



# ISAIAH

STUDY + REFLECTION GUIDE



# ISAIAH

AN INTRODUCTION

## **In the year 2014, Coram Deo Church will study the book of Isaiah together.**

It's one of the longest and most important books in the entire Bible.

It's quoted or alluded to more than 85 times in the New Testament.

It's unparalleled in theological breadth, spanning from creation to the new heavens and earth.

It's one of the most comprehensive prophetic looks at the Lord Jesus.

If we want to understand the Bible, we need to understand the Old Testament prophets – and especially the prophet Isaiah. This short essay exists to introduce readers to the book of Isaiah and equip them to read it with insight and confidence.

### **PROPHECY: UNDERSTANDING THE GENRE**

When we hear the word “prophecy,” all kinds of strange connotations come to mind. Some of us immediately think of crazy-eyed modern “prophets” predicting the end of the world. Others – especially those from charismatic/Pentecostal traditions – think of people receiving a “prophetic word” or “walking in a prophetic anointing.” What is a prophet, anyway? Did the Old Testament prophets share anything in common with these modern manifestations?

Four contrasts will help us understand the role of the biblical prophets more clearly.

#### ***Not Foretelling, but Forth-Telling***

Many people assume that the job of a prophet was to *foretell* or predict the future. But that's only a small part of the prophet's role. Dr. Richard Pratt explains:

The Greek word *prophetes* from which we derive our English word “prophet” is a rather flexible term... On the one hand it may mean to “speak beforehand” or “predict,” and on the other hand, it may simply mean to “speak forth” or to “proclaim” something that is not even a prediction at all. A prophet then can be someone who predicts or simply someone who proclaims. In reality, Old Testament prophets did both. They spoke of the future, but they also spoke boldly about their own days. (Pratt, *He Gave Us Prophets: A Prophet's Job*, <http://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/hgp>, accessed 31 December 2013).



We should understand the biblical prophets, then, not as “foretellers,” but as forth-tellers. Their job was to speak forth the word of God.

### **Not Soothsayers, but Covenant Servants**

Another common term the Bible uses to designate the prophets is the Hebrew word *'ebed*, which means **servant**. "This title is important for prophets, because it often bore the connotations of an official or an officer, especially an officer of a royal court... [Prophets] served as representatives of the heavenly throne. They were official servants who spoke in the name of the Great King" (Pratt, *He Gave Us Prophets: A Prophet's Job*, <http://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/hgp>, accessed 31 December 2013).

One way the prophets serve God is to represent him as *prosecuting attorneys*. God, the Great King over heaven and earth, has made a covenant with his people. He has pledged himself to them as their God, and he expects them to be faithful to him as His people. When they are unfaithful – when they disobey and disregard their covenant relationship with him – he "takes them to court." He sends prophets to present evidence of the people's sin and call them back to repentance and fidelity.

Another way the prophets serve God is by serving as *a means of checks and balances*. Throughout most of the Old Testament, God's people were ruled by kings. And those kings were sinful human beings. They often abused power, served idols, and acted corruptly. God sends prophets to confront the kings' disobedience, to call them to repentance, and to warn them and their followers of God's impending judgment on their sin.

### **Not Certainties, but Contingencies**

Many people wrongly assume that the biblical prophets spoke in certainties. Behind this view is a misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 18:22: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously." Does this mean that everything a prophet says is certain to occur?

Not at all. Rather, biblical prophecy always involves contingencies. Remember, the prophets are God's **covenant servants**. They don't speak God's words into empty space; they speak **to** God's covenant people, with the goal of arousing a response in those people! When they warn of God's judgment, their goal is to elicit a response of repentance. When they promise blessing, their goal is to secure continued obedience. Thus, almost every prophecy in the Bible is **contingent** upon the response of the people.

The clearest example of the contingency of prophecy is the short little book of Jonah. Jonah is sent to Nineveh with this simple message: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). No stated conditions, no exceptions – just a clear word of impending judgment. Yet the people of Nineveh repent. "When God saw



what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it" (Jonah 3:10). But why? Is God going back on his word? He *said* he was going to overthrow the city! Why would he not do so? Answer: *because God's warning to Nineveh contained an implied condition*. Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown – [unless the people repent and turn to God]. How do we know this condition exists? Because Jonah himself knew it. In Jonah 4:1-2, we read: "[Jonah] was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; *for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*" Jonah understood that his entire mission was conditional. God's message of judgment was not a certainty, but a threat: if the people repented, God would graciously spare them. That's why he sent Jonah in the first place.

### **Not Mechanical Dictation, but Organic Inspiration**

"When it comes to Old Testament prophets, we frequently treat them as if they were passive instruments of revelation, mere mechanical mouthpieces of God," observes Dr. Richard Pratt. "[But in reality], when God inspired the writing of Scripture he used the personalities and the thoughts and the outlooks of human writers... If we hope to understand Old Testament prophecy, we must reject a mechanical understanding of their experience and begin to look for the ways God inspired them as full, thinking human beings" (Pratt, *He Gave Us Prophets: Essential Hermeneutical Perspectives*, <http://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/hgp>, accessed 1 January 2014). God didn't take over Isaiah's lips and force them to move, or catch him up in a trance that bypassed his natural faculties. Rather, the prophet "was so wrought upon and superintended by God that the human words which expressed the message (words natural to that man at that time with that personality) were also the very words of God himself" (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 31).

Now that we've understood the dynamics of prophecy in general, let's gain a better grasp of Isaiah's work in particular. When and where was the book of Isaiah written? What was Isaiah's message to the people of his day? And how does his body of work apply to us today?

## **DATE AND CONTEXT OF WRITING**

*The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*  
(Isaiah 1:1)



The kings mentioned in Isaiah 1:1 ruled over Judah from 740 BC to 686 BC. Think about the historical events in our own culture within the past 60 years: we've gone from the moon landing to the International Space Station, from Vietnam to drone warfare, from Jim

Crow laws to an African-American president. Likewise, Isaiah's ministry took place in a rapidly changing cultural environment.

So we should expect that:

1. The book of Isaiah is **diverse**. It proclaims God's word into many different situations and events.
2. The book of Isaiah is **compiled**. Isaiah didn't sit down and write all 66 chapters in one sitting. Rather, the book is a compilation of oracles, visions, and writings gathered throughout Isaiah's ministry.
3. The book of Isaiah has inherent **tension**. In some chapters Isaiah is pronouncing woe and judgment. In other chapters he is proclaiming comfort and peace. Like us, the people of Judah needed different challenges at different times.

### ***The Historical Situation***

From the time of Abraham (circa 2000 BC) until the days of Saul, Israel had no human king. Saul was anointed as king around 1025 BC, and David succeeded him on the throne around 1000 BC. Biblical scholars refer to the period under Saul, David, and Solomon as the "United Monarchy." The twelve tribes of Israel were aligned together under one king.

Then, under Solomon's son Rehoboam, the unity of the 12 tribes was fractured. The northern tribes broke away and formed their own nation around 930 BC (see 1 Kings 12). God's people were divided into two kingdoms: **Israel** in the north and **Judah** in the south. Hence, scholars refer to this period as the "Divided Kingdom." This is the period in which Isaiah's ministry takes place.

Isaiah serves as a prophet to Judah and Jerusalem – the southern kingdom. His ministry began in 739 BC – "the year that King Uzziah died" (Isaiah 6:1). At this time, Assyria was growing into a massive world power, threatening the security of both Israel and Judah. Three major historical events involving Assyria form the background of Isaiah's prophetic ministry.

#### *The Syrian-Israelite Coalition (Isaiah 7-12)*

Around 734 BC – five years into Isaiah's ministry – Syria and Northern Israel formed a coalition to resist the Assyrian empire. They tried to pressure Ahaz, king of Judah, into joining their ranks. But Ahaz resisted and turned to Assyria for help – instead of turning to God. God's words to Ahaz and to Judah during this period of time are recorded in chapters 7-12 of Isaiah.

#### *The Invasion of Sennacherib (Isaiah 29-39)*

As a result of the Syrian-Israelite coalition, the king of Assyria went to war against Israel and destroyed its capital city, Samaria, in 722 BC (see 2 Kings 17). The Assyrians took



many Israelites into exile, effectively destroying the northern kingdom. You can imagine the shock and fear for the southern kingdom, Judah, as they watched their northern brethren decimated. A few years later, in 701 BC, the same Assyrian army marched against Jerusalem and sought to destroy it. Meanwhile, Egypt, the strong power to the south, was offering protection to Judah in exchange for loyalty and money. In Isaiah 29-35, God warns his people against “going down to Egypt” instead of trusting in the Lord for deliverance. And in Isaiah 36-39, God sends a word to King Hezekiah in the midst of the looming invasion. Hezekiah trusted in God during this crisis, and God accomplished a miraculous deliverance of his people (see 2 Kings 19).

#### *The (Coming) Babylonian Exile (Isaiah 40-55)*

“In many ways the prophet Isaiah forms a hinge between the period of Assyrian judgment and Babylonian judgment,” observes Dr. Richard Pratt (*He Gave Us Prophets: Historical Analysis of Prophecy*, <http://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/hgp>, accessed 31 December 2013). After the Sennacherib invasion, Hezekiah sought an alliance with a new up-and-coming kingdom – Babylon – in order to protect Judah from further Assyrian attacks (Isaiah 39:1-4). In response, Isaiah delivered this word to the king:

“Hear the word of the Lord Almighty: The time will surely come when everything in your palace and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon” (Isaiah 39:5).

This prophecy serves as a crucial hinge in the book of Isaiah. The second half of the book – chapters 40-66 – concerns Judah’s exile in Babylon, which would not begin until 586 BC. Because Isaiah is writing 100 years before these events, many so-called “critical scholars” contend that these chapters must have been written later and then added retroactively into Isaiah’s book. But those who believe in the sovereignty of God and the possibility of predictive revelation have no reason to doubt Isaiah’s authorship of these chapters.

So the first half of Isaiah is set mainly in Jerusalem during Isaiah’s own day, while the latter half of the book focuses on the future events of the Babylonian exile.





# THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book of Isaiah divides into two major sections: chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66. The differences between these two major sections are significant.

## Chapters 1-39

- Style: topical prose, more like a set of sermon transcripts; probably originally spoken material that was written down
- Emphasis: God's majesty
- Key Themes: confrontation of Judah's sins; the faithful remnant; God's judgment of nations in history
- Notable Features: concrete historical details; concern for Isaiah's immediate surroundings (Jerusalem/Judah/Assyria)

## Chapters 40-66

- Style: flowing, hymnic, more like a well crafted poem; probably intended as a literary composition from the beginning
- Emphasis: God's universal dominion and infinitude
- Key Themes: the Servant; redemption and deliverance; new heavens and new earth
- Notable Features: No historical setting is provided; Isaiah himself is not specifically named

Because the differences between these two sections are so pronounced, critical Bible scholars in the late nineteenth century began arguing that the book was the product of two different authors. Soon the premise grew to three authors, and eventually a "school" of disciples who all wrote various sections. This multiple-author perspective was an outgrowth of Enlightenment rationalism, and it's pretty much run its course in the world of biblical studies. Current scholars are returning to the much more humble approach of taking the book as it comes to us rather than proposing speculative hypotheses about its origins. But as you study Isaiah, you'll occasionally find authors referring to the latter parts of the book as "Second Isaiah" and "Third Isaiah." While the most coherent and compelling arguments favor single authorship, the vital issue in all of this is that the ultimate Author of Scripture – including the book of Isaiah – is God. This is borne out in the way the apostles understood and cited Isaiah (see, for example, Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 12:38-41; Romans 9:27-29).

For our purposes at Coram Deo, we'll divide the book into four major parts:

- The Holy Judge (chapters 1-12)
- The Sovereign King (chapters 13-39)
- The Suffering Servant (chapters 40-55)
- The Final Conqueror (chapters 56-66)



If you're interested in understanding the more minute divisions and sub-sections within the book, consult the ESV Study Bible or the resources listed on page 11.

## KEY THEOLOGICAL FEATURES

### ***The Holy One of Israel***

When Isaiah was called to ministry, he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up... Above him stood the seraphim... one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!'" (Isaiah 6:1-3). This encounter with God marked Isaiah for the rest of his life, and led him to use a distinct expression: "The Holy One of Israel." This phrase appears 25 times in the book of Isaiah and only 7 times in the remainder of the Old Testament. It is Isaiah's favorite designation for God. It combines transcendence and immanence in a peculiar fashion: "the God who is transcendent in holiness has brought himself into close relationship with a specified people" (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 18). The simple title "The Holy One of Israel" provides fodder for fruitful reflection, meditation, worship, and prayer.

### ***The Messianic Hope***

The promise of a coming Messiah is a dominant theme throughout the book of Isaiah. In fact, Isaiah is one of the most important books in the Bible for our Christology (our understanding of Jesus' nature and work). Careful readers will be amazed at how precise Isaiah's descriptions of the Messiah are. He is a King born in David's line (11:1), yet he is also the root from which the whole family of David springs (11:10). He is a humble human being who experiences rejection and suffering (53:2-3), but he is also the 'arm of the Lord' (52:10, 53:1). He is a King who rules in righteousness (9:7, 11:5), but also a Redeemer who provides righteousness to sinful people (51:4-8; 61:10). He is the Savior of Israel (49:1-5) who also provides salvation for the Gentiles (49:6-7). Christians throughout history have treasured the book of Isaiah because it gives such a clear picture of the Lord Jesus.

