



Devotional Studies through the Book of Isaiah

Days 1-2

Background

Isaiah is the book of prophesies of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who ministered from approximately 740 B.C. to 680 B.C. For about 20 years, he spoke to both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. After Israel's fall to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., Isaiah continued to prophesy to Judah.

This period of Israeli history is told in 2 Kings 15-21 and 2 Chronicles 26-33. Isaiah was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Micah. The prophets Elijah, Elisha, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah and Amos had already completed their ministries.

By the time of Isaiah, the Israelites had been in the Promised Land for nearly 700 years. During its first 400 years in Canaan, Israel was ruled by judges – spiritual, military and political leaders whom God raised up as occasion demanded.

Then, for about 120 years, three kings reigned over the whole nation of Israel: Saul, David and Solomon. In 917 B.C., Israel had a civil war and remained divided – Israel to the north and Judah to the south – up until the time of Isaiah. By this time, 18 kings had ruled over the northern nation of Israel. All of them were evil and rebellious against the Lord. The southern nation of Judah had 11 kings by this time. Some of them were good and some were bad.

In the era in which Isaiah lived, Israel was a small nation often caught in the middle of wars between superpowers Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. As Isaiah's ministry began, there was a national crisis: Assyria was about to engulf the nation of Israel. And during his ministry as a prophet, the southern nation of Judah faced repeated threats from the larger surrounding nations.

The New Testament quotes Isaiah by name more than all of the other writing prophets combined. The name Isaiah means 'Salvation is of the LORD.' There are at least seven men by the name of Isaiah in the Bible, but only one is Isaiah "son of Amoz." We know more about Isaiah than we do many of the other prophets. He was married and had at least two sons (Isaiah 7:3, 8:3). He lived in Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:3, 22:1, 37:2, 38:5, 39:3).

Tradition holds that Isaiah outlived King Hezekiah and that his successor, Manasseh, cut Isaiah in half with a wooden saw after the prophet hid himself from the angry king in a hollow tree (Bultema). Many think the comment "they were sawed in two" found in Hebrews 11:37 refers to the martyrdom of Isaiah. (David Guzik)

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 1-4

Israel's Spiritual Condition

God's people were spiritually in a bad place. They were sinning against the Lord in many ways and were blind to their sin. Isaiah was sent to wake them up and help them see their sin in the hope they would turn to God and repent. The sins we read about in the first four chapters are:

- Rebellion toward God (1:2-3)
- Religion without the right heart (1:12-15)
- Greed (1:23, 3:14-15)
- Neglecting the needs of widows, orphans and the oppressed (1:17, 23)
- Magic arts (2:6)
- Arrogance and pride (2:11-17)
- Trusting in man instead of God (2:22)

In Isaiah 1:13, we get a glimpse of how God feels about their sin when he says, "Your incense is detestable to me" and "I cannot bear your evil assemblies." In the first four chapters of Isaiah, there is a sense that God feels hurt and angry that His people have

strayed so far from Him and from his plan for them. He had hoped they would love and serve Him. For any of us with children, we can relate to this when they rebel against us despite all we have done for them and the love we have shown them. It is important to connect emotionally with what God is going through so that we can have an accurate picture of his pain and, hopefully, be motivated never to follow the Jews' example.

Hope for the Future

The other recurring theme is the hope God holds out for their repentance and the future He wants to give them if they will turn to Him and repent. In 1:16-19, God pleads with them to come and reason with Him. He pleads with them to have a willing, obedient heart. He pleads with them to love and serve the oppressed, the fatherless and the widowed. If they do, He says they will eat the best of the land.

In 2:1-5, God tells of a future kingdom that will begin in Jerusalem and be a time of peace and justice, when people with sincere hearts will seek God, who will teach them His ways. God is dreaming about a future with His people, the way we might dream about a future marriage relationship. The only difference is that God knows that it will be so.

In 4:2, God introduces the prophecy of the Messiah. If we compare this to Isaiah 11:1, we see a consistent theme of Jesus being called a branch. Branch means coming from the trunk of the tree, or an extension of the trunk. In both cases, the branch is also related to fruit.

Looking at the sins of God's people, to which of them can you relate?

What gives you the most hope as you read these chapters?

What do we learn in these chapters about the nature and character of God?

Days 3-4

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 5-8

God's Vineyard

In chapter 5:1-4, God describes the preparation and care he gave in making and maintaining His vineyard. A vineyard has one purpose: to bear fruit. However, His vineyard was producing only bad fruit. God says He placed His vineyard on fertile soil, dug up the stones and cleared them away, planted it with great vines, built a watchtower and made a wine press. He is saying there was nothing more He could have done to make His vineyard fruitful, but that when He went to find good fruit, He found only bad. The fault was not with the vineyard or the preparation, but with the workers.

God also uses this analogy of a vineyard in the New Testament:

~ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ~ John 15:1-8

In both analogies, everything on God's part is in place; it is just a matter of our remaining in Him to bear much fruit. Each of us should do some soul searching and ask ourselves if are we remaining in Him and therefore bearing much fruit? Are we having the kind of impact God planned for us. If not, what needs to change?

"I have been thinking of the advantages of my own position toward the Lord, and lamenting with great shamefacedness that I am not bringing forth such fruit to him as my position demands. Considering our privileges, advantages and opportunities, I fear that many of us have need to feel great searchings of the heart." (Spurgeon)

Isaiah's call from God

In 6:1-8, God is calling Isaiah to be His prophet. Prophet literally means, 'Mouthpiece of God.' Four things strike me about Isaiah's calling:

1. God blows him away with His power, glory and greatness. He does this to give Isaiah great faith and confidence for the struggles and trials he will face.
2. Isaiah is deeply convicted about his own unworthiness and inadequacy. Before we can be used by God, we must understand how weak and unworthy we are in light of God's power and worthiness.
3. As we get connected to God, we become clean and strong so that we can accomplish all God has in store for us.
4. Isaiah had to answer God's call and make a deliberate decision to go, do and say whatever He wanted him to, no matter what the personal cost and sacrifice.

In Isaiah 7:14-15, God gives us another prophecy of the Messiah. It is interesting to note that there was a point in Jesus' life when He knew right from wrong. Before that time, Jesus was like any other child. As soon as He could distinguish right from wrong, He only did the right. We know this because Hebrews 4:15 tells us that even though Jesus was tempted in every way we are, He was without sin. We call the age of fully knowing right from wrong 'the age of accountability.'

In 8:12-14, God is preparing Isaiah to be His prophet. He tells him not to fear what everyone else fears; that God is the one he was to fear and regard as holy. In doing so, God tells him that He will be his sanctuary. We can fear all kinds of things that control, distract and paralyze us. Fear of people who are intimidating, fear of failure, fear of poverty and fear of death or illness are common to humans. However, God tells Isaiah that if he fears Him, everything else will fall into place.

What do you need to change in order for you to bear great fruit in God's vineyard?

After seeing the four elements of God's calling of Isaiah in chapter 6, how strongly do you think those four elements are actively present in your own life?

What are some of your fears? Do you have a healthy fear of God? How does your fear of God affect your other fears?

Days 5-6

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 9-12

Prince of Peace

In 9:1-7, Isaiah prophecies about Jesus as a future hope. He says in verse 9:1 that God will honor the town of Galilee. In Matthew 26:69, it says Jesus came from Galilee. It says Jesus would be a great light, would increase our joy and would enlarge our nation. It says Jesus would destroy the yoke that burdened us, meaning the yoke of our sin.

Isaiah 9:6-7 describes the Messiah in the following ways:

- He would be a human son born on earth.
- He would have a never-ending government.
- He would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.
- He would be just and righteous.
- His government would increase.
- He would come from the line of David.

All of these descriptions point to Jesus and no other. It seems almost every chapter in Isaiah is rich with Messianic prophecy. God wanted to give the Jews hope in the midst of His rebuke and discipline.

'Highway' of holiness

Isaiah 11:16 describes a 'highway' for the remnant of God's people. In Isaiah 35:8-9, God describes this road as a highway of holiness on which only the redeemed may travel. In Isaiah 62:10, God tells His people to prepare the way and build up the road by removing the stones. God again is giving the Jews hope during a hopeless time. He is giving them a way out of all the spiritual garbage in which they were involved. God always provides us a way out of our sin (1 Corinth. 10:13). We just need to take it.

