalem - Isaiah 22</i> Sunday, 10/03
10/4	Study #4 - Isaiah 25 <i>A Hymn of Praise</i>	31	<i>The Triumph of God - Isaiah 27</i> Sunday, 10/10
10/11	Study #5 - Isaiah 30 <i>Trusting in Egypt</i>	35	<i>Hymn of Redemption - Isaiah 35</i> Sunday, 10/17
10/18	Study #6 - Isaiah 36-37 <i>The Prayer of Hezekiah</i>	39	<i>Hezekiah & Babylon - Isaiah 38-39</i> Sunday, 10/24
10/25	Study #7 - Isaiah 40 <i>Comfort My People</i>	45	<i>The Only Savior - Isaiah 43</i> Sunday, 10/31
11/1	Study #8 - Isaiah 42 <i>The Chosen Servant</i>	49	<i>The Suffering Servant - Isaiah 53</i> Sunday, 11/7
11/8	Study #9 - Isaiah 55 <i>A Gracious Invitation</i>	53	<i>True Worship - Isaiah 58</i> Sunday, 11/14
11/15	Study #10 - Isaiah 60 <i>Future Glory</i>	57	<i>The Year of the Lord's Favor - Isaiah 61</i> Sunday, 11/21

Welcome to Homegroups at SB Community Church

Homegroups have three essential elements:

- Bible study
- Prayer
- Community building

How to thrive in a homegroup:

To build community and trust, we all make every effort to **be prepared, be present, and be real.**

- Expect to spend 45 minutes to an hour preparing for your homegroup gathering. You can split this time up into shorter daily segments. Spend time reading and pondering the passage. Consider the questions and mark any that you particularly want to discuss during homegroup. Come ready to contribute and also to listen to others.
- Try to come each week—this honors the rest of your group and contributes to building the trust and connections that will help us all to grow. Arrive on time if possible. Set your phone aside. Notify your leaders if you won't be able to attend.
- We all long for authentic relationships, and homegroups can be a place where we are truly known and loved. Keep information shared by others confidential.
- If you're comfortable speaking out in a group, or talk a lot, regulate yourself. Leave space for others to talk. Ask questions to draw out others.
- Respect others' views, do not argue, do not interrupt. As trust grows, be willing to build relationships and to encourage each other.

The prayer of our pastoral staff is that each homegroup will grow spiritually, personally, and in community life as we study the Bible together. May you engage in and enjoy the riches of God's word each week!

Homegroups Serving in Children's Ministries



What Is Involved?

- Each homegroup is scheduled to provide childcare helpers 2-3 Sundays between September and June.
- This is strictly a helper role where you are assisting children's ministries leaders as they care for and lead the children.
- To mitigate the risk of Covid, our program will take place entirely outside this fall and extra cleaning protocols are in place.
- Since we will be entirely outside, masks will be optional for children & helpers.
- Be ready to be flexible and serve at a service time you don't normally attend!
- Helpers are placed in the following groups: Nursery, Toddlers, Preschool, and Elementary.
- You will be able to choose your service time and age group when you sign up.

Why Do We Do This?

Our philosophy is that everyone who regularly attends is part of our church family and the larger family of God. We believe it is our privilege and responsibility to care for one another, including the very youngest members. As you minister to SBCC's children, we hope that in the process you would:

- Meet people you might not otherwise meet.
- See God in unexpected ways and places.
- Find a role you may enjoy and in which you might like to serve more regularly.
- Enjoy yourself!

Substitutes:

- If you can't serve one of the Sundays your group is scheduled, you are responsible to find a sub for yourself. Use the emailed link you'll receive to choose another Sunday, make a switch, or sign up a friend in your place.

- Carolee Peterson is a great resource if you need help. (carolee@sbcommunity.org).
- All subs need to be someone who attends SBCC regularly and should be in high school or older.
- We really do need all scheduled slots filled every week!

The Day You Serve:

- MOST IMPORTANT! Please check in at the Info Table 20 minutes before the service starts.
- Report to assigned children's area right away. (Don't stop and talk.) Kids are arriving!
- Sick at the last minute? Call or text Donna Sugano at (805) 705-9573 or Carolee at (805) 895-4064.

Exemptions:

- Those who currently work as a regular Youth Leader or Children's Ministry Leader are exempt.
- Exemptions are not given for the important ministries of Worship, Sound/Projection, Info Table, Greeters, etc., since those roles do not require missing all of the adult service.
- We do give exemptions for health reasons or if there are other situations where it wouldn't be appropriate for someone to care for our children (psychiatric, felony, etc.). We ask that if you fall into this category, please let your homegroup leader know so we can exempt you.

CAROLEE PETERSON

Children's Ministries Pastoral Assistant
(805) 895-4064
carolee@sbcommunity.org

A Word about this Study...

We're doing things differently this time around! Usually, the passage we study in our homegroups is the same passage that you'd hear taught on Sunday. But because Isaiah is so long and our time in this book is so brief, we will be covering different passages in our homegroups and Sundays. The passages will, however, be related in theme so our hope is that you will get more out of the Sunday teaching by having done the studies, and that the Sunday sermons will help you understand the midweek sections better too. And this way we'll get to cover twice as much material in this amazing book!

Sources

Motyer	J. Alec Motyer, <u>The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary</u> , IVP, 1993
Motyer	J. Alec Motyer, <u>Isaiah (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)</u> , IVP, 1999
Oswalt	John N. Oswalt, <u>Isaiah (NIV Application Commentary)</u> , Zondervan, 2003
Oswalt	John N. Oswalt, <u>The Book of Isaiah, 1-39 (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)</u> , Eerdmans, 1986
Richter	Sandra L. Richter, <u>Epic of Eden: Isaiah, Seedbed</u> , 2016
Seitz	Christopher R. Seitz, <u>Isaiah 1-39</u> , John Knox Press, 1993
Webb	Barry G. Webb, <u>The Message of Isaiah: The Bible Speaks Today</u> , IVP, 1996
ESV	English Standard Version of the Bible
NIV	New International Version of the Bible

For Motyer, all quotes are from his Tyndale commentary unless specifically stated otherwise. Similarly, for Oswalt, all quotes are from his NIV Application Commentary unless noted otherwise.

Acknowledgements

As a church, we last studied the book of Isaiah twenty years ago in the fall of 2001. The study guide we used in 2001 was written by Reed Jolley and, with his generous permission, we have re-used or revised some of that material for a few of the studies and the Introduction.

Studies 4, 7, and 10 were written by Benji Bruneel. The remaining studies were written by Mike Willbanks. Erin Patterson provided helpful revisions and Carolee Peterson added graphics and layout. The map, timeline, and outline of Isaiah are all from Dr. Sandy Richter's "Epic of Eden: Isaiah", and are used with permission from the author and Seedbed Publishing.

Additional Resources

Should you find yourself wanting more help in understanding the context and background or help interpreting specific passages of Isaiah, we recommend the following resources:

Seedbed Videos

Our own Dr. Sandy Richter, who teaches Old Testament at Westmont and has studied Isaiah intensively, has recorded a series of 10 videos called "The Epic of Eden: Isaiah." These 20-30 minute videos are very helpful in understanding this challenging book! To watch these videos, you'll need to go to seedbed.com and create an account (it's free). There will be a place to identify Santa Barbara Community Church as your church. This will give you access to stream