### ***The Remnant***

The book of Isaiah begins with strong words of judgment against God's own people: "Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me... They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him" (Isaiah 1:1-3). This raises an immediate tension: if God's own people are guilty of sin and rebellion, doesn't that threaten his promises of grace and redemption? How can he judge the sin of his people and still preserve his purposes through them? Isaiah deals with this tension through the theme of *the Remnant*.



Old Testament scholars Ray Dillard and Tremper Longman explain this concept: “The remnant is that group of people who survive some catastrophe brought about by God, ordinarily in judgment of sin. This group becomes the nucleus for the continuation of humankind or the people of God. This surviving remnant inherits the promises of God afresh... those who survive divine judgment become a purged, purified, and faithful remnant, the nucleus of a renewed and chosen people” (Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 277-278).

In our own day, we are called to be the remnant. We live in a country where millions of people profess faith in Jesus Christ, yet live in rebellion and unfaithfulness. Through repentance, faith, and hope in our Messiah, we exist as “a purged, purified, and faithful remnant” in the midst of a sinful nation (Isaiah 1:4).

### **God as the Lord of History**

Isaiah exalts God’s sovereignty over the particular events of history – including the rise and fall of kings (39:5-7, 45:1), the success and failure of military strikes (37), and the demise of entire nations (15:1-9). Because God rules history, we can trust him in the particular details of everyday life, and we can hope confidently in him even when things seem bleak around us (37:14-38). God’s power to move history stands in stark contrast to idols, who have no power to save those who trust in them (44:9-20).

### **The Motif of the City**

Cities in the Bible are more than political geography. They symbolically represent entire peoples and entire ways of life. The cities of Jerusalem and Babylon are especially important, representing the “city of God” and the “city of the world” – and Isaiah leverages these symbols throughout his book. J. Alec Motyer explains:

“The Isaianic literature could be accurately described as ‘the book of the city’... to be sure, its scope is Judah and Jerusalem, but in its 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... The world produces a global society structured without God... [In contrast,] there is created the ‘city of God,’ a new world order constructed by God on his plan, with himself at the centre and from where he reigns over a universe of righteousness and peace” (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 16-17).

### **The Motif of the Servant**

Isaiah 40-66 return repeatedly to the theme of the Servant (see especially 41:8-9; 42:1, 53:11). At first this Servant is identified as the people of Israel: “You, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen” (Isaiah 41:8). But as the book goes on, Israel’s failure as God’s servant becomes clear: “Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as My messenger whom I send?” (Isaiah 42:19). Eventually it becomes clear that Israel herself needs the redeeming work of the Servant:



“And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him” (Isaiah 49:5). Finally, toward the end of the book, the Servant stands forth as an individual who will atone for the sins of many: “By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11). Dillard and Longman observe: “Christian readers can understand how the New Testament writers were following the lead of Isaiah himself. In their eyes, Jesus had become a remnant of one. He was the embodiment of faithful Israel, the truly righteous and suffering servant... He becomes the focus of the hopes for the continued existence of the people of God in a new kingdom, a new Israel of Jew and Gentile alike” (Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 279).

## READING ISAIAH AS GOD’S WORD TO US

Most of us agree that the Bible is God’s Word for us, today. But it doesn’t always *feel* like it – especially when we read the Old Testament. We have a much easier time seeing Romans or the Gospel of John as “for us;” the OT feels like another world. So, how are we to hear God’s voice to us through Isaiah? How do we read this book as living truth, not ancient history? How does Isaiah speak to our lives today rather than just to the Israelites living 2700 years ago?

First, we must *honor the original audience*. We must acknowledge that this is God’s word to a particular people living at a particular time, facing a particular set of circumstances. So we start by asking: what was God saying to the original audience? In technical terms, this is called *grammatico-historical exegesis* – studying the passage’s original grammar and history, so that we understand the text in its original context. Second, we must “*bridge the gap*” of cultural distance. We do this by asking three questions:

*Question 1: What’s the same?*

- **Same God.** God is the same “yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).
- **Same world.** Despite the changes in technology, culture, and global politics, we still live in the same world as the people in Isaiah’s day – a world created by God, marred by sin, and longing for renewal (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13).
- **Same kinds of people.** People are people. We struggle with the same questions, wrestle with the same doubts, and chase the same idols as the people in Isaiah’s day.

*Question 2: What’s different?*

- **Different era in redemptive history.** The people in Isaiah’s day looked forward to the promised Messiah. His person and work were still in the future, seen through shadows and symbols. But we stand on the other side of the cross, looking back “through” the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and able to see more clearly how he fulfills all of God’s promises.



- **Different specific circumstances.** We don't face the threat of Assyrian invasion (Isaiah 36). We're not tempted to forge an alliance with Egypt (Isaiah 31). And most of us don't carve idols of wood to bow down to (Isaiah 44). But we do face threats; we do run to false Saviors; and we do chase after idols. The key to reading a book like Isaiah is to identify the general principles – applicable to every time and place – that lie underneath the specific circumstances.

*Question 3: So what?*

- What do we learn about the nature of God that provides redemption?
- What do we learn about the nature of humans that requires redemption?
- What do we learn about the person and work of Jesus?

Jesus is the center of the Bible and the focal point of all prophecy. Understanding this helps us comprehend the “trajectory” of prophecy and make appropriate adaptations for our day:

“Originally, Old Testament prophets set a trajectory of hope, a trajectory of expectation. A future time of great judgment and blessing was coming. The New Testament takes that trajectory and traces it into the future and finds fulfillment in the first coming of Christ, in his kingdom today and in the end of the world when Christ returns in glory... As followers of Christ, we must also learn how to take the expectations of Old Testament prophecy and apply them to the first coming of Christ, the continuation of his kingdom, and the second coming of Christ” (Pratt, *He Gave Us Prophets: Essential Hermeneutical Perspectives*, <http://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/hgp>, accessed 3 January 2014).

“Isaiah’s book needs only simple adjustments to fit into our time-line. We stand... looking back to the work of the Servant (now fulfilled in the person, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus) and looking forward to the coming of the Anointed Conqueror. The only difference is that while we know the King already reigns, his kingship is incognito to the world at large, and we await his coming who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 33).

## CONCLUSION: HOW SHOULD I READ ISAIAH?

- **Read meditatively.** Slow down. Savor. See the images. Hear the critiques. Fear the warnings. Embrace the encouragement. Receive the promises. Don't just read for comprehension; read for transformation.
- **Read resourcefully.** You're going to come across things you don't understand: geographical references like “Over Nebo and over Medeba” (Isaiah 15:2), political references like “Pekah the son of Remaliah” (Isaiah 7:1), and theological references like “the branch of the Lord” (Isaiah 4:2, 11:1).



When you find something unfamiliar: look it up. Seek to learn, not just to read. Use a study bible like The ESV Study Bible, purchase one of the commentaries we recommend (see below), or consult the inter-webs.

- **Read Christo-centrally.** All the Messianic threads Isaiah is weaving, all the redemptive images he's displaying, all the promises he's offering... they all find their fulfillment in Jesus. Work to draw the connections to Jesus in everything you read.
- **Read worshipfully.** Isaiah's entire goal is to give you a vision of God as "the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 1:4). If his writing doesn't move you to worship... you're missing something.

## ISAIAH: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Listed in order from least technical to most technical:*

*ESV Study Bible.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

*Gospel Transformation Study Bible.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

*Knowing the Bible: Isaiah.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013

Longman, Tremper III & Dillard, Raymond D. *An Introduction to the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Ortlund, Raymond C. Jr. *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005.

Motyer, Alec J. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993.



## THE BOOK OF ISAIAH PREACHING SERIES (A TENTATIVE CALENDAR)

16 Feb 2014	Intro to Isaiah
23 Feb 2014	Isaiah 1
2 Mar 2014	Isaiah 2
9 Mar 2014	Isaiah 3-4
16 Mar 2014	Isaiah 5
23 Mar 2014	Isaiah 6
30 Mar 2014	Isaiah 6:1-8: Holiness of God
6 Apr 2014	Isaiah 7:1-8:10
13 Apr 2014	Isaiah 8:11-22
20 Apr 2014	<b>EASTER: Isaiah 9:1-7</b>
27 Apr 2014	Isaiah 9:8-10:34
4 May 2014	Isaiah 11
11 May 2014	Isaiah 12:1-6
18 May 2014	**STAND-ALONE SERMON
25 May 2014	Isaiah 13-20
1 Jun 2014	Isaiah 21-23
8 Jun 2014	Isaiah 24-27
15 Jun 2014	Isaiah 28
22 Jun 2014	Isaiah 29
29 Jun 2014	Isaiah 30-31
6 Jul 2014	Isaiah 32-33
13 Jul 2014	Isaiah 34-35
20 Jul 2014	Isaiah 36-37
27 Jul 2014	Isaiah 38-39
3 Aug 2014	Isaiah 40
10 Aug 2014	Isaiah 41:1-20
17 Aug 2014	**STAND-ALONE SERMON
24 Aug 2014	**STAND-ALONE SERMON
31 Aug 2014	Isaiah 41:21-42:17
7 Sep 2014	Isaiah 42:18-43:21
14 Sep 2014	Isaiah 43:22-44:23
21 Sep 2014	Isaiah 44:24-45:25
28 Sep 2014	Isaiah 46-47
5 Oct 2014	Isaiah 48
12 Oct 2014	Isaiah 49:1-50:3
19 Oct 2014	Isaiah 50:4-51:8
26 Oct 2014	Isaiah 51:9-52:12
2 Nov 2014	Isaiah 52:13-53
9 Nov 2014	Isaiah 54-55
16 Nov 2014	Isaiah 56-57
23 Nov 2014	Isaiah 58:1-59:13
30 Nov 2014	Isaiah 59:14-60
7 Dec 2014	Isaiah 61-62
14 Dec 2014	Isaiah 63-64
21 Dec 2014	Isaiah 65
28 Dec 2014	Isaiah 66



## TEMPLATE: A SIMPLE WAY TO MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE

*"I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I." – Martin Luther*

We'll be spending all year in Isaiah. So we want to slow down and take it in – thoughtfully, reflectively, prayerfully.

The following simple outline for Scripture meditation is adapted from a lecture by Tim Keller. It reflects Keller's own adaptation of Martin Luther's "Simple Way to Pray," which is based on the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*. Christians have been praying this way for centuries. It's a time-tested practice that will yield great rewards in your soul when faithfully observed.

### **Step 1: Read (Slowly)**

*Begin with a slow, gentle reading of Scripture. Just a paragraph or two... maybe only a couple of verses. Read slowly. Let each word and phrase sink in.*

### **Step 2: Reflect**

*Ponder what you've read, and let it lead you into prayer.*

- a) *How can this text/truth help me ADORE God?*
- b) *How can this text/truth help me CONFESS sin?*
- c) *How can this text/truth help me PETITION for grace?*

### **Step 3: See Jesus**

*Worship Jesus specifically, as the ultimate focal point of all of Scripture.*

- a) *How is Jesus the ultimate EXAMPLE of this attribute?*
- b) *How is Jesus the ultimate SOLUTION for this sin?*
- c) *How is Jesus the ultimate SOURCE of this grace?*

### **Step 4: Pray**

*Move into intercessory prayer. How does what you've read spur you to prayer?*

- a) *For myself*
- b) *For my family and friends*
- c) *For my church*
- d) *For my city*
- e) *For the world*

### **Step 5: Contemplation (if the Spirit wills)**

*Occasionally, as you take time for meditative prayer, you will experience the beauty of contemplative silence – "a deeper sense of God on the heart." This doesn't always happen, and you shouldn't try to force it. But if and when the Holy Spirit graces you with this... enjoy it. Rest silently in the presence of God. Enjoy his company.*





# PART ONE

# ISAIAH

THE HOLY JUDGE



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO FEB. 23

TEXT: ISAIAH 1:1-31

WORD OF THE WEEK: HEAR

## PRAYER

Our Father, we love Thee for Thy justice. We acknowledge that Thy judgments are true and righteous altogether. Thy justice upholds the order of the universe and guarantees the safety of all who put their trust in Thee. We live because Thou art just—and merciful. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, righteous in all Thy ways and holy in all Thy works. Amen. (from A.W. Tozer)

## MEMORY VERSE

“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 like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

## SUMMARY

The book of Isaiah opens with the scene of a courtroom. The creator God who is the holy judge of all mankind commands the attention of the heavens and the earth, saying, “Look at what my people have done.” The “Holy One of Israel” lays charges against Israel and their guilt is exposed at every level – national, religious, and societal. And God’s people today are just like God’s people in Isaiah’s day – slow to repent, slow to believe, quick to justify our sin. Despite our rebellion there is still hope. Isaiah offers us hope in the LORD, who alone is able to save. Not only is the LORD the “Holy One,” he is also the “Mighty One.” He alone is able to cleanse us from sin by the blood of his Son, Jesus. He alone is able to redeem us from slavery to sin and idolatry. Through the prophet Isaiah, God is calling us to repent and receive grace.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What are the names used for God in this passage (Isaiah 1:2,4,24)? Talk about what these names mean.
- In the middle of the chapter, God challenges us to change. What does God ask us to do (Isaiah 1:16-17)?