The concept of a holy road that we must be on to reach God is also in the New Testament. In Matt. 7:13-14, Jesus describes the narrow road we must be on in order to get to heaven. Both the Old Testament and the New describe those who will be on this road as being only a few. Isaiah 11:16 says only a "remnant" will be on the road. Matt. 7:13-14 says only a "few" will be on the road. The same teaching is found in Luke 13:22-24, which also tells us to "make every effort" to enter through heaven's narrow door, which many people will try to enter without success.

The Sevenfold Spirit

~ The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. ~ Isaiah 11:2

God says Jesus would possess the Spirit of the Lord and gives a description of the qualities of this Spirit. This is commonly referred to as the sevenfold Spirit of God:

1. The Spirit of the Lord. This is the overall Holy Spirit.
 2. The Spirit of Wisdom: Jesus became wisdom from God. He doesn't just have wisdom – He is wisdom! (1 Corinth. 1:30)
 3. The Spirit of Understanding. Jesus understands us perfectly. He understands everything. He is perfectly suited to be our sympathetic high priest in heaven (Hebrews 4:15-16). 'Understanding' in Hebrew has the idea of a sharp sense of smell. Trapp says it describes Jesus' "sharpness of judgment in smelling out a hypocrite."
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4. The Spirit of Counsel. Jesus has perfect counsel to give us at all times. He has the needed wisdom and understanding.
5. The Spirit of Power. He has the ability to do what He wants to do. Many people would help us if they could, but can't.
6. The Spirit of Knowledge. Jesus knows everything. He knows our hearts. He knows all the facts. Many times, we have made decisions that seemed strange or wrong to others because they didn't have the knowledge we have. Jesus has knowledge we don't have, so it shouldn't surprise us that sometimes His decisions seem strange or wrong to people.
7. The Spirit of Fear of the Lord. He willingly kept Himself in a place of submission, respect and honor to God the Father.

This passage is behind the term 'seven Spirits of God' used in Revelation 3:1, 4:5 and 5:6. It isn't that there are seven different Spirits of God, but rather that the Spirit of the Lord has these seven characteristics in fullness and perfection. The seven-branched lamp stand that held the oil lamps for the tabernacle is also an illustration of the seven aspects of the Holy Spirit. "This candlestick had one stem in the center, from which protruded three branches to the right and three to the left. Similarly, in this text, three pairs of the names of the Spirit are grouped around the central stem." (Bultema)

How do the prophecies in Isaiah help your faith?

How does the imagery of a highway to holiness help you spiritually?

How do you most need the seven aspects of the Spirit of God that Jesus embodies?

Days 7-8

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 13-16

Judgment on Babylon/Satan

In Isaiah 13-14, God pronounces judgment on Babylon. The following helps explain why His judgment would be so harsh:

Babylon was a city on the Euphrates River. It is mentioned 287 times in the Scriptures, more than any other city except Jerusalem. Right after the flood (Genesis 11:1-10), it was "the seat of the civilization that expressed organized hostility to God." (Tenney, Interpreting Revelation). Babylon was later the capitol of an empire that cruelly conquered Judah. "Babylon, to (the Jews), was the essence of all evil, the embodiment of cruelty, the foe of God's people and the lasting type of sin, carnality, lust and greed" (Tenney). To those familiar with the Old Testament, the name Babylon is associated with organized idolatry, blasphemy and the persecution of God's people. In the New Testament, the world's system of the last days is characterized both religiously and commercially as Babylon (Rev. 17-18). Therefore, Babylon is a "suitable representation . . . of the idolatrous, pagan world system in opposition to God." (Martin).

In chapter 14, Isaiah continues to prophesy against Babylon, but he is also talking about Satan. This is important for us to understand because it helps us see the final destiny of our enemy.

As this prophecy continues from the context of chapter 13, it is important that we remember that Isaiah has two aspects of prophetic fulfillment in mind. First, there is the immediate and partial fulfillment regarding the empire of Babylon and its king. Second, there is the distant and ultimate fulfillment regarding the spiritual empire of Babylon – the world system – and its king, Satan. Ezekiel does the same with the King of Tyre. He refers to the king, but it is obvious he is also writing about Satan. (Wolf)

God wants us to know that Satan is destined for Hell. He isn't a winner. He's a loser. And he certainly isn't the boss or lord of Hell. Satan will go to Hell as a victim, as the ultimate prisoner in the dungeon of darkness, and Hell will be happy to receive him this way! We often — to his great delight — inflate Satan's status and importance. We tend to think of him as a nearly equal opposite of God, as if God is light and Satan is darkness. Well, Satan wishes he was an equal opposite of God, but God wants us to know now what everyone will know someday: Satan is a mere creature and is nowhere near being equal with God. If Satan does have an equal opposite, it would be a high-ranking angelic being such as the archangel Michael – not God the Father or God the Son. Knowing how disgusting and degrading Satan's end will be, why would any of us serve him or work for his cause, even for a minute? Who wants to end up with the maggots and the worms?

~ How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! ~ Isaiah 14:12 (NKJ)

Here, the prophet identifies the king of Babylon as Lucifer, son of the morning. Some debate if Lucifer is a name or a title. The word means morning star or day star, referring to a brightly shining object in the heavens. Whether it is a title or a name makes little difference. This once brightly shining king of Babylon is now fallen from heaven.

The pride, selfish ambition and self-will of the king of Babylon are powerfully expressed in five "I will" statements found in Isaiah 14:13-14. This is the essence of a self-focused and self-obsessed life.

1. "I will ascend to heaven." Heaven will be my home and my place of honor.
2. "I will raise my throne above the stars of God." I will be enthroned and exalted above all other angelic beings.
3. "I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain." I will sit in the place of glory, honor and attention.
4. "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds." I will continue to rise, even in heaven, until all see me in my bright shining glory.
5. "I will make myself like the Most High." I will be equal to God, far above all other created beings.

And yet, there came a time when, despite all his beauty and glory, Satan departed from the heart of God by wanting to exalt himself above his peers. In contrast, the heart of Jesus says:

"The status of equality with God is not something to hang on to. I will let it go. I will give up my reputation, be a servant, live humbly among men and even die an excruciating and humiliating death." (Philip. 2:5-8)

When Lucifer departed from having that heart, he fell from glory.

"It is a strange paradox that nothing makes a being less like God than the urge to be his equal, for he who was God stepped down from the throne of his glory to display to the wondering eyes of men the humility of God." (Grogan)

~ "Yet you shall be brought down." ~ Isaiah 14:15

Despite Satan's desire to exalt himself, he will not be exalted at all. Certainly, there is a sense in which he is exalted right now, but this is but an eye blink in the scope of eternity. Satan, like all those who desire to exalt themselves, shall be brought down. 1 Peter 5:6 expresses the true path to being exalted: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." In Mark 9:35, Jesus said that if anyone desires to be first, he should be last of all and servant of all. (Guzik)

In 16:5, Isaiah again gives us great hope for the future Messiah in the midst of tremendous sin and judgment. This Messiah and His reign would be in stark contrast to what they were experiencing. It says the Messiah's reign would be established in faithfulness. He will be a man of justice and righteousness. What great hope for a helpless, dejected people.

Why do you think it is so important for us to understand Satan's final destiny?

How can Satan's statements in chapter 14 mirror your own sinful nature?

Days 9-10

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 17-20

Forgetting/Remembering God

In 17:10-11, Isaiah rebukes the people for forgetting God. The following is David Guzik's commentary of this passage:

'You will plant pleasant plants . . . you will make your seed to flourish; but the harvest will be a heap of ruins.' One aspect of the Lord's judgment against Israel will be to bring their hard work to nothing. They will work hard to plant and grow crops (both literally and figuratively), but the harvest will be a heap of ruins. This can be one of the most devastating aspects of the Lord's judgment. Haggai 1:6 speaks of this work of the Lord: 'You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.' How much better it is to be listening to Jesus and to have our service directed and blessed by Him (Luke 5:1-10). Why did the LORD bring this judgment on Israel? Because they had forgotten the God of their salvation. In one way, this does not seem like a great sin. After all, why does God need us to remember Him? Why can't we just leave Him alone, and He leave us alone? It is a sin to forget God because He created you and because He is the God of your salvation. If you forget Him, you can forget about your salvation. Satan does not need to make us bank robbers or murderers to destroy us. It is enough for him simply to make us forget. We can forget because of sleepiness, a lack of attention and distractedness. Satan doesn't care much about how he does it, but he does want us to forget the God of our salvation. (Guzik)

When we forget God, we become arrogant and feel as though we have accomplished everything with our own power and strength. If Satan can make us forget about God, we become humanistic in our thinking and no longer dependent on God. This makes us weaker and weaker, until we have no power to overcome our own sin or help others with their sin.