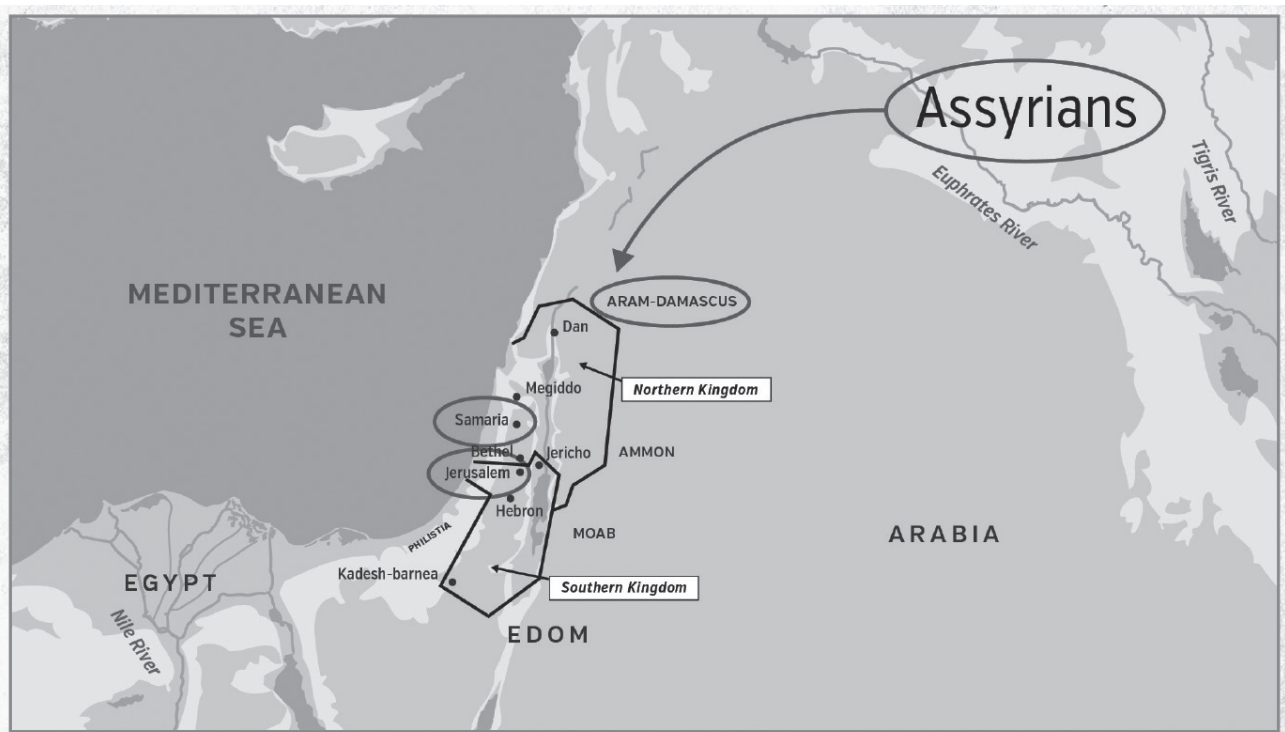
her lectures. Think of these as ‘extra credit’ or further resources to assist you in navigating this material. Certain studies in our study guide will direct you to the videos that correspond with the material being covered that week. Of course, you can go ahead and watch all at your own pace, too, if you prefer!

Commentaries

There are many good commentaries on Isaiah, but for its excellence, thoroughness, accessibility, relative brevity, and price, we recommend J. Alec Motyer’s *Isaiah* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries).

Barry Webb’s *The Message of Isaiah* is briefer and gives helpful insights section by section rather than verse by verse. John Oswalt’s *Isaiah: NIV Application Commentary* is longer and will cost you a bit more but helps the reader make connections between Isaiah’s prophecy and contemporary issues and application.

Map



I AM GOD *there is no other...*



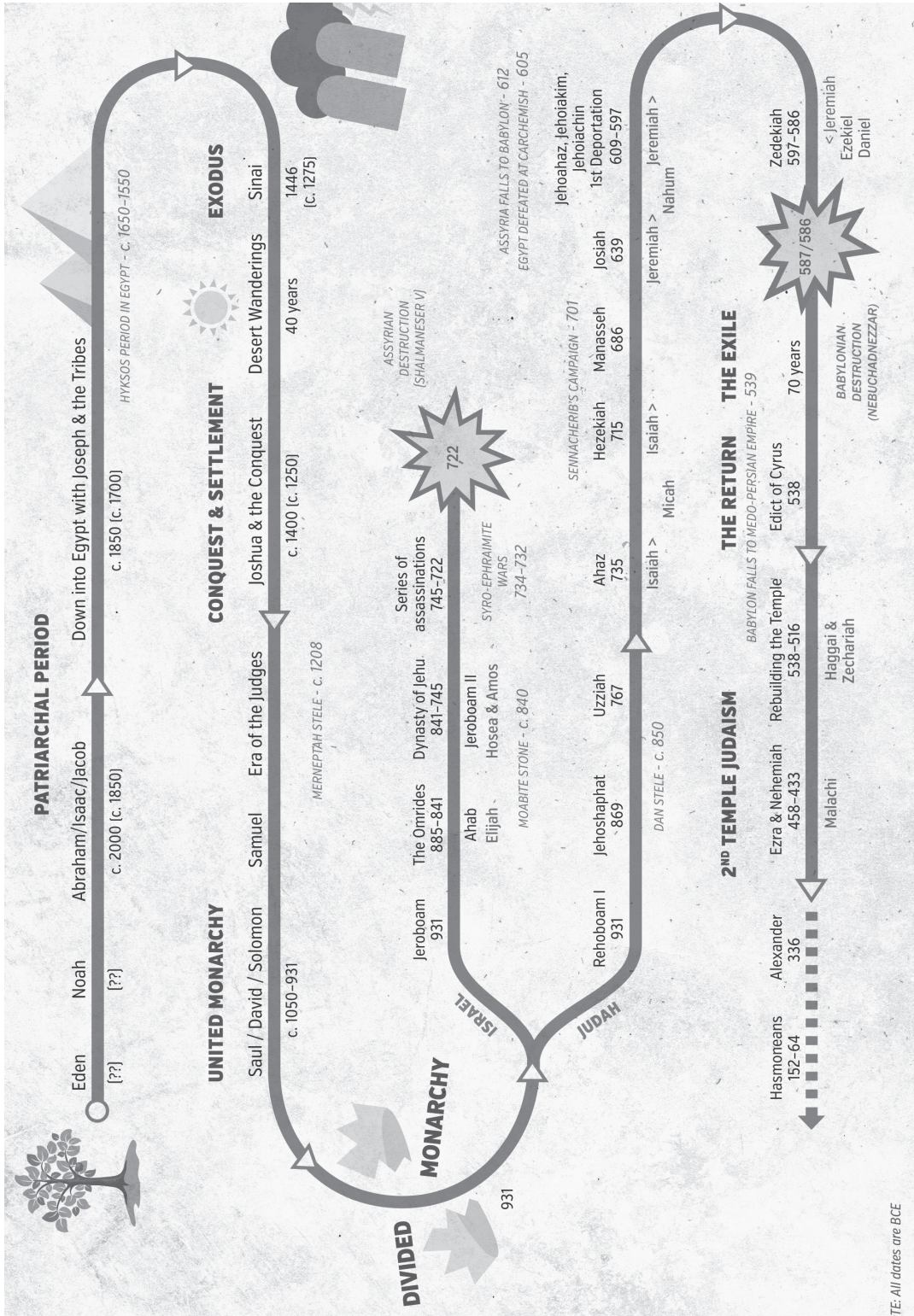
Overview

“Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things, before they spring forth I declare them to you!” 42:9 [NAS]

		ISAIAH 1-39 Former things... Israel's sin and impending judgement						ISAIAH 40-66 Latter things... Israel's hope of restoration after judgement					
1	Introduction of Lawsuit	1-6 Introduction: The problem: Judah's sin	7-12 Ahaz: a faithless King	13-23 Oracles Against the Nations	24-27 The "little Apocalypse"	28-35 A series of Woes against Israel	36-39 Hezekiah: an (almost) faithful king	40-43 Transition: The solution: Yahweh's transformation & restoration of Israel	44-53 The Servant & the Idol or "Who will you serve?"	54-63 The resto- ration of Israel & the Nations	64-66 Summary of All: "Can a land be born in a single day?"		
2-4	Summary Oracles												
5	Poetic reiteration												
6	Denouement: the intro of Isaiah												
7-9:7	The Children-Name-Signs												
9:8-10:4	"His anger does not turn away"												
10:5-34	Judgment against Assyria												
11:1-12:6	Salvation for Israel & a Hymn of Praise												
13-14	Babylon & "The Day of Yahweh"												
15-17	Philistia, Moab, Damascus												
18-20	Egypt												
21-22	Babylon & Judah												
23	Tyre												
24	Cosmological Judgment & Coming Kingdom												
25	Hymn of Praise for New Order												
26	Resurrection after Death												
27	"In that day" Leviathan slain, Jacob exonerated												
28-31	Drunken Ephraim; Sinful Ariel; rebellious children												
32-34	Resolution: A righteous king & Judgment												
35	Hymn of Redemption												
36-37	Hezekiah, Sennacherib & Isaiah												
38	Hezekiah (and Israel's) temporary reprieve												
39	Hezekiah's foolishness: Babylon is Coming												
40-41	The Restoration begins!												
42	The New Servant												
43	The New Thing (the exiles come home!)												
44	The Servant vs. the Idol												
45-48	The Idols and those who serve them humiliated, Yahweh delivers (cf. Cyrus)												
49-53	Yahweh reclaims his people by the work of His Servant												
54	Judgment has its limits; there is a script												
55-56	Come to the waters!												
57-58	The fate of the wicked												
59-62	The fate of the righteous												
63	The Winepress of Yahweh												
64	Israel finally understands, "Our Father"												
65	Yahweh will restore: A new heaven and earth												
66	"I extend peace like a river!"												