## REFLECTION

- What imagery (metaphors, word pictures, etc.) from this text is most striking to you? Consider how they might be true of your life.
- Where do you tend toward empty religious practice (Isaiah 1:10-15)?

## APPLICATION

- How will you respond to God’s call to obedience in Isaiah 1:16-17 this week?
- How do you see the pervasive nature of sin (verse 5-6) affecting you and the world around you? Repent and believe the gospel promise that through Christ’s blood you shall be “white as snow.”



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MARCH 2

TEXT: ISAIAH 2:1-22

WORD OF THE WEEK: ABASED

## PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, Help me humble myself before You, by seeing the vanity of honor and the conceit of men's minds, as standing between me and You; Let me not forget the heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

"Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?" (Isaiah 2:22).

## SUMMARY

Mountains are picturesque – majestic when seen from afar and formidable up close. Elevation was highly significant in the time period in which Isaiah lived and preached. The nations surrounding Israel prided themselves on their "high places," where they worshipped their idolatrous gods. Isaiah sees a coming day where God's city, Zion, will be established as "the chief of the mountains" – the highest of the high places. In that day, those who pridefully exalt themselves will be brought low, and God alone will be lifted up. We need to take heed, readying ourselves for the day when God, the Holy Judge of all the earth, reveals the "splendor of his majesty" (Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21) and puts an end to idolatry and all human pride.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What is Isaiah inviting the people to "come" to (Isaiah 2:3, 5)?

## REFLECTION

- What words or themes are repeated multiple times in the chapter?
- What connection does the text make between pride and idolatry?
- How does Isaiah describe the coming "day" of God? How does your heart respond to his announcement of this day?

## APPLICATION

- Israel thought they were self-sufficient. How does a sense of self-sufficiency affect your prayer life? Your relationships? Your devotion?
- What negative examples do you see in this chapter? How, by God's grace, will you do the opposite?



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MARCH 9

TEXT: ISAIAH 3:1-4:6

WORD OF THE WEEK: BRANCH

## PRAYER

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (from Psalm 51:1-3)

## MEMORY VERSE

“The Lord has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples” (Isaiah 3:13).

## SUMMARY

In the previous chapters, Isaiah has ushered us into the courtroom to meet the Judge, and shown us our pride and rebellion. God’s people have become a “sinful nation” (1:4), “their land is filled with idols” (2:8), and their security rests in human leaders and resources (3:1-5). From Isaiah 3:1-4:6, we are given a picture of the effects of walking in the darkness of sin. Like the people Isaiah is writing to, we tend to minimize sin. The picture Isaiah paints is grim: Israel’s society will collapse as the LORD removes stability and allows sin to have its full affect. Sin will bring devastation and God’s judgment against it will be fierce. Even still, there is hope beyond judgment. Isaiah prophesies about a Branch – a metaphor for the Messiah – who will cleanse and create anew God’s people (4:2). For the people in Isaiah’s day, the Branch was yet to come; but for us He has come. God is urging us to see the horrible effects of our sin, repent, and hope in Jesus, the “beautiful and glorious” branch of the LORD.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What sins have the people of Israel committed (see Isaiah 3:14-23)?
- How does Isaiah describe the Branch of the LORD?

## REFLECTION

- Reflect on Isaiah 3:9. What does this verse suggest about the God-ordained function of shame and guilt for our sin? When these things are missing, what does that imply?
- What does God promise to do through the branch of the LORD? Consider how Jesus has accomplished these things for you.

## APPLICATION

- Does the effect of sin and judgment of sin depicted in these chapters seem fitting? How could you grow in understanding sin or in keeping yourself from minimizing sin?
- Who have you sinned against that God might be asking you to confess your sin to? How might you make restitution in that relationship?



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MARCH 16

TEXT: ISAIAH 5:1-30

WORD OF THE WEEK: WOE

## PRAYER

O LORD, No day of my life has passed that has not proved me guilty in thy sight. Prayers have been uttered from a prayerless heart. Praise has been often empty sound. My best services are filthy rags. I am guilty, but pardoned; lost, but saved; wandering, but found; sinning, but cleansed. Give me a perpetual broken-heartedness. Keep me always clinging to thy cross, and flood me every moment with thy descending grace. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

## SUMMARY

The hope of the coming Branch of the LORD lingers in the mind of the reader, as Isaiah begins a “love song” for “my beloved.” We seem to anticipate a wedding song or something special between husband and wife, but the narrative turns sharply. In poetic verse, Isaiah speaks of a vineyard owner (something very familiar to Israel) who has done everything right for his vineyard, yet finds his vineyard to be unfruitful (5:4). Verse 7 reveals that Israel is the vineyard. Rather than a wedding, this is a funeral. The six “woes” of chapter 5 can be likened to a funeral procession wailing over those who are spiritually dead. The change needed for humanity is none other than resurrection – death to life. The end of the chapter captures with gripping imagery the darkness and death that result from sin (5:30).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- Who is the vineyard and what will the owner do to it (Isaiah 5:5-7)?
- What is God looking for among his people (Isaiah 5:7)?

## REFLECTION

- Make a list of the “woes” in this chapter. What are some expressions of these things in our own day?
- Think about verse 16. How has God been exalted, just, holy, and righteous in Christ? Spend some time praising Jesus for his sinless life, substitutionary death, and resurrection.

## APPLICATION

- Which of the “woes” can be a temptation for you? How could you “walk in the light” with this area of life?
- Woes are warnings. Who could you warn about the things in this passage? (e.g. greed, drunkenness, lying, corrupting talk, pride, etc.)



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MARCH 23

TEXT: ISAIAH 6:1-13

WORD OF THE WEEK: GO

## PRAYER

O My Savior, I thank You from the depths of my being for Your wondrous grace and love to me. You bore my sin in Your own body on the tree. Increase my gratitude for Your sacrifice, and teach me, this day and every day, the riches of Your grace. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8).

## SUMMARY

Isaiah's life is a story of grace. Pastor Ray Ortlund calls these chapters, "The Triumph of God's Grace Over Our Failure." Isaiah is humbled by the holiness of God, changed by the goodness of God in atoning for his sin, and caught up in the story of God. The story of grace gives reference for the rest of the book and Isaiah's calling to speak the words of God to the people of Israel. Our foundation for the work of making disciples is the same: Grace. Ortlund writes, "If your heart does not leap at God's grace in Christ, what you need is more grace. Nothing else can save you from deadness." We are to rest upon the grace of God toward us in Christ by reminding ourselves of his forgiveness and hoping in the promise of his return. Only then will we have the courage and tenacity to live as God's "sent" people (Isaiah 6:8) in the midst of an unbelieving and rebellious culture.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- How did Isaiah respond to God's call?
- What was the nature of the kind of ministry or work that God asked Isaiah to do?

## REFLECTION

- If God had decreed that the people would not perceive or understand or repent (6:9-10), why did he send Isaiah to preach in the first place? What does this suggest about the true goal of preaching the gospel?
- What promise does God hold out to Isaiah in 6:13? How might this give hope to Isaiah in the midst of ministry?

## APPLICATION

- Isaiah's response to God's glory and God's atoning work was to say, "Here am I – send me!" What about you? Is preaching the gospel to others something you're excited to do? If not, why do you think that is? If so, how can you help to inspire and encourage others?

Is there a conversation you are dreading that you know God has asked you to have? Move forward in the will of God this week, trusting that he will supply grace.



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MARCH 30

TEXT: ISAIAH 6:1-8

WORD OF THE WEEK: HOLY

## PRAYER

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. O Holy God, teach us to revere your name. Forgive us for minimizing your Other-ness, your Majesty, your purity. Humble us before your infinite holiness, that we may fall to our knees in adoring silence and put our hands to our mouths in worshipful contemplation. Hallowed be Your Name. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3).

## SUMMARY

Underlying this chapter is the tale of two kings – Uzziah and Yahweh. King Uzziah began his reign doing what was right in the eyes of God, yet turned away in his later years. Upon the death of Uzziah, Isaiah sees another King, the King of kings who lives forever. The King whose holiness and glory is so breathtaking that Isaiah is undone. "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" In the presence of this King, Isaiah is immediately aware of his sin. The prophet who pronounced "woes" to his own people now sees himself as unclean. It's easy to spot sin or failure in *others*, isn't it? Only when we compare ourselves to the LORD of hosts, do we see the depth of our guilt. The Christian is to live with an increasing awareness of his or her *own* sinfulness – which tends to be preceded by awareness of God's holy character. The gospel of grace (atonement for our unclean lips, deeds, and thoughts) frees us to approach God's holiness. Isaiah's personal vision in this chapter begs us to ask the question: to which king will we give our allegiance?

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- Who was King Uzziah? (Read 2 Chronicles 26)
- What does Isaiah realize about himself when he stands in the presence of God?

## REFLECTION

- Use your imagination to try and picture the scene that Isaiah describes in this passage. What would you feel if you were there?
- Where do you see the Lord Jesus in this passage? Spend time praising Jesus for the atonement of your sin by his death on the cross.

## APPLICATION

- Do you find yourself finding fault with others often? What might that suggest about your awareness of God's holiness?
- Think about the general "tone" of your prayer and worship. Does it reflect the face-down, selfless awe that Isaiah felt in the presence of God? If not, what might need to change?



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO APRIL 6

TEXT: ISAIAH 7:1-8:10

WORD OF THE WEEK: IMMANUEL

## PRAYER

Thank you God, that you are Immanuel – God with us. In your holiness and transcendence, you are exalted above all created things; but in your incarnation you came near to us in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. We confess that our circumstances speak more loudly than your presence. Forgive our lack of faith and strengthen our confidence in you – through Jesus Christ our Lord, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever: Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

## SUMMARY

The book moves from personal narrative of Isaiah’s call to the historical events of the time period in which he speaks and writes. *The* defining crisis of Isaiah’s generation has come upon the people of God. As the LORD foretold through the prophet Isaiah, the Assyrian empire threatens to attack. Judah is at a point of decision. Will King Ahaz decide to align with Israel and Syria or trust God for deliverance? Will God deliver? Will God save? Ahaz doesn’t believe the LORD and seeks security elsewhere. The storyline rings painfully familiar to us. Our hearts are filled with fear over our circumstances. If I put my trust in God, will he save me? Does God know? Does God care? Will God’s promises really count for *me*? Sooner or later this question comes upon us. What will be our answer?

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What danger is facing Jerusalem and King Ahaz (see 7:1-2)?
- What does Isaiah prophesy will happen to Judah “in that day?” (See 7:18, 20, 21, 23)

## REFLECTION

- What metaphor does Isaiah use to describe the Assyrian invasion in 8:6-8?
- Note the repetition of “Immanuel” in 7:14, 8:8, 8:10 (“God is with us”). How do this child and his name function as a sign in Isaiah’s own day? What is the original “point” of this prophecy (8:16)? How is Matthew’s use of this prophecy in Matthew 1:23 an example of “dual fulfillment?”

## APPLICATION

- How are you like King Ahaz, being pressed and challenged by your current circumstances? Why do circumstances tend to speak more “loudly” than God’s Word? How can you more fully rest in the promise that “God is with us?”





# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO APRIL 13

TEXT: ISAIAH 8:11-22

WORD OF THE WEEK: FEAR

## PRAYER

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." (from Psalm 27)

## MEMORY VERSE

But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread (Isaiah 8:13).

## SUMMARY

The life of the prophet was hard. Isaiah was reviled by his own people, threatened often, and called to speak the truth to the stubborn people of Israel and Judah. Remember that God already told Isaiah (chapter 6) how they would reject his message. In these verses, God encourages Isaiah to fear the LORD only. This makes a clear contrast between Isaiah and Ahaz (8:13). In the previous chapter, God sent Isaiah to King Ahaz encouraging him not to fear the political pressure of Syria and Ephraim. When the time of decision came, Ahaz failed the test – faking trust in God but living in fear of others. Isaiah's response is the opposite: "I will wait for the LORD...and I will hope in him" (8:17). How often are we confronted with the same simple choice: to fear God or fear others? God warns us that the fear of man creates a snare, a stumbling block (8:14-15). The Lord wants us to see that when we "look to the earth" for salvation we will only find distress and darkness (8:22).

## General Questions

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- Who does God want Isaiah to fear?
- To whom are the people looking for counsel (v. 19)? Who does God want them to look to instead (v. 20)?

## Reflection

- Look closely at verses 13-15. For those who fear God, what does God become for them? For those who do not fear God, what does God become? How does Jesus pick up this theme in Luke 20:17-18?
- Notice the emphasis in this passage on law, testimony, and word (8:16, 20). How is the word of God connected to the fear of God?