We must remember God and acknowledge Him in everything we do by thanking Him and asking for direction. It is also important to remember God each morning in our personal devotions of Bible study and prayer.

Here is a list of Scriptures on the topic of remembering God: Deut. 8:10-20, Heb. 2:1, Prov. 3:5-6, 1 Chron. 16:10-14

The Futility of Idolatry

In chapter 19:1, Isaiah says the idols of Egypt tremble before God. He is referring to God's judgment on Egypt in Exodus.

At the time of the Exodus, when Pharaoh of Egypt would not release the children of Israel from their captivity, the Lord made the idols of Egypt totter at His presence. He directed each of the plagues against a particular idol of Egypt. He knocked over the god Khnum, guardian of the Nile; the god Hapi, the spirit of the Nile; and the god Osiris, who had the Nile as his bloodstream, when he turned the waters to blood. He knocked over Heqt, the frog-goddess of fertility, with the plague of frogs. He knocked over Hathor, a cow-like mother goddess, with the plague on livestock. He knocked over Imhotep, the god of medicine, with the plague of boils. He knocked over Nut, the sky goddess, with the plague of hail. He knocked over the whole system of Egyptian worship of their gods with loathsome lice and swarms of insects. He knocked over the god Seth, thought to be the protector of crops, with the plague of locusts. He knocked over Ra, thought to be the sun god, with the plague of darkness. He knocked over Osiris, the Egyptian god thought to be the giver of life. And he even knocked over the supposed deity of Pharaoh himself with the plague against the firstborn. God made all the idols of Egypt falter at His presence before – and Isaiah tells us He will do it again! (Guzik)

Egypt turns to God

In chapter 19:16-22, Isaiah writes that Egypt will turn to the Lord. This is an almost unbelievable prophecy given their Godlessness. However, we have the following quote from theologian Athanasius of Alexandria, who lived from 293 A.D. to 373 A.D.

Athanasius wrote this from Egypt: "The thing is happening before our very eyes, here in Egypt; and thereby another prophecy is fulfilled. For at no other time have the Egyptians ceased from their false worship save when the Lord of all, riding as on a cloud, came down here in the body, brought the error of idols to nothing and won over everybody to Himself and through Himself to the Father." (from 'On the Incarnation,' cited by Grogan)

What does Satan use to try to get you to forget God?

What happens to you when you do forget God?

When you read that a seemingly impossible prophecy comes true, how does that affect you?

Days 11-12

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 21-24

Chapters 21-23 describe God's judgment against Babylon, Edom and Jerusalem. Then, chapter 24 describes God's judgment on the entire world in the last days.

Dependence on Ourselves vs. Dependence on God

~ "You looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool. You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall. You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago." ~ Isaiah 22:8-11

Even with God's impending judgment looming, His people did not look to Him for direction, protection or repentance. They instead worked hard to try to protect themselves.

When Jerusalem was faced with this subsequent attack, they prepared the city for battle, strengthening the wall of the city and making sure there was adequate water to endure the siege. But none of this would matter, because God removed His protection. The best thing Jerusalem could have done to protect herself was turn her heart toward the Lord. God called them to weep and mourn. Instead of preparing Jerusalem for an attack, they should have turned their hearts in humble repentance to the Lord. Instead of humbly seeking the Lord, the people of Jerusalem had more confidence in their own preparation. (Guzik)

When we feel the stress and pressure of life or God's hand upon us, we often do the same. Instead of turning to God in repentance, asking him for direction and protection, we simply try to figure it out on our own. Every time we do this, it will eventually be disastrous because we were never designed to run our own lives. We were designed to worship, look to and depend on the only God.

"Our hearts are top-full of harlotry, ready to shift and shank in every by-corner for comfort; to hang (our) hopes on every hedge, rather than to roll themselves upon God, 'the hope of Israel.' (Trapp)

Clueless and Selfish

~ "Shebna, who is in charge of the palace." ~ Isaiah 22:15

Shebna was a servant of King Hezekiah, both a steward over the house and a scribe (1 Kings 18:18, Isaiah 37:2). These were both positions of honor and responsibility. Shebna was one of King Hezekiah's chief assistants.

~ "Hewing your grave on the height." ~ Isaiah 22:16

What did Shebna do with his position of honor and authority? He made himself a fancy and prestigious tomb. In that day, this was a display of significant power and wealth. In this, Shebna personifies all of Jerusalem with his obsessive self-interest. Isaiah had prophesied that the people of Judah and Jerusalem would be carried away into exile, but Shebna didn't believe it. He built an elaborate tomb to himself in Jerusalem, as if to say, "I will never be carried away in exile. I am so certain I will die here that I will build my tomb here." Shebna sought honor and glory, but he would never find it. Instead, the Lord would make certain he was never buried in his prestigious, expensive tomb and instead he would die in exile. Shebna is the same kind of man Jesus spoke about in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), who spent his time and money planning building great things. In the end, he died without God – and all of it meant nothing. Actually, Shebna's accomplishments — the beautiful tomb, the glorious chariots – are even worse than nothing is. They are a shameful. (Guzik)

We can be just like Shebna by being so busy with our personal affairs that we miss God's warnings. God tries to direct us, but we can be so busy trying to meet our own goals, needs, desires and deadlines that we completely miss God's will.

Faithful in the midst of judgment (Isaiah 22:20-22)

The place of Eliakim the son of Hilkiah before Hezekiah is somewhat obscure in the Scriptures. He is only mentioned in six passages, and the only description of him is that he was over the household (2 Kings 18:18, 37 and Isaiah 36:3, 22). But, Eliakim was famous in heaven! "He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah."

The Lord would take the office and authority of the unfaithful Shebna and give it to Eliakim instead. "I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position... I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him." God will get His work done! If someone is unfaithful like Shebna, the Lord will remove him from his office, strip him of his authority and give it to another.

"I will summon my servant." Because Eliakim was the Lord's servant, the Lord would give him great authority: "I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David." In that day, the chief royal steward would have a large master key of the palace fastened to the shoulder of his tunic. The key was a picture and demonstration of the authority of the chief steward. Here, the Lord gives Eliakim the authority to open and shut doors as the Lord's representative, which no man can oppose. Notice the contrast between Shebna and Eliakim. Shebna is selfish, using his leadership position to further his own self-interests. But Eliakim was a man God honored and trusted. Both were serving King Hezekiah side by side. (Guzik)

This passage reminds me of Psalm 75:6-7, when God says he will lift one man up and bring another down. We can be so busy striving for own success that we miss pleasing God. Yet it is He who determines who will be exalted and who will be brought low. It is encouraging that even in the midst of God's judgment on Jerusalem, He found a faithful man on whom he could depend.

Judgment on the World

The connection between these chapters and the preceding ones appear to be as follows: the judgments pronounced upon the various countries and nations in those chapters are drawn together here into a focal point. The specific divine judgments described there become here the general judgment upon the nations, which will take place when the Lord Jesus Christ with His Church will return to this earth." (Bultema)

~ "The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left." ~ Isaiah 24:3-6

'Languish' means, "to be or become weak or feeble; droop; fade; to lose vigor and vitality." Why does the earth languish? Because in the Great Tribulation, the earth will be terribly afflicted by the judgments of the Lord. Rev. 8:7-13 describes the terrible effect of the judgments of the Lord upon the earth.

"They have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes." Transgression is the spirit of our age. Notice the slogans from some national advertising campaigns:

Nothing is taboo. Break all the rules. To know no boundaries. Relax: No rules here. Peel off inhibitions. Find your own road. We are all hedonists and want to do what feels good. That's what makes us human. Living without boundaries. Just do it.