"For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind!" 65:17 [NRS]

Timeline



Introduction

Let's Be Honest...

In the fourth century St. Augustine asked his mentor 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. Now by any measure, Augustine was a towering intellect. So we should be honest up front and acknowledge: Isaiah is not easy reading!

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.¹

This should not surprise us, for as we read through this book we are coming 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 11 weeks we will, Lord willing, gain a renewed vision of God, of his sovereignty, of his righteous judgment, of his compassionate love, and of the Messiah he was to send some seven centuries after Isaiah’s ministry.

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.

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.² Isaiah was a southern prophet, staying in and around Jerusalem his entire life. He ministered during the reigns of five kings of Judah, recorded 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

1 Quoted by Seitz, 2

2 After what is known as the United Kingdom during the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, Israel had a civil war and what followed was the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Isaiah lived and prophesied during the end of the divided kingdom and after the annihilation of the northern kingdom when Judah was all that was left of God’s covenant people. See the timeline on 8 where the life of Isaiah fits into the broader landscape of Old Testament history.

Assyria to stunning military conquests. Tiglath-Pileser III¹ 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. Indeed, in the years to come, Judah endured crisis after crisis which called into question her very existence as a people. These included:

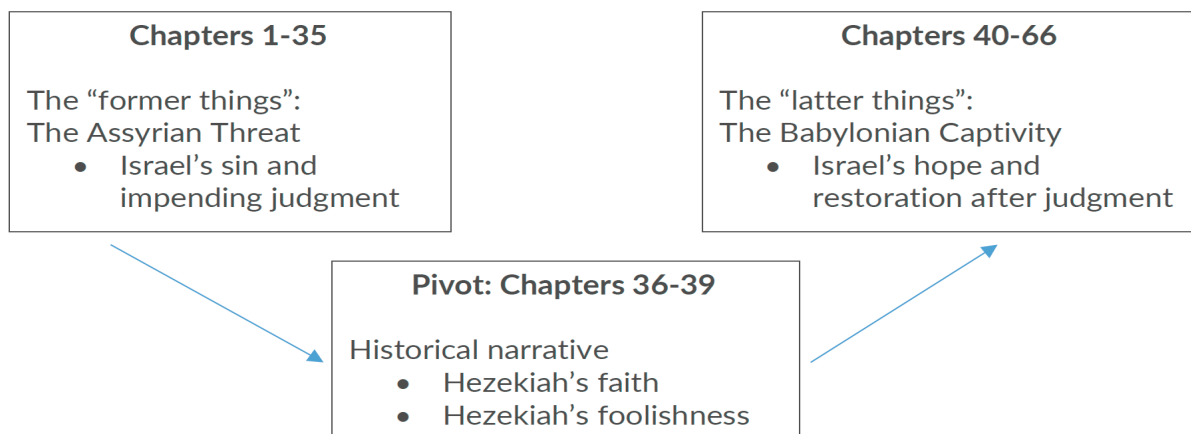
- A regional conflict in 734 BC when Judah was threatened by its neighbors to the north, Israel and Damascus.
- The Assyrian invasion and destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. The implications of Israel's fall for Judah were monumental. The border of the Assyrian empire was now a mere 8 miles north of Jerusalem!
- Most significantly, in 701 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib launched an attack on Judah after King Hezekiah rebelled.

The central section of Isaiah (chapters 36-39) records the only extended narrative material in the book. It records the circumstances that preceded and followed this last crisis.

For more on the historical context of Isaiah's life and ministry, watch Sandy Richter's Seedbed videos #4 & #5 (The Life and Times of Isaiah the Prophet, Parts 1 & 2).

The Structure of Isaiah's Prophecy

Part of the reason we find Isaiah so difficult to understand is that it is not a linear account. Rather, it is a collection of his messages, an anthology of his sermons assembled around themes. A detailed breakdown of how each chapter fits into the various subsections of the whole can be found on p11. But broadly speaking, Isaiah's 66 chapters fall into two parts, with a pivot section in the middle.



¹ Tiglath Pileser ruled from 745-727 BC.

As Barry Webb points out, the overall movement is from the Old Jerusalem of Isaiah's time to the New Jerusalem of the future kingdom of God.¹ The focus shifts from the decimated and disgraced nation of Israel to a New Israel— a redeemed, reborn and enduring People of God who will be gathered from every nation to enjoy God's blessings and live forever in covenant² with him. But while there is a general trajectory through the whole, this movement from Old Jerusalem to New Jerusalem takes place again and again throughout, with the most complete description of life in God's kingdom being saved for the last two chapters of the book.

For a great visual overview that connects Isaiah's structure with his message, go to bibleproject.com and watch their two 8-minute videos on [Isaiah 1-39](#) & [Isaiah 40-66](#).

Isaiah's Message

While Judah was surrounded by military threats from the surrounding nations, her greater troubles came from her own people. 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

Isaiah insists that God will not forever be mocked. If the inhabitants of Judah do not repent, judgment is sure to follow. But just as assuredly, God will remain faithful to his covenant and his purposes to bless the whole earth will not be thwarted. In light of this, Isaiah consistently urges the people to trust in the promises of the sovereign God. From beginning to end, he points to the centrality of faith in the life of the people of God. Alec Motyer summarizes,

Isaiah is the Paul of the Old Testament in his teaching that faith in God's promises is the single most important reality for the Lord's people... He is the 'Hebrews' of the Old Testament in his proposal of faith as the sustaining strength of the Lord's people in life's dark days... He is also the James of the Old Testament in his insistence that 'faith works', proving itself in obedience.³

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).

As we study Isaiah's words together this fall, may we too see Jesus' glory and speak about him!

¹ Webb, 30-33

² "Covenant" is a major theme in the bible. It refers to a relationship based on loyalty to promises. The people of Israel were called into a covenant relationship with God in which God promised to provide and protect them and bring blessing to the whole world through them. Israel in turn promised to trust and obey God alone. It is Israel's failure to live up to this covenant that is behind all of what we read in Isaiah.

³ Motyer, 18

Notes

study one

A Crop of Stink-Fruit

Isaiah 5

Being a prophet was not for the faint of heart. It often involved saying hard things (and doing hard things). Many times, prophets found the people to whom they were sent to be unresponsive, so it took shocking words and actions to get their attention.

1. Think of a time you had to do or say something difficult for the sake of someone you loved. Why did you do it? How did it make you feel? How was it received?

The first five chapters of Isaiah form a sort of preface to the entire book. In this opening section, we hear a repeated indictment of God's people for how they have rebelled against God. For this reason, what emerges is a grim picture of the inevitability of God's judgment, but also glimmers of the anything-but-inevitable grace of God. If you have time, consider starting at the beginning and taking in Isaiah 1-5 together.

Read Isaiah 5. Keep in mind the structure of this chapter as you read.

- The Song of the Vineyard (v1-7)
- The Bitter Crop Produced (v8-30)

2. What are some initial thoughts, impressions or questions that came as you read this chapter?

The Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7)

3. First things first... we can't understand the song until we know who is who.
 - Who is speaking or singing? (Is there more than one singer?)
 - To whom is it sung?
 - Who is "the one I love" (v1)?
 - Who or what is the Vineyard?
 - How would you summarize the message of the song?

Compare this passage to the following:

- Matthew 7:15-20
 - John 15:1-8, 16
 - Galatians 5:22-23
4. Do you think of your life as a fruit-bearing enterprise? What is an example of good fruit in your life? Confess an area of "stink-fruit" (a literal translation of what is often rendered as "bad", "wild", or "worthless" fruit in v2).

In verse 7, Isaiah uses shocking word plays. In Hebrew, the words for "justice" and "bloodshed" are almost identical. The same is true of the words "righteousness" and "outcry". Derek Kidner gives the feel in English with the paraphrase, "He looked for right but, behold, riot!" The point is not only that Israel's behavior is outrageous– the exact opposite of what God had wanted from his people– but that Israel had lost the ability to distinguish between what is good and what is evil.

5. How can we be trained to distinguish between good and evil and live accordingly?

The Bitter Crop and the Judgment of God (5:8-30)

There are two key words in this section, “woe” and “therefore”. The “woes” introduce the sins which Israel has committed. The “therefores” speak of the judgment of God. Note the growing intensity of God’s judgment as this sermon progresses.