## Application

- How does the word/law/testimony of God need to have a greater place in your life? What changes will you make this week to give it greater prominence?
- Sin brings "distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish." What area of fear of man (or sin) will you seek to put to death this week? If you don't kill sin, it will kill you (Isaiah 8:20).



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO APRIL 20

TEXT: ISAIAH 9:1-7

WORD OF THE WEEK: SON

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ: we praise you for being the Light of the world, the Prince of Peace, the Son given to us by the Father. You reign on the throne of David, and the government of the world rests on your shoulders. Thank you for your victory over Satan, sin, and death. We boast in your resurrection from the dead, and we delight in your promise to be with us always! Fill us with songs of joy this week as we meditate on your life, death, and resurrection.

## MEMORY VERSE

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

## SUMMARY

In the last few chapters, there was a significant question posed for Isaiah’s people and us: Will God truly save us? The following verses are God’s answer. Although we deserve contempt, there will be a day when those who hope in God will be made glorious. Light will overcome darkness. The oppressor will be brought to justice. Needless violence will cease. Fruitfulness will abound. All this will come about through the means of a child who is King. God will faithfully keep his covenant with David that his throne would be “established forever” (2 Sam 7:16). Where darkness and gloom appear to reign, God breaks in with light and joy. The rejection of God by God’s people does not defeat him. His zeal for his glory overcomes the failure of sin.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What names will be given to the child-King (see 9:6-7)? Ponder each name. What does each one signify?
- How does the passage describe the people without this King?

## REFLECTION

- Ponder all the “reversals” promised in this text – darkness to light, etc. How are these fulfilled in the coming of Jesus? Which one is most meaningful to you?
- Notice the emphasis on “gladness” (9:3). Why will this child-King’s reign be reason for such gladness? Is your life marked by this sort of happiness?

## APPLICATION

- Look back over the past few years. What have you prayed for that God has answered? Write down several things you are praying for and record in the future how God answers.



- Isaiah draws a connection between injustice toward God and others. How could you honor God by seeking justice this week? At work? In your neighborhood? In relationships?

# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO APRIL 27

TEXT: ISAIAH 9:8-10:34

WORD OF THE WEEK: ANGER

## PRAYER

O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation! (from Psalm 38)

## MEMORY VERSE

"For his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still" (Isaiah 10:4).

## SUMMARY

The time of decision has come and God's people have chosen evil. Repeatedly and willfully the people of Israel commit sin against God and one another. Therefore, the LORD is angry. The wrath of God in the Bible reveals not cruelty, but humility. He's willing to get involved. We matter to him. That is why God sent his Son into our mess and sickness as the Great Physician (cf. Matthew 9:10-13). Listen to what Ray Ortland has to say about the wrath of God:

*"What is the wrath of God? His wrath is his active, resolute opposition to all evil...his love will never make peace with our evil...His wrath is not moody vindictiveness; it is the solemn determination of a doctor cutting away the cancer that's killing his patient. And for God, the anger is personal, not detached and clinical. This Doctor hates cancer..."*

God enforces justice for all. He used Assyria as "the rod of [his] anger," but they too will face the reaping of the evil they have sown. The hope that remains for Israel and for us is to "lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (10:20).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What is God angry about?
- How will God deal with Assyria after he uses them to judge Israel (See 10:24-27)?

## REFLECTION

- Notice the repeated refrain in this section (9:12, 9:17, 9:21; 10:4). Why does Isaiah keep returning to this refrain? What point is he driving home?
- What are the characteristics of the "remnant" (10:20-22)? How do they point to Christ?

## APPLICATION

- Wrath. What do you think of God's anger? Why?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 1:10. How would you think differently of Jesus knowing that he bore the wrath of God for you?



# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MAY 4

TEXT: ISAIAH 11:1-16

WORD OF THE WEEK: RIGHTEOUSNESS

## PRAYER

O God, all fullness that I lack in myself is found in Christ. It is my duty, out of a sense of emptiness, to go to Christ, to possess and enjoy his fullness as mine. Help me to delight more in what I receive from Christ. Let me not think to receive the Spirit from him as a 'thing,' apart from finding, drinking, being filled with Him. Establish me in Christ, settle me, assure me with certainty that he is mine. This only will fill my heart with joy and peace. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

"The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

## SUMMARY

"Once upon a time..." is a simple phrase, yet it has immediate impact on our thought process. It orients us to the story that follows and helps us understand a fairy tale is about to take place. You may have noticed that Isaiah has some indicator phrases of his own. In the second half of chapter 10 and in chapter 11, the phrase "In that day..." is repeated four times. This is a clue that God has purposed to bring about something in history. For most of the first eleven chapters, God has promised to bring about judgment. There have been hints of grace along the way – we have seen that a king will come (9:6-7) and that a remnant of God's people will remain (10:20-23). But now the nature and the effects of the King's rule are put on full display: equity for the poor, justice for the wicked, and blessing wherever he reigns. The lion and the calf dwell together, the cow and the bear graze, and the child and the cobra will play! Peace will reign with the root of Jesse.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What will the "shoot from the stump of Jesse" be like?
- How will the animals be affected? What could this mean? (See 11:6-9)

## REFLECTION

- Ponder the reality that this king is both the "shoot" and the "root" of Jesse (11:1, 10). What does this imply about him?
- Notice the recurrence of the "remnant" theme at the end of chapter 11. What is familiar? What is new?

## APPLICATION

- Which aspect of the reign of the "righteous branch" gives you the greatest sense of peace or longing? Why?



- How could you seek to grow like the shoot of Jesse? (See 11:1-5, e.g. bearing fruit, walking by the Holy Spirit, wisdom/understanding, counsel and might, fear of the LORD, delight in God, right judgment, opposing evil, fighting for the poor, etc.)

# ISAIAH: THE HOLY JUDGE

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MAY 11

TEXT: ISAIAH 12:1-6

WORD OF THE WEEK: SALVATION

## PRAYER

Glorious God, It is the flame of my life to worship you, the crown and glory of my soul to adore you, heavenly pleasure to approach you. Give me power by your Spirit to help me worship now, that I may forget the world, be brought into fullness of life, be refreshed, comforted, blessed. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

## SUMMARY

God's Word often has the pattern of *revelation* and *response*. Pastor Bill Clem defines worship as simply "responding to God for who he is, what he has done, and what he is doing in the world." God is after our worship. That is the problem. The issues of Israel were not merely social justice issues, political controversy, or threatened invasion. Their problem (and ours) is a worship problem. God graciously *reveals* the coming "branch of righteousness," who will triumph over sin and reign with grace. In light of this good news, God calls for a *response* of worship. The pattern in chapter 12 is one of a singular voice, which calls to others to receive the revelation of grace (in 12:1 the Hebrew "you" is singular, but in 12:3 it's plural). He says, "for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation" (12:2), so now: "Y'all give thanks to the LORD." People, families, missional communities, churches, and societies change as WORSHIP changes. God is calling us to invite others to worship Him. How will we *respond*?

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What does the individual worship God for? (See 12:1-2)
- What does the community worship God for? (See 12:3-6)

## REFLECTION

- What are all the ways the people worship in this passage? What forms do their worship take?

## APPLICATION

- What else do you tend to make the problem besides worship?
- How is worship the issue in a current difficult situation or relationship you are facing?
- Spend time worshipping Jesus for his strength, deeds, comfort, glory, and salvation. Sing a song to God. If you are lacking joy, meditate on the water which flows graciously to you from the "wells of salvation."





# PART TWO

# ISAIAH

THE SOVEREIGN KING



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO MAY 25

TEXT: ISAIAH 13:1-20:6

WORD OF THE WEEK: NATIONS

## PRAYER

O Lord God: The heavens declare your glory, and the earth your riches. In you we live and move and have our being. Your providence has established the bounds of our habitation, and wisely administers all our affairs. From you, and through you, and to you are all things. May your Name be worshiped in every tribe and tongue and nation, to all eternity: Amen. (adapted from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

“For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?  
His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27).

## SUMMARY

Chapter 13 marks a transition into a new section of the book of Isaiah. In this section, Isaiah speaks a series of oracles and judgments against the pagan nations surrounding Israel. Ray Ortlund offers a helpful summary of these chapters:

*“Isaiah is making one basic point. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a local deity, not a tribal god, not an American pet. He is the Lord of the nations, they are all accountable to him, their fates and fortunes are in his hands alone, he will have the final word, and he will vindicate the faith of his people. Individuals are judged in eternity, but nations are judged in time.”*

God is in control. He will judge Babylon, the iconic city of human rebellion and pride (13:1-22). He will have compassion on Jacob and his people Israel (14:1-22). He will judge Moab, a nation of sexual immorality and injustice (15:1-16:13). He will discipline Damascus for they have “forgotten the God of [their] salvation” (17:1-14). He reveals the future of the people of Cush and Egypt (18:1-20:6). God’s sovereignty over the nations brings freedom from control for Isaiah – and for us.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What are some of the reasons that God judges these nations?
- How does the tone of these oracles change in chapter 19?

## REFLECTION

- Reflect on these chapters and Ortlund’s statement that “Individuals are judged in eternity, but nations are judged in time.” What does this contribute, correct, or confuse about your theology?
- How is taunting a valid form of worship (14:4)? How does it glorify God?

## APPLICATION

- We tend to take ourselves and our circumstances too seriously. Step back for a few moments. Where do you crave control, but can’t seem to get it? Release that person or situation to God who is in control.
- Think about the nations in our day. Get a map of the world and pray for God’s Kingdom to be established and the gospel to go forward in all nations.





# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JUNE 1

TEXT: ISAIAH 21:1-23:18

WORD OF THE WEEK: VISION

## PRAYER

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: help me learn that the way down is the way up; that to be low is to be high; that the broken heart is the healed heart; that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit; that the repenting soul is the victorious soul; that to have nothing is to possess all; that to give is to receive. Let me find your light in my darkness, your life in my death, your joy in my sorrow, your grace in my sin, your riches in my poverty, and your glory in my valley.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground” (Isaiah 21:9).

## SUMMARY

Night has come. The city of Babylon is under attack. Will it hold through night? Suspense fills the air as Isaiah watches for what will happen next to Babylon, the “desert of the sea.” Eagerly he awaits the report of the night watchman. In these oracles, Isaiah wants us to see the world through prophetic lenses. The first cycle of oracles (chapters 13-20) revealed the impending judgment of God. But here, Isaiah peers further into the future, seeing the world in shadows (chapters 21-23). Through these oracles — focused on Babylon, Dumah (Edom), Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tyre — Isaiah is returning us again and again to his theme: stop looking for your own salvation and start trusting God’s salvation. The pleasures and power of these ancient nations were not mere opponents to faith in God, they were a seductress of faith. Don’t power, pleasure, and success still beckon us today? God is calling us to heed the words of the prophet Isaiah and trust in Him alone.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What are the names of the places in each of the five oracles (21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1, 23:1)?
- How does Isaiah respond to the oracle about Jerusalem? (See Isaiah 22:4)

## REFLECTION

- Do some basic research on the city of Tyre. What was this city known for? How does this help you better understand God’s oracle against it in Isaiah 23?
- What did the people of Jerusalem do to elicit God’s retribution (22:8-14)? How do we do the same things?

## APPLICATION

- Think about God’s calling on Isaiah to be a prophet. What can you learn from Isaiah about enduring pain and sorrow? (Read Isaiah 20:1-21:10)
- “In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called you to weeping” (Isaiah 22:12). What is worthy of lament in your life or our world? Have you lamented or cried out to God about it?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JUNE 8

TEXT: ISAIAH 24:1-27:13

WORD OF THE WEEK: REMEMBRANCE

## PRAYER

Sovereign God: we long for the day when there is no grief, sorrow, sin or death. In that day we shall be near you, as heirs of your kingdom, members of your body, one with him who is one with you. We will exercise all the powers of body and soul in enjoyment of you and of your Son Jesus Christ. Keep us vigilant and watchful for that day, and lead us to it soon, for better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. (adapted from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

“He will swallow up death forever; and the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 25:8).

## SUMMARY

We remember our heroes by their actions. In the Bible, God presents himself as the hero of all heroes, and these chapters show his mighty feats in terms of two cities — one of *destruction* and one of *restoration*. Chapters 24-27 form what is called a “chiasm,” a literary device similar to a pyramid turned sideways, where the top of the pyramid (middle) is the climax of the story. Although this section begins and ends with the theme of a city *destroyed*, the story’s climax is in the middle with a *restored* Zion (Isaiah 25:6-12). In Zion, the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces and prepare a great feast for his people (25:6-8). Isaiah’s song of the ruined city (25:1-5) and song for the renewed city (26:1-6) border this glorious scene and center our attention on God, the gracious host. This feasting imagery is familiar to us: Jesus, the host, prepares a “feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine” on the mountain of Calvary where he invites us to come and eat so that he might “swallow up death forever” by his own death for the forgiveness of sin.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- How does the song of the ruined city (25:1-5) differ from the song of the strong city (26:1-6)?
- What are some of the reasons God’s people give for their worship and praise of him?