The idea is constant: you don't have to respect God's boundaries because you can make your own and live by them. Humans have changed the law of God in the sense of changing the basic moral code which men have recognized and lived by for centuries. Once, it was universally recognized that it was wrong to lie, wrong to cheat, wrong to be sexually immoral, wrong to do so many other things. Today, all of that is approved and celebrated. We have changed the Lord's ordinances and we are ripe for judgment. Humans have changed the Word of God by replacing it with substitutes or fashioning it into something more suitable to their liking. Every time a preacher soft-peddles the gospel, a politician twists the Scriptures to rise in opinion polls or a counselor wrenches the context of God's Word to make it fit a crazy psychological theory, they have changed God's rules and are ripe for judgment. Man has "transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant." For an interpretation of these words of Isaiah, read Paul in Romans 1:18-32. (Morgan)

We must make sure our doctrine is not formed by our emotions, our fears or our desire to fit. We must simply determine what God is saying and then obeying it – no matter what the cost. God's truth must reign supreme in the church and in our hearts.

As you examine your life, on who are you ultimately depending and how is this evident?

As you examine your heart, are you more like Shebna or more like Eliakim? Explain.

What role does the Word of God play in your daily life and how would you like to grow in this area?

Day 13-14

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 25-28

In 25-27, Isaiah focuses on praising God and detailing the tremendous blessings of our future hope and of his future fruitful vineyard.

Hope of Heaven

In 25:6-10, Isaiah gives us a picture of heaven. Though common in the New Testament, descriptions of heaven are rare in the Old Testament, where the focus usually is on the coming of the Messiah and the new spiritual covenant. But Isaiah gives the Jews a glimpse into their eternal hope.

Isaiah 25:6-10

“On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples” (Isaiah 25:6). In several places, the Bible speaks of what is often called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Rev. 19:9 says, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” According to Isaiah 25:6, we might say this great feast takes place on earth, not in heaven. And what a feast it will be! For God’s people, this will be the “victory banquet” or the “awards banquet” after the final battle is over! Jesus is really looking forward to this banquet. He said to His disciples at the Last Supper, “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom (Matt. 26:29).” In this, Jesus spoke of His longing expectation for the day when He would take communion with His people at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Jesus is excited about this event. Are you? Paul knew this and looked forward to this day. He proclaimed in 1 Corinth. 15:54: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” Freud was wrong when he said, “And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be.” Compare that with Isaiah’s triumphant declaration, “He will swallow death up forever!” (Guzik)

The Peace of Our Salvation

Isaiah 26:1-4

What a beautiful passage. It says our salvation is our wall and our rampart (fortification). In Ephesians, it says that our salvation is our helmet. The image is of the nation that has kept the faith entering heaven through a gate. When we are inside the gate and in God’s holy city, we will be kept in perfect peace. 1 Peter 1:8-9 tells us that our salvation is not something we will receive when we die, but that we experience the blessings of salvation as soon as we are baptized. While we are on this earth, the saved can live in perfect peace because of the eternal Lord, our rock.

~ “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” ~ Isaiah 26:3

What a promise! “Perfect peace.” God says we can have perfect peace and stay in a place of perfect peace. In Hebrew, the term perfect peace is “shalom shalom.” In Hebrew, repetition communicates intensity. It isn’t just shalom; it is shalom shalom, or perfect peace. (Guzik)

“Understand, dear soul, that it is thy privilege to live inside the double doors of God’s loving care. He says to thee, ‘Peace, peace.’ If one assurance is not enough, He will follow it with a second and a third.” (Meyer)

The Hebrew word “sawmak” comes from the root “to prop” and has the idea “to lean upon or take hold of . . . bear up, establish, uphold, lay, lean, lie hard, put, rest self, set self, stand fast, stay (self), sustain” (Strong’s Dictionary). In other places, the same word is translated as “sustained” (Gen. 27:37, Psalm 3:5) for when the priest would put their hands on the head of a sacrificial animal (Ex. 29:10, 15, 19) or of the laying on of hands in other circumstances (Num. 27:18), of being upheld (Psalm 71:6), to stand fast upon (Psalm 111:8), of being established (Psalm 112:8), of leaning upon (Isaiah 36:6, 48:2).

So, what is your mind fixed on? Upon what do you lay your mind? What upholds your mind? Upon what does your mind stand fast? On what is your mind established? Upon what does your mind lean? To have this perfect peace, your mind cannot occasionally come to the Lord – it has to stay on Him. To be kept in this perfect peace, our mind must stay on the Lord. If our mind stays on ourselves, our problems, on difficult people in our lives or on anything else, then we can’t have this perfect peace. This is the heart that says with the Apostle Paul, “I may know Him” (Philip. 3:10). Satan loves to get our minds on anything except the Lord.

“Because He trusts in You.” This is another way of expressing the idea of keeping our minds stayed on Him. Usually, you keep your mind on whatever you are trusting. When we trust the Lord, we keep our mind stayed on Him. Proverbs 3:5 expresses this same idea: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” The word for “lean” in Proverbs 3:5 comes from the same root as the word “stayed” in Isaiah 26:3. When we trust in the Lord, we do not lean on our own understanding. To lean on the Lord is to trust Him. To be sustained by the Lord is to trust Him. To be established by the Lord is to trust Him. To be upheld by the Lord is to trust Him. The battle for trust in our lives begins in our minds. If we trust the Lord, it will show in our actions but begin in our mind. (Guzik)

God's Glory and Not Our Own

Isaiah 26:8-9

~ Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. ~ Isaiah 26:8a

What a wonderful, pure heart. We are not to run after our name being lifted up. We are not to ambitiously strive for our own renown to be heralded among people. This will only lead to emptiness and a constant chasing after what does not satisfy. Only when we are consumed with lifting up God's name and wanting His glory to be known throughout the world will we be at peace and have our souls fulfilled.

Well, then what about you? Are you just supposed to forget about you? Isaiah, answers that in 60:19 when he says, "your God will be your glory." Wow! What a verse. God has designed us in such a way that our glory is attached to God. When we read the Book of Revelation, isn't that what is happening in heaven when the thousands upon thousands are joined in joyful singing to God. In all those verses, there are no individuals being lifted up, only one collective voice praising our amazing God.

Isaiah 26:12

I love this verse because it takes our pride and destroys it. God has done for us anything good we have done. God has given us the desire and the ability to accomplish all we do. So the only proper response when we accomplish something great is to give glory to God and to thank Him (1 Corinth. 1:31, Gal 6:14).

God Tends His Vineyard

In Isaiah 27:2-6 and 28:23-29, God once again talks about His fruitful vineyard. Here he is talking about the Christian age, when He will "Fill the world with fruit." Here, God says:

- We should sing about this vineyard. (You sing about what you take joy in).
- The Lord will watch over it. (God is overseeing the whole process of people becoming Christians. God is working hard behind the scenes).
- God is watering it continually. (He is constantly opening hearts and getting people ready to be approached by disciples).
- God guards the harvest. (He protects open peoples' souls so that Satan will not harm them).
- God teaches us when to plant, when to plow, when to grind to powder, not to use a sledge and not to run over the harvest with a cartwheel. (God teaches how to bear fruit for His kingdom).

What a beautiful passage. Seeing all God has done and is doing to make sure that fruit for His kingdom fills the earth should make you want to collaborate with God and share your faith at every opportunity. It should also make you want to turn to God to teach you what to do and when to do it to ensure that as many people as possible become disciples of Christ.

What are you looking forward to when you get to heaven?

Do you feel you are experiencing the full measure of peace that God intended for you to experience? If not, what do you think is preventing you from experiencing this peace?

Why is it so important that we don't run after self glory, but instead focus all glory and honor on God?

As you read about God and his vineyard, what were some of your thoughts and convictions?

Days 15-16

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 29-32

God's Anger and Hope

In 29:1, God is upset with the Jews because they are spiritually blind, illiterate and asleep and are worshipping Him verbally without the proper heart. Verse 15 says they were going to great lengths to hide their sin from God. In verse 16, they question God and reject His authority over them. In the middle of God describing all their sin, He points to a glorious future in verses 17-19. Isaiah speaks of a fertile field and a time they will no longer be blind but will come out of the darkness and see. Verse 19 tells us that those who are humble who will enjoy these blessings. I love how God always gives hope even in the middle of the most condemning rebuke. We serve a God that longs to bless us and give us all we need – if only we will listen to and obey Him with a humble heart.