6. Summarize or write a paraphrase of these six “woes”. Be ready to share it with your group.

7. Which of these woes directed to ancient Judah seem relevant to 21st century America and our local context in particular? How so?

Motyer writes of verses 18-19,

They form the heart of Isaiah’s description of the crop of “stink-fruit”, the place that people give to morality and God, and how they define moral authority. Isaiah pictures people harnessed to sin, like animals harnessed to carts. Thus they are the voluntary practitioners of a sinful lifestyle but, as such, they are living an animal existence beneath their true dignity as humans and, as victims of sin’s deceit, they are involved in an increasing bondage as the movement from “cords” to “ropes” indicates.¹

1 Motyer, 65

8. How have you seen the deceitfulness, bondage, and dehumanizing nature of sin, either in your own life or in others?

Isaiah 5:20 presents a picture of a moral code which has been reversed.

9. What are some examples of this reversal in our culture?

This is a dark chapter, wouldn't you agree? But all this is designed to create in God's wayward people a change of heart and a longing for rescue. Without a realization of the profound effects of sin, both in us and in the way God's heart is grieved, we will not appreciate the incredible offer of grace and the glimpses of hope that we will repeatedly see in Isaiah's remarkable announcements.

Prayer Guide

- Thank God that we belong to him and that he wants what is best for us. Thank God that he will not allow sin to run amok in our lives.
- Repent for the ways our culture (and perhaps we personally) have made greed a virtue. Ask that God would purify us from covetousness and an addiction to wealth.
- Pray for those among us who "rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink." Ask for freedom from addictions to alcohol and other substances.
- Pray that our church would be a safe place for people to deal with sins of which they are ashamed.
- Pray that God's word and God's character would be our compass for morality.

In preparation for Sunday's teaching on Isaiah 6 and the call of Isaiah, watch Dr. Sandy Richter's *Epic of Eden: Isaiah* "Session 2" video which gives a great overview of the role of the prophet.

study two

The Sign of a Child

Isaiah 7-8

We're about to learn about some children with interesting names. Each of these names, as we'll see, is pregnant with meaning and significance for Isaiah's audience.

1. What does your name mean? Does your surname tell what your ancestors did for work or where they lived? Are you named after anyone in particular? Share with your homegroup if there is any significance to your name(s) ... or make up a good story!

After the introductory section of Isaiah (chapters 1-6), the remainder of the first part of Isaiah (chapters 7-39) are bracketed by the stories of two kings of Judah- one of the worst (Ahaz in chapters 7-12) and one of the best (Hezekiah in chapters 36-39).¹

In order to understand this section, it is crucial that we have an understanding of the geopolitical context of the time of Ahaz.

We strongly recommend watching Sandy Richter's Seedbed videos #4-5. (Or just #5 if you're short on time.)

Before turning to Isaiah 7-8, read 2 Kings 16:1-9 to get an idea of what Ahaz was like.²

2. How did Ahaz earn the reputation of a "bad king"? Where did he go wrong?

1 See the Introduction and timeline at the beginning of the study to get a refresher on the historical context.

2 If you want a fuller picture of the situation in Ahaz's time and his depravity, read all of 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28.

How does a king become so corrupt? His father, grandfather and great-grandfather had been among the best of Israel's kings. Yet this king squandered his family heritage by making compromise after compromise. His reign was disastrous for Judah at every level—militarily, spiritually, economically and diplomatically. By the end of his reign King Ahaz had brought into Judah the most vile of practices: the worship of sun, moon, and stars, witchcraft, necromancy (communicating, in theory, with the dead) and child sacrifice.

Isaiah 7 takes place early in the reign of King Ahaz. 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. 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 in his place. A second option for King Ahaz is to submit to the Assyrians themselves and hope for protection against the Israeli-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.

With this background in mind read Isaiah 7-8. As you read, remember that Ephraim is another name for Israel and keep the following outline in mind as you read:

- i. The dilemma of King Ahaz (7:1-9)
 - ii. The sign of Immanuel (7:10-16)
 - iii. The coming judgment of God (7:17-25)
 - iv. The birth of a child (8:1-10)
 - v. The spiritually blind and the believing remnant (8:11-22)
3. Make some notes as you go with any questions, observations or connections you see.

4. There are three children with unusual names in these chapters. What do their names mean?¹

Shear-Jashub: _____

Immanuel: _____

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz: _____

¹ Most Bibles will include these meanings in footnotes. If yours does not, you can find the meanings using biblegateway.com or simply searching online.

5. As a group, see if you can summarize the predicament that Ahaz is in. What is the Lord's message to Ahaz through Isaiah (in 7:3-9) as he faces this situation?

Isaiah 7:14 is familiar to us as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus. But it seems there was a prior, partial fulfillment as well.¹

6. What did the sign of Immanuel mean to Isaiah's listeners? In light of the present crisis and their enemies, how will they know God is with them? (See verse 16.)

In verses 17-25, God foretells the coming of the vicious Assyrians. They will eliminate the danger faced by Israel and Syria, but will themselves pose a much greater danger to Judah. Syria fell to the Assyrians in 732 BC; Israel lost much of its territory soon after and ultimately fell in 722 BC; and Judah was besieged in 701 BC.

Now we get to the third child with the prophetic nickname Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Look again at 8:1-10.

7. What similarities or connections do you notice between the coming of this child and the one we just looked at (Immanuel)?

John Oswalt writes,

There is good reason to think that Isaiah's son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, who is introduced here, was the first fulfillment of that sign. He represents the negative impact of God's presence that results when both king and people have reckoned without that presence.²

¹ Important to the meaning of this prophecy is the age when a boy could be "expected to know how to refuse the evil and choose the good." This would be around the age of 12-13 when the boy could become a bar mitzvah, a son of righteousness trained in the law.

² Oswalt, 148

Isaiah 8:5-8 compares two rivers. The “gently flowing waters of Shiloah” are a reference to the main vulnerable water supply for Jerusalem, God’s provision for his people. The second river stands for Assyria, which was famous for its location on the mighty Euphrates River.

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 destroyed Israel-Syria, the inhabitants of Judah had been relieved. But here Isaiah says, Don’t be smug. The flood waters will overflow into Judah as well.

8. Notice the two additional references to Immanuel in 8:8, 10. What do they signify? Is God’s presence in these verses good news or bad news?

9. With this in mind, does the sign of Immanuel in 7:14-17 come across as good news or bad news? Explain your answer.

The last section of chapter 8 calls our attention to different ways of reacting to God. There is a remnant that trusts God and another group that is spiritually blind.

The Holy One will provide a holy place (sanctuary), where the one who has focused on God will be at peace. But those who refuse to give God that central place in their lives will find that instead of being a rock of refuge, he will be a stone in the road to stumble over. Here we come again to the dual significance of “God is with us.”¹

1 Oswalt, 151

10. Our crises are not the same as Ahaz's, but all of us have challenges. What does living by faith, waiting for the Lord, or hoping in him look like for you right now?

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of Immanuel and the "rock of stumbling" (see Matthew 1:22-23 and 1 Peter 2:3-8). Just as for Ahaz and the people of Judah, our choice to trust in "God with us" or not will be either our salvation or our downfall.

11. How are we doing at communicating the joy and urgency of trusting in Jesus to one another as well as the unbelievers in our lives?

This Sunday, we'll look at Isaiah 9 and yet another prophecy of a child with a significant name.

Prayer Guide

- Thank God for Jesus, the incarnation of hope and the assurance that we can trust in God's provision and protection.
- Pray that the Lord of hosts will be honored as holy in trusting obedience. (8:13)
- Pray for specific situations or relationships in our lives which require us to wait on the Lord and hope in him.
- Pray for those you know who are spiritually blind to who Jesus is. Ask for faith.

Notes

study three

Babylon is Doomed!

Isaiah 13:1-14:23

Why do people watch movies like Titanic, Outbreak, San Andreas, or Armageddon? Whether it is a storm, a contagion, an earthquake, an asteroid, or some other type of impending disaster, such movies continue to entice people at the box office.

1. What's your favorite "doomsday" movie or book and why?

The previous section of Isaiah (chapters 7-12) is full of soaring notes and visions of glory. We love that kind of material! But the next section of Isaiah, chapters 13-23, is filled with oracles about the nations and many of them have a "pervasive sense of doom and darkness" which remind us that "history is not a tale of everything getting better and better. Rather, divine judgments become starker, problems remain unsolved and the people of God live below their dignity. Yet even so, darkness is streaked by the light of dawn."¹

2. Read Isaiah 13:1-14:23. Notice how the judgment of Babylon bookends and balances the word of hope to Israel in the middle. Jot down a few observations, questions, or connections you notice as you read.