## REFLECTION

- Take some time to consider the structure of chapters 24-27. Can you see the chiasm? Why do you think Isaiah placed 25:6-12 as the climax?
- How does the image of the vineyard in 27:2-6 contrast with the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7? What other themes in these chapters draw from material in earlier chapters of Isaiah?

## APPLICATION

- What promises in chapter 26 do you need to believe?
- Meditate on Isaiah 25:9. How do you need to wait on the Lord right now? How do you need to purposefully rejoice and be glad in his salvation?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JUNE 15

TEXT: ISAIAH 28:1-29

WORD OF THE WEEK: CORNERSTONE

## PRAYER

Jesus, thank you that you are the cornerstone – the solid foundation upon which to build my life. I confess the ways that I – and your people as a whole – have made lies our refuge and taken shelter in falsehood (Isaiah 28:16). Thank you that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Deliver me from falsehood and from building my life on shifting sand. Help me to remain firmly anchored in you – to give ear to your voice and listen to your words.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech” (Isaiah 28:23).

## SUMMARY

Isaiah looks north to Ephraim (Israel) and sees a people lost in their own decadence. He looks at his own people, Judah, and sees prophets and priests who teach falsehood and cannot comprehend the word of the Lord. He sees Judah forsaking their trust in God for trust in treaties with other nations. God’s punishment is coming to Israel and Judah through the conquering nation of Assyria. In the midst of this, God declares that he has laid a “precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation” in Zion. Whoever believes in this cornerstone will “not be in haste”. To “not be in haste” is to not be in panic over God’s coming judgment. We know that this cornerstone is Jesus Christ. To trust in Jesus is to be put on a sure foundation, to build your house on the Rock and not on shifting sand. Yet, too often we put more trust in riches, in politicians, in families, in our own abilities and knowledge than in the cornerstone God has laid in Jesus Christ. But as we learn to trust God, we will find “rest and repose” and will not be moved (28:12).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- How does Isaiah describe the priests and prophets of Judah (28:6-8)?
- How does Isaiah describe God’s coming judgment? (In particular, 28:21)

## REFLECTION

- Isaiah uses this interesting language to describe the punishment which is forthcoming, “For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.” We have a phrase, “As one makes their bed, so they must lie in it.” Judah has made its choice, and now will reap the consequences. Where do you see similar situations working out in the world today?
- The statements in 28:10 and 28:13 are essentially “baby talk” in Hebrew. What point is God making? How does he use this image of nonsensical babbling to mock the prophets AND to prophesy judgment?

## APPLICATION

- In what areas of your life are you trusting in things and people before God? How is this working out?
- One of God’s promises is “rest to the weary” (28:12). Where do you feel weary and lack rest? What would it mean for you to rest in God in this area?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JUNE 22

TEXT: ISAIAH 29:1-24

WORD OF THE WEEK: ARIEL

## PRAYER

O Fountain of all Good: destroy in me every lofty thought. Break pride to pieces and scatter it to the winds. Annihilate each clinging shred of self-righteousness. Break me, then bind me up; thus will my heart be prepared as a dwelling for my God. I ask these things of a great God. (from *The Valley of Vision*)

## MEMORY VERSE

"This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me. Their fear of me is a commandment taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13).

## SUMMARY

"Ariel" is another name for the city of Jerusalem. It means "lion." The Lord declares that he will be a Lion to the city which thinks it is a lion. C.S. Lewis fittingly capitalized on this image of God through his famous character Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*:

*"Aslan is a lion – THE lion, the Great Lion."*

*"Ooh," said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."*

*"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

Is your view of God too safe? Isaiah is opening the eyes of his people — and our eyes — to the true character of God. For God's people it will take the siege and destruction of Jerusalem to accomplish this. But, in the process God is seeking the good of his people: graciously transforming their blindness and deafness into sight and hearing. He is dangerous but good, knowable yet mysterious, and in control over the course of our lives. If God could never shock you, then you would never know the difference between your notions of God and the reality of God.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- How do verses 29:1-8 summarize the plight of "Ariel" or Jerusalem?
- Read verse 13 – what's wrong with the people's worship of God?

## REFLECTION

- What images or word-pictures does God use to describe his judgment against Jerusalem?
- What is the good news promised in 29:18-21? How does this chapter contrast the right use of words (29:18) with the wrong use of words (29:13, 15, 21)?

## APPLICATION

- What seems mysterious to you about God? Praise him for this aspect of his character meant draw you towards wonder!
- Is the God you worship too safe, too small? How might God be opening your eyes to his greatness and his mystery and his sovereignty?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JUNE 29

TEXT: ISAIAH 30:1-31:9

WORD OF THE WEEK: TEACHER

## PRAYER

God, how quickly we turn to Egypt. Our hope may not be in horses and chariots; but it is in money and safety and relationships and stability. Help us see the ways we look to these things rather than looking to the Holy One of Israel. Help us see that our false Saviors are “men and not God.” We trust your word that “all of them will come to an end together.” You are the king who rules righteously. Our hope is in you – one God, forever and ever, Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore, he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are those who wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18).

## SUMMARY

Isaiah takes us into the classroom of life. School is in session, and God has assumed the role of teacher and father. This role is familiar to God’s people for he has commanded husbands and fathers to bear his image by instructing their children in the ways of God (cf. Gen. 1:27-28, Deuteronomy 6:4-9). In this chapter, God sighs over his stubborn children. He says that they “carry out a plan, but not mine,” and “make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin” (30:1). Teaching is God’s purpose in the judgment against his people. Instruction is the aim of God’s sovereign orchestration of our lives. What is God teaching you? Why has the Lord brought about the circumstances and events of your life? Like Israel, he is teaching you of his justice, mercy, and grace. He is teaching you to put off sin and put away idols so that you might find true joy in Him. Listen for his teaching, for “blessed are those who wait for him” (30:18).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- Who are the people of Israel trusting rather than their father and teacher? (See 30:1-7)
- What should God’s people do, instead of “going down to Egypt” (31:1)?
- What does Isaiah call God’s people to do when they recognize their sin? (See 31:6-7)

## REFLECTION

- Ponder this week’s memory verse (Isaiah 30:18). How does it comfort you? How does it encourage you to deeper trust in God?
- How do you think verse 15 applies to you: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength?”

## APPLICATION

- What is God teaching you right now? Why has the Lord brought about the current circumstances and events of your life?
- In what ways are you prone to “go down to Egypt?” What false Saviors do you look to for deliverance, peace, or safety?
- Isaiah calls for repentance saying, “turn to him...cast away [your] idols.” What do you need to turn from? How do you need to turn to God in repentance?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JULY 6

TEXT: ISAIAH 32:1-33:24

WORD OF THE WEEK: KING

## PRAYER

God, how quickly we turn to Egypt. Our hope may not be in horses and chariots; but it IS in money and safety and relationships and stability. Help us see the ways we look to these things rather than looking to the Holy One of Israel. Help us see that our false Saviors are “men and not God.” We trust your word that “all of them will come to an end together.” You are the king who rules righteously. Our hope is in you – one God, forever and ever, Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever” (Isaiah 32:17).

## SUMMARY

The bent of the people of Judah was to trust or rely on other deities, nations, or rituals. Ray Ortlund encourages us to think of Egypt as “a cipher for anything I think I need outside the promises of God.” There is a reason why Judah was wrong in seeking help from Egypt. God had *promised* to deliver them. God had declared his commitment to them. Yet again, God’s people reject his word and his promises. We reject his commitment to us, and we flee to other saviors for help. We need transformation — the ability to become a new kind of people. These chapters warn of the soon coming disaster (“in a little more than a year” – 32:10) and unfold the two means by which God will transform his people. God will transform them by the messianic king of righteousness — King Jesus (32:1-7). And, God will transform them by the outpouring of the Spirit — the Holy Spirit (32:15-20). The triune God has given us himself. He is our only hope for transformation, and his Son and his Spirit will accomplish it.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What should God’s people do, instead of “going down to Egypt” (31:1)?
- What does Isaiah call God’s people to do when they recognize their sin? (See 31:6-7)
- Contrast the fool and the noble man (32:5-8). What do we learn about each?

## REFLECTION

- What hope is held out for God’s people in 32:1? What are the marks of the renewed people of God (32:1-5, 15-20)?
- How does God’s grace in salvation (31:4-5) provide motivation for turning from idols (31:6-7)?

## APPLICATION

- In what ways are you prone to “go down to Egypt?” What false Saviors do you look to for deliverance, peace, or safety?
  - Isaiah calls for repentance saying, “turn to him...cast away [your] idols.” What do you need to turn from? How do you need to turn to God in repentance?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JULY 13

TEXT: ISAIAH 34:1-35:10

WORD OF THE WEEK: RETURN

## PRAYER

O Lord, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble. Be our judge, our lawgiver, and our king. Help us to trust in your purposes; to obey your instruction; to submit to your rule and reign. Help our eyes to see our King, Jesus, in all his beauty, and to rest in him.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us" (Isaiah 33:22).

## SUMMARY

Isaiah has narrowed the lens of his prophetic camera to focus on the specific judgment of God on the people of Israel. Now, the prophet pans out to focus more widely on the ultimate realities of trust and salvation. These chapters warn of the soon coming disaster ("in a little more than a year" – 32:10) and unfold the two means by which God will transform his people. God will not let the Assyrians brutalize his people forever, but declares: "you destroyer...you will be destroyed!" (33:1). He acts on behalf of those who trust him, those who "wait" for him (33:2). Salvation is coming. God will transform his people by the messianic king of righteousness — King Jesus (32:1-7). And, God will transform them by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (32:15-20). God has given us himself. He is our only hope for transformation, and his Son and his Spirit will accomplish it.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- Contrast the fool and the noble man (32:5-8). What do we learn about each?
- Look at the "fire" imagery in verses 11-14. How is God like a fire? How do people respond to God?
- The people have been looking out for foreign invaders... what do they see as they look out in verses 17-21?

## REFLECTION

- What hope is held out for God's people in 32:1? What are the marks of the renewed people of God (32:1-5, 15-20)?
- We tend to think about God as Savior often. Why are the other names for God given in verse 22 important to salvation?
- Notice the description of godly virtue in verses 15-16. How are you becoming this kind of person? How do these promises motivate you toward deeper and fuller obedience?

## APPLICATION

- What is your response to your sin? When you think of yourself before God, does fear or trembling describe you? Why or why not?
- What seems to bring instability into your life? How do you need God to be the "stability of your times" (33:6)?



# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JULY 20

TEXT: ISAIAH 36:1-37:38

WORD OF THE WEEK: TRUST

## PRAYER

God, forgive us for our impatience. We are slow to wait on you and quick to doubt. But you assure us that your day of vengeance is coming, and that our final salvation awaits. Encourage the exhausted among us, strengthen the weak, and comfort the anxious. Help us live with a joyful, exuberant expectation of your soon return. We look forward to the day when "sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Thank you that the gladness and joy of that day is already ours through Christ, our Lord.

## MEMORY VERSE

"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be up on their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

## SUMMARY

The divine loudspeaker crackles and a summons rings out. At the beginning and end of chapter 34, God summons his people to see how the Sovereign King will accomplish the final overthrow of their enemies – not just in Assyria but throughout the world (see 34:1 and 34:16). The wickedness of their enemies will meet God's justice: "For the LORD has a day of vengeance and a year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (34:8). Isaiah has held before us repeatedly the realities of judgment and salvation. Having warned us again, he turns to salvation. The remnant people of God will return to Zion, and their return will be glorious! The desert will burst into bloom. The scorched land will become a fertile oasis. The people have merely to wait. But waiting is hard for us.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- In general, how does Isaiah describe God's judgment (chapter 34)?
- In general, how does Isaiah describe God's salvation (chapter 35)?

## REFLECTION

- Contrast the de-creation imagery of chapter 34 with the re-creation imagery of chapter 35. Why do you think God, the Creator, uses these images?
- What does God accomplish for our faith, our worship, and our joy by helping us to picture salvation in such rich imagery?

## APPLICATION

- What would you like vengeance or justice for? Ask God for the grace to release the person or situation you're thinking of to his coming vengeance. Rest in his promise of indignation, wrath, and vengeance upon the wicked.
- Is there something in life that you are waiting for? Which promises of God could you cling to this week while you wait?





# ISAIAH: THE SOVEREIGN KING

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO JULY 27

TEXT: ISAIAH 38:1-39:8

WORD OF THE WEEK: FAITHFULNESS

## PRAYER

O God, you are God – you alone – of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. You are sovereign over every square inch of your creation. There is nothing outside your control and nothing that escapes your watchful eye. In the midst of troubling circumstances, let us take refuge in your strong sovereignty, so those who see may know that you alone are God.

## MEMORY VERSE

“So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD” (Isaiah 37:20).