Our Plans: God's or Man's?

In 30:1-3 and 31:1, God is again angry at Israel for making plans without consulting Him. He is upset that instead of turning to Him and depending on Him, they are turning to the ungodly nation of Egypt for help. The Assyrian army is bearing down on the Jews and plans to attack Egypt. The Jews felt they had a better chance of fighting the Assyrians if they joined forces with Egypt than if they fought Assyria alone. This makes perfect sense – except for the tremendous spiritual implications involved with joining a nation completely immersed in idol worship. God takes this as a personal insult. In a sense, the Jews were saying they had more confidence in the armies of Egypt than in their God. We can be the exact same way when we compromise our commitment to God and His church in order to make more money. We are saying to God, "I trust more in money than I do in you." This is true of anything we rely on instead of trusting that God is able to take care of us. Note that this group of Jews would be overthrown by the Assyrians but that later, when Hezekiah King of Judah turned to the Lord, God sent an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrians (Isaiah 36-37).

Humble to God's Rebuke

In 30:9-14, the Jews do not want to hear what the prophet Isaiah has to say. They don't want to be confronted with the truth. They want to hear pleasant things. God tells them that since they refused to listen to Him they will be destroyed. We often want to believe that we are just fine with God the way we are. We don't want to have to examine our hearts, motives and sin. We avoid people who will bring a message that we must change to please God. We are drawn to people who feel we are just fine they way we are and there is no need to change. We can resist repentance because we are afraid of what we will find if we really examine our hearts. We can feel that if we really see ourselves as God sees us, we will get overwhelmed, depressed and discouraged – so it seems easier and simpler not to examine our hearts. We can also resist repentance because we love our sin or do not want to make all the sacrifices and put in all the work it will take to change.

However, God says in Proverbs 1:23 that if we heed His rebuke He will pour out His heart to us and make His thoughts known to us. WOW! What a wonderful and powerful promise. If we seek God's correction and respond to it, He will give us His heart and reveal to us what and how He thinks.

In Isaiah 30:15 and 32:17, God says our salvation depends on our repentance and rest. He also says that our strength is in our trust and quietness. God wants to be our refuge. He wants us to turn to Him and trust Him. If we do that, three things will happen:

1. We will be confronted with our sin and be forced to deal with it.
2. We will find true rest for our souls because God will help us repent and then give us peace.
3. We will have confidence and strength from knowing we are right with God and that His power is fighting for us.

How do you go about making plans for your life? How do they include God?

How have you responded to God's rebukes in your life recently?

Are there any areas of your life in which you have been avoiding the light of God's Spirit? Is there anything you're afraid to expose or are resistant to changing?

Days 17-18

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 33-35

Judgment

In Isaiah 33:1, God is telling Assyria that even though they have seemingly defeated the Jews for now, they will get their punishment in due time. They will be paid back for the harm they have done. In 33:18-19, God says that in the future the Jews will look around and say, "Where is the chief officer, where is the one who took the revenue." In other words, the Assyrians will no longer be in their land. Jesus taught the same principle in Matt. 7:1-2, when he says we will be judged with the same measure with which we judge others. That's why we need to be careful not to be critical of people.

In Isaiah 34:2-4, God is judging the whole world and talking about the end times, when the nations will all be destroyed and the stars will be dissolved. The sky will be rolled up like a scroll. God transitions from talking about the judgment He will bring on Assyria to the judgment He will bring on the whole world. 2 Peter 3:10 describes the end of the world in almost the exact same way Isaiah describes it here.

The Redeemed

As always, when God pronounces judgment in Isaiah, He follows His judgment with the future hope of the redeemed. That is exactly what God does again in a most beautiful way in chapter 35. What a glorious picture of God taking our useless, desperate situation and turning us – individually and as a church – into a fruitful, strong, redeemed people on His highway to heaven. Consider the following themes in chapter 35:

He describes us as in a desert, a parched place and a wilderness. He says we have feeble hands, knees that give way, fearful

hearts, blind eyes, deaf ears and mute tongues. Yet, God says He will do the following in us:

- We will blossom and burst into bloom.
- We will rejoice and shout for joy. Gladness and joy will overtake us.
- We will see the glory of God.
- He will come with divine retribution to save us.
- He will open our eyes, ears and mouths.
- The desert will become a land with bubbling springs. Water will gush forth and there will be streams in the desert.
- God will put us on a 'highway of holiness' (vs. 8) on which only the redeemed can journey. The "lion" (Satan) will not be there. The unclean will not be on this highway. Only the redeemed – those whom God has ransomed.

What an incredible description of the kingdom of God. Chapter 34 is the most widespread judgment of humankind in the book of Isaiah and it is followed in chapter 35 by one of the most wonderful pictures of God's redemption. I love that it is God saving, giving, enabling and strengthening His people and creating a highway of holiness. The result of God's work is people who are fruitful, joyful and powerful. We must continually look to God as our savior and our strength. We must fear Him, revere Him, love Him and obey Him as we continue on His Highway of Holiness.

In what ways do you think you need to change the way you judge others?

When you read about the destruction of the world in chapter 34, what reaction do you have?

What is the most encouraging part of chapter 35 for you?

Days 19-20

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 36-39

God Acts Powerfully to Save His People

Chapters 36-37 are the story of the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, sending his field commander to overthrow the cities of Judah. He had already conquered most of Judah's cities when he stood at the gates of Jerusalem, threatening to attack. The king of Judah, Hezekiah, receives his threats and turns to God for help. God hears Hezekiah prayer and puts to death 185,000 of Sennacherib's troops.

In 36:2, it says Sennacherib's field commander had just come from Lachish. The mention of Lachish is important historically. Lachish was 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Archaeologists have discovered a pit there with the remains of about 1,500

casualties of Sennacherib's attack on Lachish. In the British Museum, you can see an Assyrian carving depicting their siege of the city of Lachish, which was an important fortress city of Judah. (Guzik)

The field commander is trying to discourage the people in Jerusalem and convince them that they have no chance at success and so should just give up. He is making promises to them if they would surrender and is disparaging King Hezekiah's leadership. In 36:7, the field commander condemns King Hezekiah for saying he is depending on the Lord after destroying all the altars of the Lord on the high places. The following is Guzik's commentary on these high places.

The high places were spots of "individual worship" that were prohibited by God's law (Leviticus 17:1-4). Israel was commanded to bring their sacrifices to the official center for sacrifice (the tabernacle or, later, the temple). In the pagan world at that time, it was customary to offer sacrifice wherever one pleased – altars would customarily be built on high hills, in forested areas or at other special places. That practice may have been fine for the time of the patriarchs. But now, God regarded sacrifice at high places as an offense. Hezekiah did the right thing when he took away the high places and the altars, demanding that the people come to the temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifice.

The Annals of Sennacherib (the Taylor Prism), which can be seen in the British Museum, show how full of pride Sennacherib's heart still was even though he did not conquer Jerusalem!

"I attacked Hezekiah of Judah, who had not subjected himself to me, and took 46 fortresses, forts and small cities. I carried away captive 200,150 people, big and small, both male and female, a multitude of horses, young bulls, asses, camels and oxen. Hezekiah himself I locked up in Jerusalem like a bird in its cage. I put up banks against the city. I separated his cities, whose inhabitants I had taken prisoners from his realm and gave them to Mitiniti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Zilbel, king of Gaza and thus diminished his country. And I added another tax to the one imposed on him earlier." (Cited in Bultema)

What an intense time for the people of God. They were being bombarded with physical threats of war and emotional attacks of how weak they were. They were also being bombarded with the field commander telling them how bad their leadership was. They had to face the fact that the Assyrian field commander had conquered every city he had attacked in Judah and was now going to attack them. These are textbook examples of the ways Satan attacks us. Satan waits and then brings many negative things to bear at the same time. We can have financial problems, spiritual problems, relational problems and health problems all at the same time. We see this same tactic in Job chapter 1, when Satan brings many negative things to bear on Job.

Hezekiah handles these attacks correctly. How should you handle similar attacks?