These chapters picture the defeat of Babylon which was more than just an up-and-coming nation during Isaiah's time. Babylon has a prominent place in the grand narrative of the Bible. The first time we encounter it is in Genesis 11 where it becomes a prototype of human pride.

[H]umanity's bid to organize life and create security and stability by its own resources and without reference to God began at Babel. More than any other name, therefore, 'Babylon' typifies humankind's will to be its own saviour.²

1 Motyer, 144

2 Motyer, 113

In 586 BC, Babylon, which by then had become the superpower of the Ancient Near East, brutally crushed the city of Jerusalem and took its people into exile, thus becoming the perpetual symbol of all that stands against God's kingdom. The last time we read of symbolic Babylon in the Bible is Revelation 18 where her final great downfall is described.

3. What clues do you see in the text for why Babylon deserves judgment?

13:9-16 are especially graphic. Again, Motyer is helpful for understanding the violence associated with the Day of the Lord.¹

The more people turn their backs on God, determined to 'be themselves', to be masters of 'their own world', the less human they become, therefore the less humane. When the Day comes, sin will take center stage as the total and savage destroyer it has always been, and those who did not want God will get what they wanted: they will be given up to be themselves.²

Read Romans 1:18-32 and notice the three-fold repetition of "he gave them up/over."

4. If hard-hearted people are often allowed to experience the destructiveness of their sin, how can we guard ourselves from this awful result? Share some thoughts and Scriptures that come to mind.

In 14:3-20, the king of Babylon—once exalted, now humbled—is taunted. This is probably not referring to a specific historical king, but rather represents all the rulers who stood against God's purposes and people.

In 14:12, this king is referred to as "the Day Star, son of the Dawn." In some Bible versions, the Day Star or morning star is translated as "Lucifer", for that is what Lucifer means. Of course, this will raise the question, Who is this talking about? The king of Babylon or some spiritual enemy of God? Some interpreters reject this as a description of Satan, while others think that the king described here is not just a collective symbol of earthly kings but ultimately portrays the king of spiritual "Babylon," Satan himself.

1 The Day of the Lord is a theme that reoccurs throughout the Bible. To explore this further visit: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/day-lord/>

2 Motyer, 115

In any case, look at the boasts made in 14:12-15.

5. How would you summarize the folly of this figure?

Jesus calls himself the “bright morning star” in Revelation 22:16, but he has a very different approach to power. Read Philippians 2:1-11.

6. How does the self-exaltation of the Day Star in Isaiah 14 contrast with the humility of Jesus, the true Day Star and Sun of righteousness (Malachi 4:2)? What does this teach us about the way to greatness in God’s kingdom?
7. What could it look like for you to “have this mind” (Philippians 2:5) versus the mind of “the king of Babylon”? Be specific.

Isaiah, who lived long before the Babylonians ascended to superpower status, is given a glimpse into the future—beyond the Assyrian empire (which was conquered by Babylon) and even beyond the Babylonian empire—to the time when Babylon was dethroned by the Medes (3:17) and Persians in 518 BC. But it seems this partial fulfillment of prophecy points to an even greater fulfillment of God’s ultimate triumph over everything and everyone that stands against God’s benevolent rule.

8. What are some examples of the kinds of power which are still operative in our world that we pray and hope will soon be defeated?

9. How are scenes of judgment like this compatible with God's goodness and redemptive plan? Would God's Word be better news if pictures of destruction were not included?

Prayer Guide

- Read Psalm 25:8-10. Thank God that his instructions are always for our good.
- Repent of ways our pride has asserted "my will be done" rather than "thy will be done."
- Pray for your homegroup's members, that God would "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."
- Pray that the people of SBCC would have the mind of Christ and would emulate his sacrificial, servant-hearted ways with the people in our lives at home, in the workplace, etc.
- Praise God that evil will not have the last word! Pray that God will bring every embodiment of wickedness in us and in our world to an end.

Notes

study four

A Hymn of Praise

Isaiah 25

The Bible sometimes has an unwarranted reputation as dry. In reality, however, the pages of Scripture are replete with not only engaging narrative, but also the full range of human emotions. A careful reader of the Bible will encounter humor, doubt, joy, sorrow, exultation and more along the way. This week, our time in Isaiah brings us to a celebratory place.

1. Tell about a time that you were a part of a joyous celebration. What do you remember about the emotion of that occasion?

Isaiah chapter 25 captures a similarly joyous celebration, albeit for very different reasons than any we may have experienced. Read through this marvelous chapter. As you read, make note of anything that stands out, strikes you anew, or confuses you.

The chapter opens with the intimate and personal affirmation, “Lord, you are my God” (v1).

2. Do you tend to think of God as impersonal and distant, or as a person who is close to you? What circumstances have contributed to your perspective?

Throughout the chapter, Isaiah offers a variety of reasons for praise. The first prompt for his thanksgiving comes in verse 1: “for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.” The phrase “ perfect faithfulness” is comprehensive in nature. Motyer writes, “The idiom of the two nouns together means ‘every imaginable faithfulness, perfect, quintessential faithfulness.’...All through the years of alien domination the Lord’s downtrodden ones experienced an impeccably faithful God”.¹

3. Can you think of a time in your recent experience when you have been reminded of God’s faithful character?

The “things planned long ago” of verse 1 find an immediate example in verse 2: “You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners’ stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.” As contemporary readers we must bear in mind that prophets often spoke of the future with such confidence that they employed language of the past. In other words, what is presented as finished is often still-to-come!

In this case, though it may sound like the prophet is rejoicing over the destruction of a particular city, this is more likely metaphorical language that points to the future. Oswalt helps clarify:

No specific city is intended. This city is all those arrogant bastions of power that have crushed the righteous through all of time. But the prophet says that their power will not avail them in the end. God will triumph, and it has been planned so from the beginning.²

4. With all of that in mind, look back through this chapter and make a list of all of the oppressive forces and realities to which Isaiah draws attention.

1 Motyer, TOTC, 170
2 Oswalt, NICOT, 461

The high point of this chapter comes in verses 6-9, with a celebration of God's future promises.

5. What is promised in these verses? Which verse is the high point?

After reaching such soaring heights in verses 6-9, the gritty picture of verses 10-12 may sound a seemingly discordant note. But closer examination of the chapter and of the whole of Isaiah's prophecy may provide helpful context.

6. How do verses 10-12 serve to fill out the picture of God in this chapter? How does your previous time in Isaiah help to clarify the relationship between God's grace and God's judgment?

Though the language of judgment may seem harsh to us, it is critical to bear in mind that Moab was a long-time enemy and stumbling block the people of God. These descendants of Lot (see Genesis 19:36-38) had, at various times, planned to make war against Israel (see Numbers 22) or enticed the people to idolatry and sinful compromise (see Numbers 25). As those who had aligned themselves against God and his people, Moabites were even excluded from Israelite worship (see Deuteronomy 23:3-6).

7. Now, let's consider our day and time. What are some of the bastions of human sin that continue to crush and oppress God's people and kingdom purposes in the world?

8. Jesus once told his disciples that all of the Law and the Prophets served to point to him (see Luke 24:27). How do the promises of this passage begin to find their fulfillment in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and rule? Spend some time reminding one another of the gospel by sharing these thoughts with your homegroup.

Though, like Isaiah, we continue to navigate a world that is marked by ruthlessness, oppression, pride, and death, those who belong to the family of God by faith in Jesus have great cause for celebration even as we wait for the complete fulfillment of God's great promises. Even in the midst of the waiting and the longing, allow the marvelous words of Isaiah 25 to stir up themes of praise in your heart.

Prayer Guide

- Thank God that he has made himself known as a personal God and for his perfect faithfulness.
- Praise God for being a refuge (v4), a lavish provider (v6), the sovereign Lord (v8), a savior (v9), and a just deliverer (v10-12).
- Name some of the personal sin and sinful structures of our world that you long to see brought down to the ground (v12).
- Confess ways that your own life has fallen short of perfect faithfulness and praise Jesus that his life met that standard.
- Consider closing your homegroup time by reading Revelation 21:1-5 and 21:22-22:5 where the promises of Isaiah 25 find their ultimate fulfillment.

Notes

study five

Trusting in Egypt

Isaiah 30

Over the past year and a half, every country in the world has had to deal with the threat of a global pandemic. As governments and communities have struggled to provide solutions, individual people have had to continually try to assess the level of threat to ourselves and our families. We don't always agree on what the danger is and what it looks like to stay safe! Take a few minutes with your homegroup to think back over the past year and a half and ponder some of the fears you have had, and how you have attempted to manage that fear.