## SUMMARY

These chapters form a “historical interlude” between the two halves of the book of Isaiah. Sennacherib king of Assyria has taken the surrounding cities of Judah and threatens to overthrow the capital. Rabshakeh, the commander of the Assyrian army, now taunts King Hezekiah saying: “In whom do you now trust?” He mocks Israel’s God and claims there is no salvation in faith. Hezekiah is faced with a dilemma. Where will he turn? Thirty-four years earlier, a similar event occurred. Hezekiah’s father King Ahaz met Isaiah in the same Washer’s Field (compare 7:3 and 36:2). Ahaz failed to trust God and turned to Egypt. In contrast, Hezekiah passes the test and turns to God in deep repentance (37:1-4). The whole book turns on *this* hinge — trust. If you must always know the how or when or what of God’s plan before you trust, you’re not living in faith. Hezekiah doesn’t know what will happen or how God will save. But he trusts the Sovereign King.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- How does Rabshakeh taunt and challenge Hezekiah and God (36:4-10, 13-20)?
- How does Hezekiah respond (37:1-4)?

## REFLECTION

- How does Rabshakeh shrewdly undermine the people’s faith in God (see 36:10, 36:18-20)? How does this mirror the nuanced ways in which our Enemy challenges our faith?
- How does Hezekiah’s prayer (37:14-20) display both honesty about the situation and dependence on God?

## APPLICATION

- Notice the end of Hezekiah’s prayer for deliverance. WHY does Hezekiah ask God to deliver Israel? How can you incorporate this concern for God’s glory more fully into your own prayers?
- This narrative displays God’s sovereignty as effortless. What do you need to entrust to God?





# PART THREE

# ISAIAH

THE SUFFERING SERVANT



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO AUGUST 3

TEXT: ISAIAH 40:1-31

WORD OF THE WEEK: COMFORT

## PRAYER

Eternal God: we are like grass that withers and fades. But you are the Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, and your word stands forever. A thousand years are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. We acknowledge that even the strongest among us grow weary and exhausted. So give us your power, and renew our strength as we wait on you. This we pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28).

## SUMMARY

Isaiah 40 marks a major turning point in the book. In 586 B.C., the powerful forces of the Babylonian army surrounded Judah and carried its riches and people off to exile. Isaiah did not live to see that day, but with pastoral and prophetic insight, he foresaw the troubles of the God’s people in exile. In the first 39 chapters, Isaiah speaks to God’s rebellious and unbelieving people in his own day. From chapter 40 onward, Isaiah speaks to coming generations of God’s people who have been defeated and live under the worldly dominion of the King of Babylon. He outlines three sources of comfort for the people in exile: (1) the glory of the Lord will be revealed, (2) the word of our God will stand forever, (3) and the strong arm of the Lord will shepherd them. Hezekiah’s folly showed us the *need* for renewal; now Isaiah is explaining the *means* of renewal: “they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength.” This is how Israel was to endure exile, and it’s how we are to persevere through life. God gives power and strength to those who trust in him.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What word does this chapter start with? What does that suggest about the tone of this chapter?
- Where does God tell the herald to speak from in verse 9? What is he heralding? What does that suggest about our call to proclaim the gospel?

## REFLECTION

- How is God’s omniscience, strength, and power pictured in this chapter? What should be our response?
- Ponder the three major themes of this chapter: (1) the glory of the Lord being revealed; (2) the word of God standing forever; (3) and the strong arm of the Lord shepherding and renewing his people. How is each of these good news to you in your current situation?

## APPLICATION

- Can you remember a time when God renewed your spiritual strength? Make it a point to share this story with someone this week.
- Isaiah 40 contains some of the most beloved pictures of God’s greatness in the entire Bible. Select one of these word-pictures and meditate on it this week. Try praising God in that language each time that you pray.



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO AUGUST 10

TEXT: ISAIAH 41:1-20

WORD OF THE WEEK: FEAR NOT

## PRAYER

O Lord, forgive my unbelief and teach me not to fear. I am dismayed and worried about many things. Left to myself, I lack strength and courage. But you promise that when I am weak, you are strong. Help me to trust in the promise of your strengthening right hand. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

## SUMMARY

It seems that Isaiah anticipates the complaint of God's people who say, "but what about..." The Lord is not afraid to debate. He puts a question to us, "Who has performed and done this?" (41:4). God alone rules the world and activates the course of history. God alone empowers his people to live and serve him. In his greatness and power, God desires to "renew" the people of Israel, and he therefore, offers three pictures of consolation: (1) Israel, his chosen servant, will be victorious, (2) Jacob, the worm of a people, will be redeemed and transformed, (3) and the needy will be fed and sustained. If we step back for a moment, we'll see that Isaiah is preaching the gospel to us. You, Christian: God has chosen you and won victory over sin, Satan, and death by his resurrection (Col. 2:15). You, servant of God: you have been redeemed and are being transformed into the image of Christ (Col. 3:10). You, needy child of God: you have been promised nourishment that you may seek the Kingdom of God first (Matt 6:33).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What names does God call the people? (See 41:8,14,17)
- What promises does God make to comfort his people?

## REFLECTION

- Notice the threefold repetition of "Fear not" (41:10, 13, 14). Based on this chapter, how is fear connected to unbelief?
- When we are fearful and unbelieving, why do we need comfort and assurance? What does God do in this chapter to give us comfort and assurance?

## APPLICATION

- What is something that causes you to doubt God's rule?
- What do you most fear? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what unbelief might lie at the root of your fears and worries.



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO AUGUST 31

TEXT: ISAIAH 41:21-42:17

WORD OF THE WEEK: SERVANT

## PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, these Scriptures about idolatry drive me to the resources of the gospel today. Idolatry is everywhere because there's no such thing as a non-worshiper. Have mercy on me, Father, and free my foolish heart from giving anything or anyone the attention, allegiance, affection, and adoration you alone deserve. Make Jesus so beautiful and the love of Christ so compelling to me that my struggle with idolatry will diminish in intensity. Amen. (from Scotty Smith)

## MEMORY VERSE

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1).

## SUMMARY

Isaiah hates idols. They are a "delusion" to him. In fact, the prophet decides to settle the score once and for all, and he calls the idols to court. The judge appears and the questioning begins. What can they do? What will idols offer to compare with God? The idols of the world are speechless as always. So, Isaiah closes court with a scathing sentence, "Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you" (41:24). You may have noticed that the nations are always associated with idols. How then is God, who has declared himself ruler of all the earth, going to deal with the "abomination" of nations that trust idols? How will he deal with us who are so prone to idolatry? God offers his Servant as the remedy. He will be a "light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind" (42:6-7). We are in great need of this Servant, the Lord Jesus, who leads us from blind idolatry to see the creator God.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What can idols do (41:21-24)?
- How does God describe his chosen Servant (42:1-4)?
- Who does God share his glory and praise with (42:8)?

## REFLECTION

- Read this text slowly a few times, and mark all the comparisons between idols and God (for instance, compare 41:22 with 42:9).
- Mark all the references to "justice" in this text. What do WE tend to think justice is? What clues does the text give as to what justice looks like?

## APPLICATION

- Notice the emphasis on singing in 42:10-13. Are you obedient in singing to the Lord and giving him praise? How do you need to grow in this area? How can you help others grow?



- Consider: What are the common idols that people worship today? Do they fit the description that Isaiah gives? How so?

# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 7

TEXT: ISAIAH 42:18-43:21

WORD OF THE WEEK: WITNESSES

## PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, these Scriptures indict and invite me today. I stand convicted. I'm not as good of a listener as you desire and the gospel demands. You've given me two ears and one mouth, and the anatomical ratio is no mere accident. You're always speaking, through the Scriptures, and you only speak words of life. What a foolish man I am not to hang onto every syllable you utter. You want my ears that you might have my heart, and you want my heart that you might give me even more of the riches of your grace. Amen. (from Scotty Smith)

## MEMORY VERSE

"But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'" (Isaiah 43:1).

## SUMMARY

Least the people of God think that those who *really* need God's saving power are the nations, God reminds his people of their sin. Israel's condition is still dismal, likened to a deaf and blind servant (42:18). Sure, the nations are blind and following idols, but Israel was also deaf to the Lord's commands. That is the very reason they are in exile! Pastor Ray Ortlund writes, "Reformation is the recovery of God's purpose for us... [it] is God renewing in our hearts the passionate clarity about his purpose for us. It is God reawakening in us a love for his truth and his standards." We need reformation. We need the gracious intervention of the God who created us. Ortlund continues: "There is no room in the gospel for the idea that Jesus is only one of many spiritual paths. Jesus isn't even the *best* way. He is the *only* way." Do you hear? Do you see?

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- How does God describe his people (42:18-22; 43:8)?
- For what purpose were we created (Isaiah 43:7, 21)?

## REFLECTION

- Mark all the ways in this chapter that God emphasizes *himself* as our deliverer, savior, and redeemer.
- Notice how God draws us to repentance both by confronting our sin (42:24-25) and by assuring us of his gracious redemption (43:1-7). Why are both of these crucial to spiritual awakening and true repentance?

## APPLICATION

- In what ways have you been deaf and blind to God's good news? How is God rebuking you and calling you to repentance through this text?
- Notice all the emphasis on God's glory, and on him redeeming us for his own sake (43:7, 21, 25). How do you need to grow in being God-centered in your thoughts, worship, and affections?



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 14

TEXT: ISAIAH 43:22-44:23

WORD OF THE WEEK: SPIRIT

## PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, it's really not all that complicated. All of history — every millennium, century, year, and nanosecond — is determined by your generous commitment to redeem your people — to “harvest” your beloved bride from every nation, tribe, people, and language. You’ve done everything necessary to guarantee this magnificent nuptial story will end perfectly. You bought us with your life and death. You love us with more passion and delight than we can possibly imagine. Thank you for redemption. Amen. (from Scotty Smith)

## MEMORY VERSE

“I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:22).

## SUMMARY

The key to revival is the gospel. There is nothing more than the good news that brings spiritual vitality and nothing less. In this chapter, God seeks to revive the people in exile and he seeks to revive us today. The first piece of the gospel message is the totality of sin. We have — this week, this day — burdened God with our sins (43:24). He should be weary of us and leave us. Yet God is gracious beyond measure. He has offered to blot out our transgressions for his own sake (43:25). The gospel does not stop there, as God offers the refreshment of his Spirit, reviving us to new life (44:3). In light of his kindness, God calls us to repentance, asking us to turn from the folly of idolatry. Can't you see there is no comparison between idols and the one true God? (See 44:6-20) When we confess our sin and believe in God's promised salvation, revival is imminent. God is calling us to “remember these things” (44:21), return to him (44:22), and “sing...for the LORD has done it” (44:23).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What have we done to God with our sins (43:24)?
- What has God done for us (44:22)?
- What's so foolish about idols (44:9-20)?

## REFLECTION

- How do we see the doctrine of election in this text (43:1-2)?
- The image used for the Spirit is one of “pouring” – the watering of thirsty ground (43:3-5). How is this an appropriate symbol for revival? How does it apply to your heart and your church?

## APPLICATION

- Remember a specific sin that you have committed. Don't dwell there long, but consider how your sense of God's grace was fresh and heightened. Praise God for blotting out your transgressions.
- Where do you sense “dryness” in your own heart, in your missional community, or in your church? Spend some time dwelling on God's promise in Isaiah 43:3 and praying it for yourself and those around you.





# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 21

TEXT: ISAIAH 44:24-45:25

WORD OF THE WEEK: CYRUS

## PRAYER

O God Most High, Your power knows no bounds, Your goodness no restraint. You bring order out of confusion. Revive deep spirituality in my heart. Let me live near to the great Shepherd, hear His voice, know its tones, follow its calls. Keep me from deception by causing me to abide in the Truth. Keep me from harm by helping me to walk in the power of the Spirit. Let the weeds that grow in my soul be cut at their roots. Grant me to know that I truly live only when I live to You; all else is trifling. Amen. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

"I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things" (Isaiah 45:7).

## SUMMARY

The next several chapters form a parallel between two agents — Cyrus and the Suffering Servant — that God will use to accomplish his purpose in the world. God uses improbable strategies, and in this passage he reveals his plan to raise up Cyrus the Great, the future king of Persia. God calls him by name a century in advance. His task will be to return the people of God to Jerusalem. Understandably, Isaiah's audience questions this plan: a foreign, pagan King and conqueror will be the "anointed" and "chosen" agent of God? Their suspicion of God's plan rings with familiarity. We question in the same way. But God humbles himself to answer us, saying: "I am the LORD who does all these things!" He emphatically asserts his role as the creator of all (44:24 and 45:8), confirms the task of Cyrus, and speaks, "Let it be so" (45:8). God invites us and all the nations to turn to him and be saved.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- Who made everything?
- Who is Cyrus? What is God going to do through him?

## REFLECTION

- Mark all the places in this text where God asserts his uniqueness. Why is it so important that we understand that God is the **ONLY** God?
- "I make well-being and create calamity" (Isaiah 45:7)... "Truly you are a God who hides himself" (Isaiah 45:15). Why should God's mysterious nature draw us to him rather than causing us to doubt him?

## APPLICATION

- What improbable plan of God do you doubt? How might your heart be changed this week to pray, "let it be so" or "your will be done"?
- How is God calling you to serve him this week as his agent in the world?



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 28

TEXT: ISAIAH 46-47

WORD OF THE WEEK: CARRY

## PRAYER

O Lord God: Quiet our souls to call upon your name. Detach us from the influence of the flesh and the senses. Show us our danger, that we may fly to you for refuge. Make us sensible of our sin's disease, that we may value the good Physician. When we droop, revive us; when we loiter, quicken us; when we go astray, restore us, for Your Name's sake: Amen. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

"I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it" (Isaiah 46:11b).