1. Don't allow yourself to be caught up in Satan's schemes. 36:21 says Hezekiah commanded his people not to even respond to the field commander at all. We need to recognize when Satan is attacking us and not allow him to take us on the emotional, spiritual and mental roller coaster at all (2 Corinth. 10:4-5).
2. Go immediately to God and to Godly people. In 37:1-3, Hezekiah went immediately to the temple and the prophet of God, Isaiah. We must immediately let God help us process Satan's attacks by going to Him and to the most spiritual people we can find.
3. Continue to go to God as the battle intensifies. Sennacherib sent a letter with further threats. In chapter 37:14, Hezekiah takes the letter, goes to the temple, spreads the letter out before God and prays.
4. God always comes through. 37:21-22 says God came to rescue His people because of Hezekiah's prayer. Wow!

In chapter 38, Hezekiah learns that God has ordained that he would soon die. We know from comparing 2 Kings 18:2 with 2 Kings 20:6 that Hezekiah was 39 years old when he learned he would soon die. He asked God to keep him alive and God gave him 15 more years. However, in those years he had a son named Manasseh who became one of the most evil kings in Judah's history. During that time, he also received envoys from Babylon and showed them all the treasures of his palace because of his own pride. The Babylonians then attacked and overthrew Judah and took all of Hezekiah's riches. We learn from this that God's plan is always better than ours is, even if we convince ourselves that ours is better. We must embrace whatever suffering or difficulties may come with God's plan because we know and trust that He knows best and will take care of us eternally if we trust him.

How have you felt Satan attack you?

How have you handled it and how do you feel you need to handle it differently?

Is there something you know is God's will but have been resisting? How do you think God wants you to handle it?

Days 21-22

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 40-43

Our Awesome God

Isaiah is a book in three sections. Chapters 1-35 are prophetic, with the theme of condemnation. Chapters 36-39 are historic, and the theme is confiscation. Chapters 40-66 are messianic, and the theme is consolation. (Guzik)

These four chapters are some of the most encouraging chapters in the Bible. Chapter 40 describes the power, wisdom, justice and love of God. Chapter 41 describes how God will protect, empower and save His people. Chapter 42 is a beautiful description of the Messiah and His role in the coming age. Chapter 43 describes God's emotions toward His people and gives them a tremendous future hope.

In 40:5-8, Isaiah compares the fragile, temporary nature of man with the eternal powerful nature of God. Isaiah says that men are simply withering grass while God is glorious and eternal.

Voltaire, the French skeptic and infidel who died in 1778, said that 100 years from his time, Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history and the Bible would be a forgotten book. Only 50 years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society used his press and his house to produce stacks of Bibles. (Guzik)

In 40:10-21, Isaiah compares the true God with idols. Isaiah says that:

- God rules (verse 10)
- God tends His flock like a shepherd, keeping his sheep close to His heart (verse 11)
- God has all knowledge without anyone teaching Him (verses 12-14)
- All created things are like one drop in a bucket compared to the enormity and power of God (verse 15-17)
- An idol, on the other hand, must be dressed and taken care of by man so that it will not fall over.

In 40:22-26, God is again compared to man. God sits above the circle of the earth. God reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. God created everything, including the stars. Each one is perfectly placed and not one is missing. Man, on the other hand, is almost gone as soon as he is created.

In 40:27-31, Isaiah states that God not only never grows weary they way people do, but even gives His strength to fragile humans whenever they grow weary if they put their hope in the Him.

God is addressing these issues for a few reasons:

- The Jews were worshipping idols instead of God, or in some case worshipping both God and idols. (2 Kings 17:40-41)
 - They put too much stock in their own thinking and reasoning and didn't feel it necessary to consult God. (Isaiah 30:1-2)
-

- When God did not act as soon as the Jews wanted Him to or God did not do what the Jews wanted, they started complaining that He didn't care.

We all need a healthy dose of who God is and who we are. At different times, God reveals this difference in dramatic ways (Isaiah 6, Job 38-42) so we will not drift from Him. When we have a realistic picture of God and of ourselves, we will never fail to worship Him and to obey Him humbly.

God Empowers Man

The following is Redpath's commentary on chapter 41:

"I don't know of any other than the Creator Himself who can take a weak worm and make it sharp with teeth! God can do that." (Redpath)

This chapter is the great "I WILL" chapter of the Bible. No fewer than 14 times in the scope of these verses does God reinforce His authority with the promise, "I will." (Redpath)

- I will strengthen you. (Isaiah 41:10)
- I will help you. (Isaiah 41:10, 13-14)
- I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)
- I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth. (Isaiah 41:15)
- I will open rivers in desolate heights. (Isaiah 41:18)
- I will make the wilderness a pool of water. (Isaiah 41:18)
- I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree. (Isaiah 41:19)
- I will set in the desert the cypress tree. (Isaiah 41:19)
- I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings. (Isaiah 41:27)

Notice the contrast between Isaiah 41 and Isaiah 14, which is Satan's "I will" chapter. Look at Satan's "I wills":

- I will ascend into heaven. (Isaiah 14:13)
- I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. (Isaiah 14:13)
- I will also sit on the mount of the congregation. (Isaiah 14:13)
- I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. (Isaiah 14:14)
- I will be like the Most High. (Isaiah 14:14)

Satan's "I wills" are proud and self-directed. The Lord's "I wills" are for the benefit and blessing of His people. Even though Satan, in his pride, proclaimed his "I wills" – none of them happened. In contrast, every one of God's "I will's" will actually happen!

When God says 'I will,' He says it with all the authority of omnipotence. He has foreseen every difficulty. He has studied every obstacle that may come in His way. He has anticipated every possible contingency. He knows the weakness of the one to whom He makes His promise, and yet He says, "I will!" (Redpath)

The Messiah

The first seven verses of chapter 42 are a prophecy about Jesus. In those verses it states:

- God delights in Him.
 - God's Spirit is on Him.
 - Jesus will bring Justice.
 - He will not be loud and boisterous.
 - There will be no violence in Him.
-

- Jesus will never falter or never be discouraged.
- Jesus Himself will be a covenant with God's people.
- He will be a light for the gentiles.
- Jesus will free those in prison and darkness.

Many of these qualities are repeated repeatedly in prophecies found in the Old and New testaments. This serves to establish the certainty of Jesus' qualities and purpose. The one found only here is that Jesus will never falter or be discouraged. What a statement, given all of the attacks, betrayals and faults of those around him. This could only happen because of Jesus' certainty that He would be victorious in the end. (John 13:2-4)

God Loves Us

In chapter 43, God expresses his deep love for His people. In verse 4, He describes the motivation for all He has done and will do for His people. God says, "Since you are precious and honored in my sight and because I love you." Wow! If we could let that concept sink completely into our hearts and minds, every aspect of our lives would become very different.

Because of this love, God tells His people that they should forget all of their failures from the past and focus on the glorious future that God has prepared for them, a future that will be completely new. A future where God will make a way where it seems there is no way and will produce streams of hope where there seems to be no hope (Rom 4:17-21). God asks a question to His people: Do you not perceive it? God is working hard behind the scenes to open doors, make ways and produce streams. The question isn't whether God is working hard in our lives. That is a given. The question is do we perceive all that God is doing? Or are we so caught up in our daily lives that we are oblivious to God's power and His plans?

What difference does it make in your life when you are completely in tune with God's power, love and wisdom?

What is your heart's response when, in chapter 41, God declares all that He will do for His people?

How are we able to best perceive all that God has planned for us?

Days 22-23

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 44-47

Blessings from God

In chapter 44, God tells Israel how valuable they are to Him and how he will bless them. He says:

- I have chosen you. (verse 1)

- I will help you. (verse 2)
- I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring. (verse 3)
- I will pour out blessings on your descendants. (verse 3)
- You descendants will spring up like grass in the meadow. (verse 4)
- I will not forget you. (verse 21)
- I have swept away all your offenses. (verse 22)
- I have redeemed you. (verse 22)

God does this for two reasons:

1. God wants Israel to know the depth of His love and commitment to them
2. God wants them to compare who He is and what He has done and will do for them to the idols they have made.

No Other God

There is a real sense of anger and frustration when God talks about the idols that Israel has been worshipping. In verses 9-19, God describes His frustration and the stupidity of worshipping what people's hands have created. God is insulted that man is even tempted to worship these idols instead of Him.