Recall the historical situation that provides the context for Isaiah's writings. By the time of King Hezekiah, the northern kingdom of Israel had been obliterated by the Assyrians. Now they pose an existential threat to Judah as well. In light of the threat from this powerful nation to the north, where will they find protection and security? The answer, it seemed to many, was not God but their powerful neighbor to the south, Egypt.

Consider this outline as you read Isaiah 30:

v1-7	Egypt will be of no help
v8-17	The word of the Lord rejected
v18-26	The word of promise kept
v27-33	Assyria will be no threat

1. Read Isaiah 30. Write down a few initial observations or questions you have.

Verses 6-7 build on the previous five verses by picturing Judah's pack animals loaded with riches, sent off to secure help from the Egyptians. But the mission is flawed from the start. Egypt will not be able to help in the least.

2. The people of Judah felt threatened by the Assyrian military machine. Try to identify in your own life some "Assyrias"—things that cause you to feel anxious or fearful.

3. Similarly, what are your “Egypt,” or places you seek security, comfort, or protection in times of difficulty?

Verses 8-11 describe Isaiah’s audience as “a rebellious people” who are uninterested in hearing difficult words of instruction but instead want to hear “smooth things” (v10).

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Apparently, wanting to hear smooth words that go down easy was not unique to Isaiah’s day.

4. How can we ensure that we do not reject out-of-hand words of instruction that are difficult to hear? What heart attitudes might help you to respond well in such instances?

Verses 12-14 speak to the end result that inevitably comes from not trusting in God’s provision and protection: disaster. But there’s an alternative! Instead of frantically trying to come up with our own solutions to life’s challenges, we are given this prescription: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” (30:15 ESV)

5. Try rewriting this verse in your own words. What does it mean in practice?

John Oswalt reflects on the importance of repentance in the Christian life:

There is no real rest (complete dependence on God) without repentance, and there is no real repentance that does not issue in rest. The fundamental idea behind repentance in the Old Testament is to turn around or to turn back. It is to stop going in the direction you were, namely, one of self-dependence and self-pleasing, and to turn away from that life to one of depending on God and pleasing him. To talk about trusting in the Lord while still keeping hold of one's life and its direction is a contradiction in terms. By the same token, to stop committing certain sins and to clean up one's act merely for the sake of avoiding punishment is not to turn back to God. It is only to turn away from sin and may be just as selfish as any other act.¹

6. Reflect on the quote above. Can you think of a real life scenario that could demonstrate the difference between true repentance and a self-dependent attempt to clean up one's act or save oneself without trusting God?

Verses 16-17 make clear that those who are unwilling to rest in God will find their strength and strategies insufficient to bring about the rest they desire. But verse 18 contains a startling turn: "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"

Again, Oswalt captures the impact of this verse.

In one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture, [God] says that since Israel will not wait for (trust in) him, he will have to wait to be gracious to them. He "rises" from his throne— not to bring final destruction but to show "compassion." Because he is a "God of justice," those "who wait for him" will never be disappointed ... Thus, Isaiah presents the picture of the Creator of the universe patiently standing, waiting for us to discover what fools we have been and to turn back to him to receive the grace and compassion that are in his fatherly heart.²

1 Oswalt, 354

2 Oswalt, 346

7. What other Scriptures reinforce this image of God's heart for wayward people?¹ Share some that come to mind with your homegroup.

Great provision, both spiritual and material, are promised to those who trust God in verses 19-26.

8. How have you seen God's provision of your needs? Where are you still waiting on God for his guidance and provision?

This powerful chapter highlights the call to trust the Lord even in the midst of difficult times. Though Isaiah 30 ends with a vision of the defeat of Judah's feared adversary, not all of our enemies or adversaries will be defeated before our eyes or even in our lifetimes. Yet, the call to resolute trust in the Lord remains firm for the Lord is a God of justice (30:18) and his promises and purposes will stand firm.

Prayer Guide

- Rejoice in the nature and character of God! Thank him that he is patient with us and longs to show us compassion and give us rest.
- Repent for ways we reject God's offer of grace and instead cling to self-reliant strategies for dealing with our challenges.
- Pray for a spiritual sensitivity to God's voice- that the merest whisper of God would be enough to direct us in his will, whether it be to the left or the right (v21).
- Pray especially for Christian leaders, that, like Isaiah, they would be fearless to declare what is right and not only what people want to hear. And pray that the rest of us would be willing to listen to difficult correction and calls to repentance.
- Ask God for the courage to trust him in the midst of situations in which you feel powerless.

1 If you are new to the Bible or can't think of any, try going to www.biblegateway.com or similar bible reference website and search for "merciful" or a similar word.

study six

The Prayer of Hezekiah

Isaiah 36-37

Everyone loves a good story. Jonathan Gottschall writes in his book *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, “We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.”

1. What are a couple of your favorite stories? (Could be from a book, movie, personal experience, family history, etc.)

Most of the book of Isaiah is comprised of Isaiah’s sermons, but these chapters read like a story. The geopolitical theater that has been in the background up to this point moves into the foreground.

All good stories have backstories of their own. If you’re able, watch Sandy Richter’s Seedbed video #6 (“Hezekiah and the ‘Poster Child’ of Biblical Archaeology”). It gives fascinating insight into the historical context of this story.

2. Read Isaiah 36-37. Enjoy the drama! As you read, jot down some impressions, observations, or questions that come to mind.

Most good stories have a seemingly impossible crisis to be overcome, a cast of villains and heroes, and a conclusion that lets us exhale or smile.

3. Summarize this story. What is the crisis? Who are the main characters? How is the crisis resolved? Be ready to try and retell the story in your homegroup this week.

In 36:2 we learn that the Rabshakeh (Assyrian army commander) made his speech “by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field.” Does this ring a bell? If not, let John Oswalt jog your memory:

It is significant that the field commander stands in exactly the same spot where Isaiah stood some 34 or 35 years earlier when he had confronted Ahaz. (7:3) The warnings Isaiah gave over the folly of trusting Assyria instead of God are all coming true with a vengeance. He said that the Assyrians would flood the land right up to its neck (8:7-8) and that very flood tide was now swirling around them. Ahaz had only been faced with his two northern neighbors: Israel and Syria. Hezekiah now faces a much larger and more deadly enemy. Have the lessons of Isaiah’s preaching during the last 35 years made any difference? Will Hezekiah trust God in much more risky circumstances than those where his father did not trust?¹

Look at 36:4-10 again.

4. The Assyrian military official uses at least four arguments to try to convince Judah to surrender. What are they? Is there any truth in what he says?

¹ Oswalt, 400

The propaganda and campaign of intimidation continues in 36:11-20. Notice, in particular, the enemy's promises in verses 16-17. Look up these verses which use similar imagery:

- Deuteronomy 8:7-9
- 1 Kings 4:25
- Micah 4:3-4

There is an important spiritual principle here that we should be aware of. Satan parades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and sin promises us the good life, though in reality the wages of sin is death and Satan is a destroyer.

5. Think of a temptation you faced this week. In what way did it promise to give you what is good?

6. Obedience to God doesn't always yield the kinds of prosperity and success we are drawn to, yet God does promise to reward the faithful. Where have you seen or experienced this to be true?

Chapter 37 gives us a window into how Hezekiah responded to the crisis. First, he runs to God in a panic! But the important thing is not his emotional state, but that he runs to God. To be sure, all other options have been exhausted (see 2 Kings 18:13-16), but he is now ready to trust God.

7. Tell about a time that you turned to God when you were at the end of your rope.

Isaiah assures Hezekiah that the Assyrian threat would amount to nothing. 37:8-9 sets out the reason for the beginning of the Assyrian withdrawal from their siege of Jerusalem: they got word that the king of Egypt was starting to advance. But even as the Assyrians pull back, King Sennacherib vows to come back and finish the job once and for all (37:10-13). In response to this threat, Hezekiah again turns to God in prayer.

Look at Hezekiah's prayer in 37:15-20.

8. Make a list of everything he says about God.

Barry 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.¹

9. Of course, not all prayers need to follow a formula, but how would you compare Hezekiah's prayers to your prayers? What can you learn from this?

Isaiah 37:21-38 reveals God's response to Hezekiah's prayer. Although God has allowed much devastation, note his determination to save a remnant.²

10. How is the crisis resolved? Does this story bring any other Old Testament story of divine deliverance to mind?

¹ Webb, 20

² Note also the connection to Isaiah's son that we met in 7:3 when Isaiah met Ahaz at the same place that the Rabshakeh stood before the terrified people of Judah.