## SUMMARY

In these chapters God makes a strong distinction between himself and the idols of Babylon. Bel and Nebo (46:1) were two of Babylon's chief gods. God makes a simple point about these idols: they must be carried. In contrast, God carries his people. Over and over again in this section of Isaiah, we are encouraged to contrast the powerlessness of idols with the power of the True God. In chapter 47, God reminds us of the ultimate end of idolatry as Isaiah takes up a "taunt song" for the daughter of Babylon, who has fallen from the throne to the dust.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What do you learn about idols from this chapter?
- How long will God "carry" his people (46:3-4)?

## REFLECTION

- Reflect on the "reversal of fortune" experienced by Babylon in chapter 47. How does this help you to trust in God when things seem bleak or hopeless?
- How does Babylon's boast (47:8, 10) reveal that she has put herself in the place of God?

## APPLICATION

- How does the picture of a God who will carry us speak to your deepest needs?
- We need encouragement to keep ourselves from idols. What encouragements do you find in this text? How will you seek encouragement in your relationship with God this week?



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO OCTOBER 5

TEXT: ISAIAH 48:1-22

WORD OF THE WEEK: REFINED

## PRAYER

O Gracious God, remind me today of your glory. I was created for your glory. I exist for your glory. I am being refined for your glory. May I live for the praise of your glory, and may your glory be my greatest delight and joy. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 48:11b).

## SUMMARY

Like all empires do, Babylon fell. It happened just as God had decreed through Isaiah. In the center of chapter 48, God reveals his purpose in this episode of Israel's history: to refine them (48:10). We must know this is how God works. God's people are not the bunch that "has it all together." We're in need of refinement. God's logic is different than the world's, Ray Ortlund says, for it is "premised in grace: Christianity must be true because *only* God would save sinners." We need to hear this — so much so that this chapter repeats the word "hear" in Hebrew 10 times. God refined Israel through trial, and he is graciously refining us.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- Mark all the times that the words "hear" or "listen" appear in this chapter. What is God saying by this?
- What happens when we pay attention to God's commandments (48:17-19)?

## REFLECTION

- Notice how this chapter ends. Combined with the lament in verses 18-19, what is God driving home?
- Why does God do what he does (see 48:9-11)?

## APPLICATION

- Think about the reasons you do the normal things you do. How often are your actions tied to the glory of God? What could you change this week?
- In what ways do you drift toward going through the motions of religious life (see 48:1)? Confess your tendency to do the right things from the wrong heart, and invite God to "refine" your motives.



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO OCTOBER 12

TEXT: ISAIAH 49:1-50:3

WORD OF THE WEEK: CHILDREN

## PRAYER

O Lover to the uttermost, Thou hast loved me everlastingly, unchangeably. May I love thee as I am loved. Thou hast given thyself for me; may I give myself to thee. Thou has died for me, may I live to thee, in every moment of time, in every movement of my mind, in every pulse of my heart. Amen. (from The Valley of Vision)

## MEMORY VERSE

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me” (49:15-16).

## SUMMARY

This chapter features the second of the four servant songs of Isaiah. The prophetic horizon of Isaiah is now beginning to broaden and will continue to do so. Isaiah knows that the suffering Jews in exile need liberation from Babylon – but also that we need a greater liberation. Sin and the persistent unbelief present in Israel (and us) must be undone, for we still blame God for our sin and despise his discipline (49:14). We miss that the Lord disciplines the son whom he *loves* (Proverbs 3:11-12)! Isaiah foresees that in order for all nations (49:6) to be truly “gathered to him,” Christ needed to come to defeat our enemies of sin, Satan, and death. Isaiah declares, “the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted” (49:13). Only in Christ are all the assurances of God’s love and compassion fulfilled.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- How far does God want his salvation to reach (49:6)?
- What is the purpose for which God would do all these things for his people (see 49:26)? Why is this important?

## REFLECTION

- How does this chapter see a broadening of the Servant’s purpose? Mark all the references to the nations and the Gentiles. How does this anticipate Jesus’ work of redemption?

## APPLICATION

- What is most captivating to you about what the Servant of the Lord will accomplish? What does it say to you about God’s love?
- How does the assurance that God will never forget his people (49:14-16) encourage you? How might you worship God for his loyal love this week?



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO OCTOBER 19

TEXT: ISAIAH 50:4-51:8

WORD OF THE WEEK: SERVANT

## PRAYER

Father, when we walk in darkness, give us the grace to trust in your name and rely on you. We want to fear your name and obey the voice of your servant. Put your law in our hearts, and open our ears to hear and respond to your commands. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God” (50:10).

## SUMMARY

The third of four servant songs further reveals the distinctions between the Suffering Servant and the people of God. God’s people won’t learn from their Teacher, yet the Servant has learned and become able to teach (50:4). God’s people are hard of hearing and stubborn, yet the Servant is a ready listener and obeys (50:5). God’s people suffer for unrighteousness, yet the Servant suffers for righteousness’ sake (50:6). God’s people are skeptical and unconvinced of God’s love and power, yet the Servant is confident in the Lord’s help (50:7-8). To those who will listen, God gives us three lessons: my comfort will give you life, my power will transform the world, and my righteousness will inspire courage to face the world (51:1, 4, and 7).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What has the Lord God done for his Servant (50:4-9)?
- What does God ask of us in Isaiah 51:1, 4, and 7?

## REFLECTION

- What character example is given to us at the beginning of chapter 51 (see 51:2)? What is Isaiah’s point in using this example?
- How should Isaiah 51:7-8 encourage us in the midst of reproach and persecution?

## APPLICATION

- Have you ever faced adversity or suffering for doing right? How does the response of the Suffering Servant encourage you?
- God draws our attention to his Suffering Servant for hope of comfort, power, and courage. How will you look to Jesus for these this week?



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO OCTOBER 26

TEXT: ISAIAH 51:9-52:12

WORD OF THE WEEK: AWAKE!

## PRAYER

God, we confess our willing captivity to sin. We love the Babylon of this world more than the Zion of your glorious kingdom. And yet the sinful things we love enslave us. We are afflicted and oppressed, and we have no way to redeem ourselves. Will you bare your holy arm to deliver us? As you have done in the past, will you come and redeem us from slavery? Loose the bonds from our necks and bring us into the freedom of your heavenly Jerusalem, so that all the ends of the earth might see the salvation of our God. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord: Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 52:10).

## SUMMARY

God will not forget his people. When they call, he answers. Their judgment and captivity is deserved because of their sin and rebellion – but in the midst of their turmoil, God comforts them with promises of his coming redemption. "His wrath is for a moment, but his favor for a lifetime" (Psalm 30:5). As God delivered his people from Egypt and from Assyria, he will likewise deliver them from Babylon. Their redemption is pictured as a triumphant homecoming – a great pilgrimage that resembles the Exodus, with God as their "rear guard" (52:12). God's people will return to Zion, where they will obtain everlasting joy.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What do you notice about the commands in 51:9, 51:17, 52:1, and 52:11?
- Who is God talking to in 52:1-2?
- Look up Romans 10:15. What verse from Isaiah is Paul quoting?

## REFLECTION

- Remember that Isaiah is writing to God's people who are captives in Babylon. How does he picture salvation in Isaiah 52:1-12? What historical precedents does he draw on (see 51:10 and 52:4)? Why would this be good news for God's people? Why is it good news for us now?
- How does Isaiah create a sense of urgency in this section?

## APPLICATION

- The Bible is really the tale of two cities: Zion and Babylon. How are you trying to live in both? How do you need to decisively "depart" from Babylon?



- Isaiah 52:7 says the good news (gospel) that brings happiness is the simple message, "Your God reigns." Meditate on this simple phrase. Turn it over in your mind and consider why it is such good news. Then consider: what other things are you looking to for happiness? Why?

# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 2

TEXT: ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

WORD OF THE WEEK: LAMB

## PRAYER

Jesus, we praise you for becoming ugly that we might be beautiful. You who shared the eternal joy of the Trinity became despised and rejected for us. In taking up your cross, you took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. What a wonderful, merciful Savior you are! As we meditate on your sacrifice, please intensify our love for you. Deepen our awe of your incarnation and your cross. And make us the tender, humble people that the gospel calls us to become. (adapted from Scotty Smith)

## MEMORY VERSE

"But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

## SUMMARY

This week, we come to one of the most famous passages in the whole Bible. This is Isaiah's fourth and final "Servant Song," and it depicts in stunning detail the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. It teaches clearly the doctrine of substitutionary atonement: "**He** was pierced for **our** transgressions, **he** was crushed for **our** iniquities... He bore the sin of many" (Isaiah 53:5, 12). This is one of those texts where we need to slow down... meditate... confess and feel the reality of our sin... and worship our Lord Jesus, the Righteous One who bore our iniquities.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What image does Isaiah 53:7 use for Jesus? Where else do we see this image in the Bible?
- According to Isaiah 53:6 and 53:10, who sent Jesus as an offering for sin?
- What does Isaiah 53:2 suggest about Jesus' physical appearance?

## REFLECTION

- We live in a world that sees sin as "no big deal." How does Isaiah 53 challenge this dismissive view of sin? Make a list of everything this passage says about sin.
- One of the consistent patterns in the Bible's teaching about Jesus is the motif of "humiliation/exaltation." How do you see this motif in Isaiah 52:13-53:12?

## APPLICATION

- Because of Jesus' atoning death on the cross, those who trust in him are "healed" (53:5), "accounted righteous" (53:11), and their guilt is removed (53:10). Do you feel joy, freedom, and healing because of Jesus? If not, what might this suggest? If you do feel these things, how can you express them more freely?
- Ephesians 4:32 commands: "Forgive each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Are you holding on to any areas of unforgiveness or bitterness toward others? In light of Isaiah 53, what do you need to do?



# ISAIAH: THE SUFFERING SERVANT

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 9

TEXT: ISAIAH 54-55

WORD OF THE WEEK: COME!

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, You designed us for delights that you alone can satisfy. You've spread before us the gospel-feast of your Son, Jesus, and the whole bountiful banquet has already been paid for. You invite us to come to you to feast on what is good and to quench our deep spiritual thirst. So this week, every time we eat, let us be reminded that you are the Bread of Life and the giver of living water. In Jesus' name, Amen. (adapted from Scotty Smith)

## Memory Verse

"Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

## Summary

"Isaiah is concluding a major section of his book. In chapters 40-55 he puts front and center God's loving purpose to breathe life back into us. God promises to bring the Jews back from exile in Babylon, which he did. He promises to save us from our deepest captivities within, which he will. And he will not stop until the whole world is renewed. In chapters 54-55 it's time to pause so that the good news can make its full impact" (Ortlund, *Isaiah*, 364).

## General Questions

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- What are we commanded to do in Isaiah 54:1?
- What are we commanded/invited to do in Isaiah 55:1?
- What do we learn about God in Isaiah 55:8-9?

## Reflection

- Slow down and ponder the four images used in Isaiah 54:1-3; 54:4-10; 54:11-17; and 55:1-2. What does each image convey? Why do you think God uses this picturesque, evocative language?
- Reflect on the invitation of Isaiah 55:1-3. Why is this invitation good news? What "felt needs" is God raising to urge us to come to him? What would keep people from coming to him?

## Application

- These chapters are full of rich promises to those who embrace God's grace in Jesus Christ. Make a list of all the promises God makes in these chapters. Choose one or two to commit to memory.



- Isaiah 54:1-3 presumes an expectancy of growth among God's people. Do you *expect* your church and your missional community to grow as God draws people to himself? Use these verses to help you repent of any negative attitudes you have toward growth, and to join God in expecting gospel fruitfulness.



# PART FOUR

# ISAIAH

THE FINAL CONQUEROR



# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 16

TEXT: ISAIAH 56-57

WORD OF THE WEEK: CONTRITE

## Prayer

Lord, what You have done, You can do! Will You not revive us again? You can outdo all we have yet seen of Your work. Come, now, we beseech You, and repeat Your mercies ... Lord, revive me. Lord, revive the pastor and the church officers. Lord, revive the members of the Church. Lord, revive the backsliders. Lord, revive those who seem to live, but have grown careless. Lord, revive the Church at large throughout the whole earth. Spirit of revival, come upon us, now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen. (from Charles Spurgeon)

## Memory Verse

"For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
'I dwell in the high and holy place,  
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isaiah 57:15).

## Summary

Isaiah 56 brings us to the final major section of the book. In chapters 1-39, Isaiah has dealt mainly with the people of God in his own day. In chapters 40-55, he's looked beyond his own generation to what God will do in the future. And in chapters 56-66, his prophetic eye stretches all the way to the end of history, giving us a vision of God's coming kingdom and teaching us how to live in the "in-between time" as we await Christ's return as the Final Conqueror. The theme of this section is clear in Isaiah 56:1: "Keep justice, and do righteousness." We are to hold fast to God's covenant, obeying him diligently, trusting him faithfully, and hoping in him exclusively. The proud and rebellious will have no peace; but God's people, preserved and revived by his grace, will enjoy him forever.