Here in the United States, we can't relate to worshipping a carved wooden idol – but we can relate to putting more trust in money or country than in God. We can relate to putting more focus on excelling in our careers than excelling in God's work. We can relate to seeking first our own desires and wants instead of seeking first God's kingdom. In each of these instances, we are worshipping an idol, though it is not standing in our living room. God wants our heart, passion, thoughts, time and love. If anything puts God in a secondary position then we have an idol that must be destroyed.

God says many times in these chapters that He is God and there is no other. See Isaiah 44:6-8, 24; 45:5-7, 14b, 18, 21, 24; and 46:4-5, 9-10

He tells Israel repeatedly that He is the almighty. No one is like Him. No one else can save them. No one else can speak and make it come about. In the Lord alone is righteousness and strength. God alone makes, sustains and carries you. God is trying to persuade and convince Israel to worship only Him. God knows that if they worship anything but Him they will be destroyed. He is the only living, secure, permanent, powerful, loving, wise God in existence. As soon as we put our trust in anything else, Satan gains power over us.

Incredibly Specific Prophecy

In 44:28-45:1 and 45:13, God refers to King Cyrus rebuilding His temple and being used by God as an instrument to subdue nations, strip kings of their armor, open doors and set His exiles free. Cyrus did do all of these things for God. However, there is one problem. Cyrus would not be born for another 150 years. Isaiah 6:1 says God commissioned Isaiah to be a prophet the year King Uzziah died. King Uzziah died in 739 B.C., while King Cyrus died in 530 B.C. and reigned for 30 years. This puts about 180 years between the writing of this prophecy regarding Cyrus and the time Cyrus actually did what the verses prophesied would happen. According to Ezra 1:1-4, Cyrus commissioned the Temple of the Lord to be rebuilt. What makes this prophecy even more fantastic is that the Jews were fighting Assyria and then Babylonia at the time. Only after these two kingdoms would the Medo-Persians take over the Jews some 180 years later. During the writing of the prophecy, the Medo-Persians being over the Jews was not even a thought – and yet God writes that the King of the Medo-Persians would subdue nations and rebuild His temple. Naming the king who would rebuild God's temple roughly 180 years before it happened could only be because God wrote the book of Isaiah.

Poole, Trapp and Motyer write this about the prophecy of Cyrus:

The prophet alluded in Isaiah 41:2 to a king who would bring about Israel's release from captivity, but in this passage, amazingly, he mentions him by name: Cyrus, whom God designated by his proper name 200 years before he was born, that this might be undeniable evidence of the certainty and exactness of God's foreknowledge and a convincing argument – and so most fit to conclude this dispute between God and idols. (Poole)

Xenophon, in his first book, gives us a list of whom Cyrus subdued: the Syrians, Assyrians, Arabians, Cappodocians, Phrygians, Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, Bactrians, Indians, Cilicians, Sacians, Paphloagonians, Maryandines and many other nations. He also had dominion over the Asiatics, Greeks, Cyprians, and Egyptians. He vanquished, wrote Herodotus, whatever country he invaded. (Trapp)

To open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut . . . I will break in pieces the gates of bronze: The armies of the Medes and Persians, under Cyrus, conquered the city of Babylon in a remarkable raid described in Daniel 5. According to the ancient historian Herodotus: While King Belshazzar of Babylon held a reckless party, Cyrus conquered the city by diverting the flow of the Euphrates into a nearby swamp; thus lowering the level of the river so his troops could march through the water and under the river gates. But they still would not have been able to enter had not the bronze gates of the inner walls been left inexplicably unlocked. God opened the gates of the city of Babylon for Cyrus and put it in writing 200 years before it happened! "In October 539 BC, Cyrus advanced into lower Mesopotamia and, leaving Babylon till last, conquered and occupied the surrounding territory. Seeing which way the wind was blowing, Nabonidus of Babylon deserted his city, leaving it in the charge of his son Belshazzar. The taking of Babylon was as bloodless and effortless as Daniel 6 implies." (Motyer)

The question may come up, "Has this ever happened before in the word of God." The answer is yes, it has. In 1 Kings 13:2, the Bible says, "He cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD: "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here and human bones will be burned on you."

Many years later, in 2 Kings 23:16, the Bible states: "Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things."

Here God predicts that a man named Josiah would sacrifice the false priest and burn human bones on the altars on which they were sacrificing. A specific prophecy and the specific name of Josiah many years before these events took place. The only explanation is that God wrote 1 Kings and knew what would happen.

Which of God's aspects motivate you the most to worship Him?

What does Satan use as an idol to tempt you? How have you done in resisting him?

How does God giving the specific name of Cyrus 180 years before his birth affect you?

Days 25-26

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 48-51

Hypocrisy and Repentance

In 48:1-2, Isaiah deals with the hypocrisy of the Jews. He says they called themselves citizens of the holy city, take oaths in the name of the Lord and say they rely on the God of Israel – but not in truth and not in righteousness. The Jews said the right things, but in their hearts, they were not serving God. They were serving themselves. We must always be on the alert so that hypocrisy does not crop up in our own lives. Don't try to get by with just knowing the church culture and knowing how to say and do the "proper" things. We must truly seeking God, repenting of sin, obey His Word and love Him with our whole hearts. In Rev 2:1-5, the Ephesian church had many things on straight except one thing: they had lost their first love. We must guard our hearts from all forms of hypocrisy.

In 48:17-19, God is dreaming about what could have been. We see God's heart and we see how He longs to teach, direct and help us. He tells them that if they would just follow Him, then:

- Your peace would be like a river.
- Your righteousness would be like the waves of the sea.
- Your descendants would be like the sand.
- Your name would never be cut off.

It is sobering to think about all the unfulfilled potential we have because of disobedience or unbelief keeps us from everything God has for us. "Yes, I am deeply impressed with the simplicity of the road to revival. Just 24 hours obedience in our lives and we would be living in such a flood tide of Holy Spirit blessing there would not be room enough to contain it!" (Redpath)

'I Will Not Yield My Glory to Another'

In Isaiah 48:11, 42:8 and 60:19, God deals with a topic that has really captured my attention: He says He will not yield His glory to another. In Isaiah 60:19, He says He will be our Glory. He repeats that thought in Zech. 2:5. God was concerned that His glory would be diminished by the Jews turning for help to their own wisdom, to foreign countries and to idols instead of to Him. Isaiah's comment in 60:19 that God himself will be our glory is a deep, meaningful statement. There is a desire in each of us to feel respected and to be viewed by others in high regard. Basically, we want glory.

However, God repeatedly says that all glory should be His. I believe that for every desire in our hearts, there is a godly and righteous way to fulfill that desire as well as a twisted, evil way to satisfy (seemingly) that desire. Our desires for sex, food, pleasure, success, rest and even glory can be fulfilled God's way or Satan's way. In Gen. 15:1, God tells Abraham, "I am your very great reward." In Psalm 73:25 it says, "Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you." Once we truly understand the significance of being with God, being one of His own and being counted as citizens of heaven, then our glory is simply wrapped up in the fact that we are eternally attached to Him and that is enough. It is actually much more than enough. I belong to God and I am His. That simple fact fulfills all of our need for glory. Satan doesn't want us to be satisfied with that. Abraham fell short in this at first. He thought, to loosely paraphrase Gen. 15, "Yeah, yeah that's nice and all, but to truly have glory I need a son." Satan doesn't want us to be satisfied with simply belonging to God, even though it is the most powerful, glorious, wonderful position for which any human could hope. In heaven, we will all be worshipping God and His Son, not ourselves or any other human. In Rev. 4:10-11, the 24 elders laid their crowns at the throne of God. This action means the 24 elders were, in essence, saying, "This is all about God and Jesus' glory – not ours. We are simply overwhelmed with joy to be here and counted worthy to be with God and Jesus forever." We must get started on that while we're still on the earth.

Jesus to Reach the Gentiles

In 49:6 and in 50:6-9, we have more messianic prophecies. Isaiah says Jesus won't just be a light to the Jews but also the gentiles – which was a radical, distasteful thought to any Jew. In 50:6, it says that on His way to the cross people would pull Jesus' beard. Here is Spurgeon's commentary on this passage.