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 Kings. 18:13-14) could achieve, prayer has done.¹

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!

Prayer Guide

- Like Hezekiah did, spend some time remembering who God is. Praise him for his greatness and willingness to hear our prayers!
- Confess our slowness to turn to God in prayer and ask that the Lord would stir us up to be a people of faith and prayer.
- Remember those in crises, be it personal crises or international affairs. Nothing is too small or great to bring before our God.
- Repent for ways we have sought the good life in places other than God and acknowledge God to be the true giver of every good and perfect gift.
- Thank God that he acts powerfully on behalf of his people in real life situations. Praise God for the ultimate defeat of our enemies through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹ Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 282

Notes

study seven

Comfort My People

Isaiah 40

Hygge. Go ahead, say it. It's pronounced HOO-ga and this pillar of Danish life is the coziest trend since Crocs. According to the Amazon entry for the book, *The Little Book of Hygge*, "Loosely translated, Hygge—pronounced Hoo-ga—is a sense of comfort, togetherness, and well-being ...Hygge is the sensation you get when you're cuddled up on a sofa, in cozy socks under a soft throw, during a storm. It's that feeling when you're sharing comfort food and easy conversation with loved ones at a candlelit table. It is the warmth of morning light shining just right on a crisp blue-sky day." And folks go to great lengths to experience hygge.

1. Imagine that you are writing a description of hygge based on your personal preferences. What would you add?

The quest for comfort is not an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. Since the Fall in Genesis 3, humans have navigated a world-not-as-it-should-be in which discomfort is far too often the norm. The subsequent desire for deep comfort is potent within each human heart. Into this situation of longing, Isaiah 40 speaks a resonant word. Read this chapter and, as you do, make a note of anything that stands out to you, challenges you, or leaves you with questions.

As we reach chapter 40, we are now entering a new section of Isaiah that will last through the end of the book in chapter 66. The first section of the book, chapters 1-39, dealt with the "former things" while this second section deals with the "latter things."¹

If you're able, watch Sandy Richter's Seedbed video #7 ("The Message of the Latter Things").

1 Again, if you need a reminder on the structure of Isaiah, see page 11.

Isaiah opens this chapter with the words, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." After chapter upon chapter of difficulty and troubling prophecies, these words come like a drink of cold water on a sweltering day.

2. What are the immediate reasons given in verse 2 for this message of comfort?
3. Now, look through the remainder of the chapter and make a list of additional aspects of the comfort that the Lord provides.
4. The comfort offered in this chapter is more than just personal, but also has social and global implications. Name some specific "rough ground" and "rugged places" of life that you long to see become level and turned into a "plain" (v4). Think both personally and globally.

Though it is helpful to trace out these results and promises, we must keep in our vision that God is the primary subject of this magnificent chapter. Ultimately, the comfort of this chapter is rooted in the character of the God that makes the offer of comfort.

5. What aspects of God's character are celebrated in Isaiah 40?

Isaiah absolutely exults in God's power and character. According to the prophet, all created things pale in comparison to God's might and renown. This includes creation itself (v7-8, 12), the nations (v15-17), idols (v18-20), the heavens (v21-22, 26), and the rulers of the world (v23-24). Isaiah is painting a very impressive picture of God!

6. With that picture of God's greatness in mind, look again at verses 1-2, 9-11, and 29-31. How is the picture of God's power and greatness complemented by these verses?

7. Which resonates more with you, God's greatness or God's tenderness? How do you think that impacts your life of faith?

Significantly, this chapter gets cited in each of the four Gospel accounts as a way to describe the ministry of John the Baptist. (See, for example, Matthew 3:1-3, Mark 1:1-5; and Luke 3:1-6.) Read John 1:19-34 in which John the Baptist cites Isaiah 40 and then points all the focus of the crowds to the life and ministry of Jesus.

8. Turning attention back to Isaiah 40, in what ways does the life and ministry of Jesus fulfill the deepest offers of comfort made in this chapter? Be prepared to share your findings with your homegroup.

9. Isaiah 40:9 pictures a messenger enraptured with the person and work of God. What aspects of what you've considered in this chapter stoke your desire to "lift up your voice with a shout" and declare God's greatness and goodness?

Prayer Guide

- Praise the Lord for being both great and good and consider naming ways you've seen both his greatness and his goodness on display.
- Praise God for the ways that he brings comfort into our lives that are often marked by difficulty.
- Thank God for his provision of Jesus as the one who paid for our sins (v2), reveals the glory of the Lord (v5), and fulfills our deepest needs for comfort.
- Ask God to make clear the opportunities he has given you to lift up your voice with a shout in order to draw attention to his character and his work.

Notes

study eight

The Chosen Servant

Isaiah 42

One of the unique characteristics of Isaiah's prophecies is the several appearances of a character called "the servant."

Who is the servant? Good question! There's been much speculation about this and part of the reason is that there are multiple people referred to as God's servant in Isaiah. Look up the following verses and note who is being referred to as the servant:

- 20:3
- 22:20
- 41:8-10

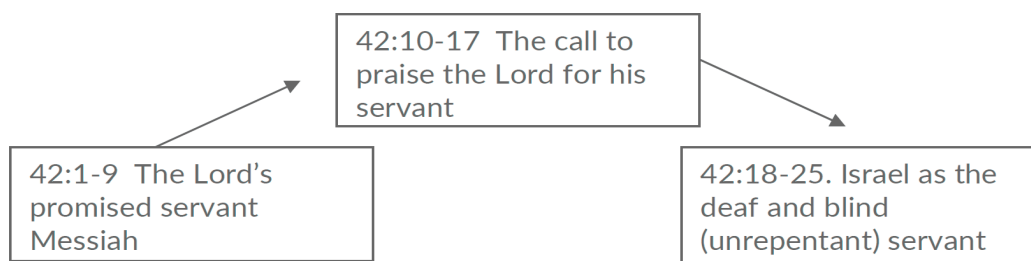
But there are several key portions of Isaiah known as the Servant Songs.

- 42:1-9
- 49:1-13
- 50:4-11
- 52:13- 53:12

For reasons we'll look at, another person seems to be in mind in these passages.

If you're able, watch Sandy Richter's Seedbed video #8 ("The Book of Isaiah and the Servant"). This will help you understand the Servant songs in Isaiah, including our passage Isaiah 42, as well as Isaiah 53 which we will look at on Sunday.

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



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

The average Bible reader may fail to see how this servant song is related to what comes immediately before. But Alec Motyer points out how the keyword 'Look!' or 'Behold!' ties our passage to the preceding passages (41:21-24, 25-29) in which Isaiah exposed the deadness of idols.

41:24 Look at this- Meaningless idols!
41:29 Look at this- Pathetic idolators!

Now, for the third time the same word rings out:

42:1 Look at this- My servant!

Motyer sums up, "The advent of the Lord's servant is unexpected but not inappropriate. He comes as the Lord's answer to the plight of a world without divine revelation."¹

2. Look at 42:1-4 again. Make a list of the things the servant will do and the things he will *not* do.

The key word in these verses is "justice". Oswald clarifies the meaning of this Hebrew concept ("mishpat").

It is much more than mere legality, as "justice" has come to connote in English. Rather it has the idea of "right order ..." This can be further seen in the usage of the related word "judge." Many a child, hearing Samson called a "judge", has suffered from some disorientation. How could this mighty man be called a judge? That is not the way judges act today! Of course, the point of the book of Judges is that when the people have disobeyed and are being beaten down by oppressors, they are not experiencing the kind of right order that God intended in this world. So when in response to repentance and faith God sends a champion who will restore them to the kind of life God intended for them, "mishpat" is restored in the land. So Isaiah is saying that the coming Messiah will do all that is necessary to restore God's right order on the earth.²

1 Motyer, 259

2 Oswald, 472

3. What are some justice issues you care about? What will it look like to have “right order” restored in these areas?

Notice how the New Testament writers use the Servant Songs with regard to Jesus:

Matthew 8:14-17
Matthew 12:15-21
John 12:35-38
Acts 8:26-35

4. How do these verses deepen our understanding of Jesus as the true Servant and what he came to do?

Compare 42:5-7 with Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:1-6.

5. What is behind John’s question and what is the point of Jesus’ answer?

The prediction of the coming Servant and the restoration of justice leads to the call to sing and celebrate in verses 10-17 as all peoples and nations reap the benefits of God’s salvation. These verses include two dramatic and startling images of God.