## General Questions

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- Who gets invited into salvation in Isaiah 56:1-8?
- Where does God say that he dwells in Isaiah 57:15?
- What does it mean to be "contrite?"

## Reflection

- How strong is your longing for revival, renewal, and spiritual awakening (Isaiah 57:15)?
- How would a "contrite and lowly spirit" manifest itself? What would it look like?

## Application

- What non-Christians are you actively praying for and pursuing? How passionate are you to see them "gathered" to God (Isaiah 56:8)?
- How can we cultivate a deeper longing for renewal/revival and a deeper contrition before God? How will you pursue these things? How will you encourage your community toward these things?



# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 23

TEXT: ISAIAH 58:1-59:13

WORD OF THE WEEK: INIQUITY

## Prayer

Merciful God, we have sinned. We have sinned in what we have thought and said, in the wrong we have done and in the good we have not done. We have sinned in ignorance; we have sinned in weakness; we have sinned through our own deliberate fault. We repent and turn to you. Forgive us, for the sake of our merciful Savior Jesus, and renew our lives to the glory of your name – the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Memory Verse

“The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,  
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;  
but your iniquities have made a separation  
between you and your God,  
and your sins have hidden his face from you  
so that he does not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

## Summary

“God is moving toward the new heavens and the new earth... What he wants now is his church to serve as the model home for the new neighborhood he has promised to build. He wants everyone to be able to look at the church and see the future, so that they can buy in” (Ortlund, Isaiah, 383). There’s no room for hypocrisy. There’s no place for shallow piety. God wants His people *now* to look like we will *then*. So in Isaiah 58, he confronts our tendency toward fake spirituality – our propensity to “go through the motions” without sincere worship and humility. And in chapter 59, he invites us to see the effects of our sin and be moved to repentance.

## General Questions

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- What hypocrisy does God confront in Isaiah 58? What is wrong with the people’s fasting (Isaiah 58:4)?
- What are some of the marks of true humility that God is looking for (Isaiah 58:6-13)?

## Reflection

- Circle or mark in some way all the words in this passage that have to do with sin, transgression, and iniquity. What do you learn?
- “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). How do you see this principle at work in Isaiah 59? What have the people sown (Isaiah 59:1-8)? What are they reaping (Isaiah 59:9-13)?

## Application

- Consider your own practice of Sabbath/The Lord’s Day in light of Isaiah 58:13-14. What needs to change?
- What are *your* iniquities that have made a separation between you and God? Make a specific list of the particular ways that your “hands are defiled... with iniquity” (Isaiah 59:3). Repent specifically for these sins.



# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO NOVEMBER 30

TEXT: ISAIAH 59:14-60:22

WORD OF THE WEEK: COVENANT

## Prayer

Our Father, Isaiah envisions a day when we, your redeemed people, will forever live a life of joy and peace in the new heaven and new earth — this very world renewed by the One who is making all things new. We praise and bless you for being such a wonderful, merciful Redeemer. You have spoken, you have promised, and so shall it be! Your Word will accomplish everything you decree and all your delights. Help us long for that day, live for that day, hope for that day, we pray, in Jesus' matchless and merciful name. (from Scotty Smith)

## Memory Verse

"'As for me, this is my covenant with them,' says the Lord: 'My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,' says the Lord, 'from this time forth and forevermore'" (Isaiah 59:21).

## Summary

Chapter 56 marked the beginning of Isaiah's last section, focused on the Final Conqueror. But it hasn't felt very hopeful yet. To this point, Isaiah's been setting the stage by showing the failure of God's people: "threatened and oppressed by opponents, harassed and defeated by sin" (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 489). But here at the end of chapter 59, the tide finally turns. We meet the Conqueror – God himself. God assesses the situation (59:14-15). God sees (59:16). God readies himself (59:17). And God brings salvation and judgment by "his own arm" (59:16). The result is a beautified, peaceful, flourishing city (Isaiah 60).

## General Questions

What *sin* is there to repent of?

What *promises* are there to believe?

How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- List the virtues that Isaiah 59:14-15 identifies as missing or absent. Why is this a bad situation?
- What does God do in response to the situation (59:15-20)?

## Reflection

- Take in the picture of the future Zion that God paints in Isaiah 60. What do you find most comforting or attractive? Why will this be a great city to dwell in?
- Slow down and pay attention to the pronouns in 59:21. It starts with a "covenant with them" – God's people. But then it switches to "My Spirit that is upon you" – and this **you** is a masculine singular pronoun in Hebrew! What does this suggest about the recipient of the promise in verse 21? What are the implications for us?

## Application

- Reflect slowly and thoughtfully on Isaiah 59:21. Why is this such a great promise? What does it mean for you?
- How does the sure vision of the future world in Isaiah 60 motivate you to live differently right now? If this is what *will* be... how should that affect your life in the present?



# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO DECEMBER 7

TEXT: ISAIAH 61-62

WORD OF THE WEEK: ZION

## PRAYER

Father, we confess our individualism. We, your people, are self-absorbed, self-protective, and self-interested. We don't care deeply about the state of your church. We don't work and pray and tithe and get involved. But you are passionate "for Zion's sake." You will not rest until Jerusalem is "a praise in all the earth." So help us not to rest either. Forgive our selfishness. Awaken our zeal for your church. Help us to be earnest in prayer and service and mission, for Zion's sake. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10).

## SUMMARY

Chapters 61 and 62 overflow with promises of salvation, restoration, and comfort. The Servant – the one anointed by God to bring about redemption – brings good news (gospel) to the poor, the broken, the oppressed, those who mourn. He liberates his people by proclaiming the good news of God's favor and vengeance. And this good news brings gladness (61:3), everlasting joy (61:7), and great rejoicing (61:10) – not just among the people of God, but even for God himself (62:5). God is redeeming not individual persons, but a people, pictured in chapter 62 as Zion, Jerusalem, the City No Longer Forsaken. And he calls his people to be "watchmen," looking for the salvation of Zion and giving God no rest until it comes.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What is the Final Conqueror "anointed" by God to do (61:1-3)?
- Who do you think is speaking in 61:1? (Hint: see Isaiah 48:16 and Luke 4:16-21).
- What's the focus of chapter 62? What is it talking about?

## REFLECTION

- Consider the theme of "renaming" in chapter 62 (esp. verses 4 and 12). Why is this significant? How is it connected to the gospel?
- How should Jesus' use of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:16-21 influence our understanding of Isaiah's message?

## APPLICATION

- Notice the tight connections in these chapters between individual salvation and corporate salvation. How are you guilty of individualism in your relationship with God? What would it look like for you to have a deeper concern "for Zion's sake" (Isaiah 62:1)?
- Notice the command of Isaiah 62:6-7. Is this your personal burden? Do you feel a longing and desire to "give the Lord no rest" until he brings renewal and revival to his people? If not, what needs to change? What can you start doing this week to be a more faithful "watchman?"



# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO DECEMBER 14

TEXT: ISAIAH 63-64

WORD OF THE WEEK: VENGEANCE

## PRAYER

"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence." God, that's what we want. We want your presence. We want your closeness. We want your kingdom to come, and your will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Come near in salvation to save your people. Come near in judgment to bring justice to the world and set things right. Fill this world with your presence. Be our joy every morning and our comfort every night. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

## MEMORY VERSE

"From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64:4).

## SUMMARY

"The Isaianic literature is characterized by a wonderful perception of the future, yet every time we are brought to the point where all seems to be fulfilled, we meet a 'not yet'" (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 512). After the beautiful picture of the redeemed Zion in chapter 62, we face the grim picture of the Servant splattered with blood after treading the winepress of God's wrath (63:1-6). We tend to recoil from language of wrath and vengeance – but we must remember that "we know nothing of the emotions proper to absolute holiness – the just, merited, and inevitable final settlement between God and all that defiles and opposes" (Motyer, 509). Salvation is not possible without judgment. God's wrath against sin is a holy expression of his righteousness (63:1). Because God hates sin, we are to hate our sin and cry out for God's intervention (64:9).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What *sin* is there to repent of?
- What *promises* are there to believe?
- How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- In Isaiah 63:2, the narrator asks why the Conqueror's clothes look red. What is the answer?
- What does the writer say he will recount in 63:7?
- What are some of the things Isaiah prays for in Isaiah 63:15-64:12?

## REFLECTION

- Ponder the pictures and images associated with revival in Isaiah 64:1-4. What do you learn? How can these images kindle imagination and vibrancy in your own prayer life?
- Ponder the language Isaiah uses to express repentance and contrition (64:5-12). What stands out?

## APPLICATION

- Why is God's wrath and anger toward sin good news? How have you avoided or shunned this aspect of the gospel? What needs to change in your thinking and/or worship?



- These chapters blend **longing** for God to "rend the heavens and come down" and **lament** for our sin and apathy. Is this rhythm of longing and lament present in your life? What needs to change?

# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO DECEMBER 21

TEXT: ISAIAH 65

WORD OF THE WEEK: NEW

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you've promised to create a new heaven and new earth from the stuff of this broken world — no more tears and terror, no more death and dying, no more heartaches or heart attacks, no more broken relationships, no more war or even gossip, no more destruction or even irritation. We praise you for your generosity and your joy, mighty Father. Through Jesus, you are making all things new. Tears will give way to cheers. So continue to flood our hearts with your grace, fill our hands with your mercy and direct our feet by your Spirit as we wait for the fullness of your coming kingdom. (from Scotty Smith)

## MEMORY VERSE

"For behold, I create new heavens  
and a new earth,  
and the former things shall not be remembered  
or come into mind" (Isaiah 65:17).

## SUMMARY

"The Lord's people (his true, believing ones, often in these chapters called his 'servants') are set alongside others who are either compromisers or outright pagans. But it will not always be so, for the Lord will bring his servants into a new heavens, a new earth and a new Zion, while a dreadful judgment awaits the rest" (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 522). In Isaiah 65, God unveils for us the glorious future he's preparing – not an ethereal heavenly realm, but a renewed material creation. God uses both promise and threat/warning to inspire the hope, faith, and longing that will keep us faithful until that day.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## COMPREHENSION

- What do we learn about God in Isaiah 65:1?
- What do we learn about God's people in Isaiah 65:2?
- What do we learn about the new heavens and earth in Isaiah 65:17-25?

## REFLECTION

- How do you see the theme of "the remnant" in Isaiah 65:8-16?
- As you slow down and ponder the description of the new heavens and earth in 65:17-25, what grabs your attention? What makes you want to rejoice and worship and live for that day?

## APPLICATION

- What are you doing to persevere as one of God's faithful servants, rather than being one of those who "forsake the Lord" (65:11)? What do you need to do more faithfully?
- How does Isaiah's vision of a new heavens and a new earth strengthen your faith and motivate you to live in light of eternity? What specific aspects of this description (and promise) particularly resonate with your life experience or your longings? How does this move you to worship and joy?



# ISAIAH: THE FINAL CONQUEROR

FOR THE WEEK PRIOR TO DECEMBER 28

TEXT: ISAIAH 66

WORD OF THE WEEK: TREMBLE

## Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for your word. Make us a people who tremble at your word. Let your word saturate our hearts and our church. Help us to love it, listen to it, and humble ourselves beneath it. And as we come to the end of the book of Isaiah, fill us with worship. Empower us for overcoming the darkness in our hearts, communities, and culture. One Day the knowledge of your glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and all flesh will worship before you. For that day we wait, secure in the love of our Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: Amen. (adapted from Scotty Smith)

## Memory Verse

"Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word'" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

## Summary

Isaiah 66 gives us a picture of true worship. God is not impressed with the buildings we build or the sacrifices we make or the religious rituals we observe. He is interested in humility and obedience. He wants us to tremble at his word. He wants us to declare his glory. He wants us to live for his kingdom and delight in his salvation. Isaiah promises that in the new heavens and the new earth, all worship will flow to God. And he ends his book on a minor key, impressing our minds with a strong and clear image of Hell.

## General Questions

What *sin* is there to repent of?  
What *promises* are there to believe?  
How does this text *point forward* to the coming of Christ?

## Comprehension

- Who does God look to (66:2)?
- Why does God judge even people who seem to be worshipers of him (66:4)?
- What two groups of people are contrasted in Isaiah 66:14b?

## Reflection

- Notice the centrality of God's word in true worship (66:2, 5). Why would trembling before his word be so much more significant than all our rituals of outward worship (66:3-6)?
- How do we see the images of city/Zion blend with the images of family/offspring in this chapter? What's the point of connecting these two images?
- Consider the last verse of Isaiah. Why do you think Isaiah ends the book this way?

## Application

- How central is God's word in your life? What do you need to do to make it more central? As you consider the coming New Year, what practical steps will you take?
- Do you see Hell as a real place? If Isaiah 66:24 is describing the fate of your friends who rebel against God, how does that need to change your prayer life and your commitment to evangelism?





## ISAIAH: END NOTES

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SOURCES (PRAYERS & COMMENTARY):

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- Unsourced prayers are either public domain, or are the original work of the authors







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