6. How do these metaphors extend the cause for celebration? What is being won or being given birth to?

God as mighty warrior (v13):

God as woman in labor (v14):

The last section (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!

In Matthew 23:16-24, Jesus berates the Pharisees as typical of this kind of blindness to God and what it means to follow God.

7. How might we take care that we don’t fall under the same judgment?

This blindness to the goodness of God and corresponding disobedience was what led to the Babylonian exile. This captivity was not because God was weak, but because God is just and he will use any means necessary to get his people to the place of turning back to him.

8. Have you ever experienced discipline from God? What did it look like, and what was your response?

As we look at Isaiah 53 on Sunday, we’ll see how the Servant willingly endures the judgment of God as well, not for his own sin, but for ours.

When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. (53:11 NLT)

Amazing grace indeed!

Prayer Guide

- Thank God for sending Jesus, the Servant of God. Praise him for his justice (v1) and his gentleness (v3).
- Pray for the wrongly ordered parts of our lives and our world to be put right.
- Repent for ways that we have strayed from God in our blindness.
- Pray for the nations to see the light of Christ (verse 6). Consider printing a list of our missions partners and praying for them by name along with the people they are seeking to reach.
- Pray Psalm 119:18 for yourself and Ephesians 1:15-19 for each other.
- Pray for SBCC, that we would embody Christ’s teaching in Mark 10:42-45 about servanthood.

study nine

A Gracious Invitation

Isaiah 55

A concert. A road trip. A dinner. Whatever it is, everyone likes to be invited to something. Everyone loves to be included.

1. What's something you are glad you got invited to?

Last week we looked at the tremendous promises of a Servant of the Lord who would come to bring about justice and peace. Amazingly, Isaiah teaches that the Servant would do this by suffering on behalf of those who had turned their backs on God. Of course, even the best gifts need to be opened. Even the greatest invitations need to be accepted.

Read Isaiah 55. As you read, make note of the following things:

2. Write down all of the commands found in these verses.

3. How would you describe the tone of this chapter?

Look at verses 1-2 again. It may seem odd that hungry and thirsty people would have to be exhorted to get a free, delicious meal. But all too often, we try to satisfy our desires for the good life in other costly ways rather than trusting God to supply what we most need and want.

4. How have you seen spiritually hungry and thirsty people (maybe even you!) try to satisfy their deepest longings in unfulfilling, costly ways?

The invitation here to “delight yourselves” is not unique in the Bible. Read the following passages.

- Psalm 37:4
 - Psalm 63:1-7
 - John 10:7-10
5. Clearly, the Christian life is not free from suffering. So how do you understand this offer of delight and abundant life?

Verses 6-7 contain a strong exhortation to “seek the Lord while he may be found.”

Read the following verses.

- Matthew 6:33
- Matthew 7:8-9
- Colossians 3:1-2
- Hebrews 11:6

Motyer notes, “To ‘seek’ is... not to look for something lost but to come with diligence to where the Lord is to be found. It speaks, therefore, of commitment, determination, persistence in spiritual concern and in longing for the Lord’s presence and fellowship.”¹

6. What does seeking the Lord’s presence and fellowship with commitment, determination, and persistence look like for us today? What would have to change in your heart or habits for you to seek the Lord in deeper ways?

Look again at verses 8-9. Though God offers to meet our deepest needs and desires, he does not promise to do so in our time or in ways that may immediately seem best to us. Oswalt writes, “As long as we first insist that everything about God’s ways and plans be made completely intelligible to us before we decide to act on his invitation, we will never act.”² This is the essence of walking by faith – surrendering to God our right to decide what is best for us.

1 Motyer, 345

2 Oswalt, 603

7. Is there a situation in your life in which God's ways don't make sense or feel compelling to you? What might it look like for you to walk in faith in these circumstances?

Verses 10-13 give us assurance that regardless of whether we understand it or not, God's word and God's ways will always ultimately lead to what is good. Notice specifically how verses 12-13 picture the remaking of the world and the reversing of the curse in Genesis 3:18.

Motyer summarizes the picture found in Isaiah 55:

The new exodus community of joy and peace and the exultant, transformed creation will themselves speak in revelation of the nature and character of the Lord: his free invitation, his call to the simplicity of repentance, his guarantee of compassion and forgiveness, the certainty of his ways, the power of his word, the move from alienation to fellowship, from death to life, from the old into the new, from the transient into the eternal, from need to fullness, such is the Lord and such is what his Servant has done.¹

No wonder the Bible so often speaks of responding to God as coming to a party! And no wonder why there is such urgency to respond – the invitation is so good! Jesus picks up on the kind of language and imagery used in Isaiah in his parable of the banquet in Luke 14:15-24. Read this parable and respond to the questions below.

8. What connections do you see between Jesus' and Isaiah's words?

9. What is God inviting you into today and what does it look like to respond to that invitation? How might you pass God's invitation along to others?

¹ Motyer, 347

Prayer Guide

Spend some time reflecting on the fact that God has extended this gracious invitation to each of us in Christ. Praise and thank God for this unmerited access we have to God through Jesus!

- Confess the ways you've sought to find fulfillment and security apart from God.
- Pray for people you know who have never experienced the embrace and forgiveness of God. Ask God to open their hearts to see and respond to his goodness.
- Consider using a song like "And Can it Be?" or "Jesus I Come to Thee" to realign your heart and to respond again to his gracious invitation.

Notes

study ten

True Resolution

Isaiah 60

We all love a good ending, don't we? Whether we've invested a couple of hours or more in a movie, a book, or a podcast, we long to see resolution: for the protagonists to triumph over the forces of evil, for the couple to realize they're perfect for each other, for what was broken to be made whole. On the other hand, when a story ends without that kind of resolution, it can be disorienting and disappointing.

1. What story ended in a way that you found satisfying? Can you think of a story that ended in a less-than-satisfying way?

From the opening pages of Genesis, the Bible has been unfolding a grand, sweeping story that not only includes people of ancient tribes and places, but all of history and all of the cosmos. Isaiah chapter 60 gives a glimpse of the glorious ending of the story of all things.

Read through this magnificent chapter and make a note of anything that stands out to you, resonates with you, or prompts questions for you.

The chapter opens with the imagery of light and darkness in verses 1-3. Light and darkness are powerful metaphors in Scripture, often used to contrast God's ways with human-centered ways.

2. If you can think of other places where Scripture uses the imagery of light and darkness, write down your thoughts here. Don't work too hard, just write down phrases or verses that come quickly to mind. Be prepared to work together with your homegroup to compile a list.

3. Take a few minutes to read Isaiah 59. Knowing that chapter 59 immediately precedes the sweeping promises of chapter 60, how do you imagine that these words would have struck the original recipients of this prophecy?

4. Read Revelation 21:1-22:5. What connections do you see between these verses and Isaiah 60?

5. Again, thinking of Scripture's big picture, how do the promises of Isaiah 60 point to ultimate resolution to the grand story of the Bible?

The prophet makes plain that the ultimate hope of the world is deliverance from sin and its devastating consequences, ushering in an ending that brings true resolution to the world's story.

6. As has been the case throughout the whole book of Isaiah, the main character of Isaiah 60 is the God who delivers his people. Go back through the chapter and make a note of all that is said about who God is and what he does for his people.

Who God Is

What He Does

Walton comments,

“Even though this is the language of lyric, the author makes four inescapable points: God will keep his promises to his people; God’s aim for his people is peace and righteousness; those aims are to be realized through his power alone; the greatest blessing of all is the presence of God”).¹

7. Christians throughout the ages have found that God’s character, work, and promises can take on different dimensions of meaning in various seasons of life. Which aspect of God’s character on display in this chapter is most meaningful to you right now?
8. As we reach the end of our time in Isaiah, think back over the past few months in this astounding book and do some self reflection. Some questions you might consider: What themes have resonated with you most deeply? How have you gained greater clarity on the meaning and fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies? Where have you been challenged to greater faithfulness in your life as a disciple of Jesus? Who do you know that might need to hear some of the good news you’ve discovered in Isaiah?

Prayer Guide

- Praise God for being true to his promises.
- Praise God as the only one capable of bringing true resolution and a satisfying ending to the story of the world.
- Thank God for his character and take time to name specific aspects of his character for which you are grateful.
- Confess ways in which you have lived for lesser stories than the grand story of God’s cosmic redemptive work.
- Ask God to make your life a compelling witness to his grace and beauty like the picture of Zion given in Isaiah 60.

¹ Walton, NICOT, 556.

Notes