There is no specific mention in the gospels of those who plucked out the beard of Jesus as part of His pre-crucifixion suffering, but from this passage in Isaiah we know it happened. What terrible agony Jesus endured! He suffered even more than the gospel writers said he did. "We have before us the language of prophecy, but it is as accurate as though it had been written at the moment of the event. Isaiah might have been one of the evangelists, so exactly does he describe what our Savior endured." (Spurgeon)

God Will Never Forget Us

In 49:15-16, God is answering the accusation that He forgets His people when they most need Him. He is assuring them that He has not forgotten them even though they feel that way. He says that even if a mother would forget her own baby, God would never forget or forsake His people. God further answers this charge in 50:1-2. Consider the following:

“The people of Israel in exile are likening themselves to a divorced wife, forgotten and forsaken of God. The Lord interrupts this kind of thinking and breaks into it with a challenge to His people, saying, ‘Where is the bill of divorcement? Produce it. Produce the bill and show me where I divorced you.’ But Israel cannot do it. Of course, she cannot find it, because He has never given it to her. God cannot divorce those whom He has taken into covenant relationship with Himself.” (Redpath)

Or, there may be another sense: “Here the Lord compares Himself to a man and father of a household who is treated shamefully by his own wife and children. When he came home, there was no one to welcome him and when he called, no one answered him. Hence, He who had the right to all their respect was treated as one without any rights.” (Bultema)

Encouragement to the Righteous

In Isaiah 51:1-17, God addresses all who “pursue righteousness.” God wants to make sure that the Jews who are really trying to be pure and righteous did not get weak or discouraged. He spends 17 verses reassuring them that he is with them and would save them, give them strength and protect them. God knows that once a person gives into discouragement, it is a downward spiral. We must never give in to one of Satan’s biggest tools – discouragement. Given the God we serve, the promises he has made and the future we are certain of, there is absolutely no reason ever to be discouraged.

“Once a Christian gets eaten up with discouragement and unbelief it takes a great deal to shake him out of it. Those two emotions are the masterstrokes of Satan. So long as the child of God maintains an attitude of praise and trust in the Lord, then he is invincible. Once the devil gets him discouraged, that poor man is really going to take a knocking!” (Redpath)

Are there any areas of your life that are hypocritical? If so, what do you need to do about them?

What is your response to the above thoughts of God Himself being our glory?

What are the things that most easily discourage you? What do you think God would say to you about those things?

Days 27-28

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 52-55

The Suffering Servant

Isaiah 52 and 53 are arguably the most important chapters of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. The specific and thorough nature of this prophecy is what makes it so important to the Christian faith. In Isaiah 9:6-7, there is another prophecy that the Jews recognized as speaking of the coming Messiah. It talks about a mighty ruler who will come through the line of

David and whose reign will never end. It says that this man will be called Mighty God. Because of this prophecy, the Jews were waiting for a military and political ruler that would release them from their Roman oppressors. However, when they looked at Isaiah 52 and 53, they were confused. This prophecy speaks of a man who is unpopular and unattractive. It says this man would be struck by God and that he would suffer greatly for our sins. The two prophecies did not seem to go together. In Acts 8:26-39, there was an educated Jew traveling back from Jerusalem to Ethiopia while reading this portion of Isaiah we know as chapter 53. He had no idea about who Isaiah was talking about. This tells us that the Jews of the day had no clue that Isaiah 52-53 was a prophecy about the Messiah because it countered their image of the Messiah. Let's look at the specifics of this prophecy:

- He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. (Verse 4; fulfilled in Mark 1:32-34)
- He was pierced for our transgressions. (Verse 5; fulfilled in Matt 27:35)
- God laid on Him the sin of us all. (Verse 6; see 2 Cor. 5:21)
- He was silent before the men that would slaughter Him. (Verse 7; fulfilled in Matt. 27:12-14)
- He had no children. (Verse 8)
- He was assigned a grave with the wicked. (Verse 9; fulfilled in Matt. 27:38)
- He was assigned a grave with the rich. (Verse 9; fulfilled in Matt. 27:57-60)
- There was no violence or deceit in Him. (Verse 9; see Hebrews 4:15)
- He will have many spiritual offspring. (Verse 10; fulfilled in Matt. 28:18-20)
- After the suffering of His soul He will see the light of life. (Verse 11; fulfilled in Matt. 28:5-7)
- He poured out His life unto death. (Verse 12; fulfilled in Matt. 27:50)

Many of these facts were not just found in the New Testament biblical accounts but also in non-Christian history of the time. Here is what the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus had to say about Jesus when he wrote in approximately 70 A.D.:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, is not extinct at this day. (Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 3, verse 3)

God's Thoughts and God's Ways

In chapter 54, God tells the Jews that although He was angry for a short while and they had to suffer because of their sin, He would forgive them and bless them and their children. In 55, God tells them to come to Him and seek Him so that He may bless them. Then in 55:8-9, God says that His thoughts are not their thoughts and His ways are not their ways. He says the difference between his ways and thoughts and their ways and thoughts were "as the heavens are higher than the earth." God said this because the Jews just couldn't figure God out. Why was He displeased with them before and now going to bless them? Why did He use the ungodly nations of Assyria and Babylon to conquer God's people?

We often we feel that if God would let us in on what He is doing then we would get on board with His plan. However, God is saying that it doesn't work that way. He says that even if He did explain His thoughts and ways to us, they are so much higher than ours that we still wouldn't get it. It is obvious that suffering is always a part of God's plan to mature His people, but that would never be a part of our plan for our lives (Romans 8:17, Phil 1:29, 1 Peter 4:1-3). Because of this, He simply asks us to trust and obey Him even though we don't completely understand His plan.

Even though God does ask us to obey when we don't understand, He still wants us to be on His same wavelength with Him as much as possible. In Proverbs 1:23, God tells us that if we respond to His rebukes He will pour out His heart to us and make his thoughts known to us. Wow! He will make his thoughts known to us. What an honor. And it comes from responding to His rebuke.

Psalm 25:9, tells us that God shows the humble His ways. 1 Corinth. 2:16 says we have the mind of Christ. Philip. 2:5 says we

should have the attitude of Christ. Ephesians 5:1 tell us to imitate God. All of these verses seem to indicate that we can think like God and know His ways. Therefore, we can come to some conclusions:

- God is on a much higher plain than our natural selves are.
- We must obey God whether we understand His thinking or not.
- As we humble ourselves and respond to His correction, we begin to think like God and know His ways.
- Through this process, we will become more and more like Jesus.

When you read the prophecy in Isaiah 52-53, what are some of your thoughts and emotions about Jesus?

Looking back on your life, how do you see God's ways and thoughts? How were they better than your ways and thoughts?

Days 29-30

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 56-59

Security for the Disciple

In 56:3, God refers to a common feeling among His people that they are not worthy to go to heaven and therefore no matter what they do they will not make it. It says that they will say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people."

Guzik's commentary on this verse

Often when people feel like foreigners or outcasts, the feelings become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is only by refusing to embrace such feelings, and choosing instead to trust in God's promise, that such feelings can be broken. If God says you belong, then you belong. (Guzik)

We must find God's promises that relate to our salvation and make a decision to believe the promise of God over our feelings when Satan comes knocking with doubt about our position with God and our place in heaven.

Unrighteous Leaders

In Isaiah 56:10-12 God paints a bleak picture of the leaders of His people. He describes them as men who:

- Are blind
 - Lack Knowledge
 - Are mute dogs that cannot bark
 - Love to dream
 - Love to sleep
 - Fill their own appetites
-

- Seek their own gain
- Are drunkards

No wonder the Israelites were so easily led astray doctrinally and morally with leaders like this. If we hold any position of influence in God's kingdom we must make sure that we fear God and put the good of God and His people as our first priority. We must be willing to say what needs to be said no matter how unpopular. We must be keenly aware of what God's will is, and what Satan is trying to do as well. We must not sit in an ivory tower but know the condition of our flock and make sure that we meet the people of God's needs. We must not be lazy but diligent and have the same work ethic as Jesus Christ.

The Emptiness of Idols

In Chapter 57:3-13 God describes His people that have run after idols. They are sacrificing their children to false gods, they are making other sacrifices to the false god Molech, they are forgetting God and they are fearing and worshipping other gods.

People who would not make a small sacrifice for the LORD God would kill their own children for a pagan idol! "And as the love of harlots is oft hotter than that of husband and wife, so superstition many times outdoeth true religion." (Trapp)

Satan tries to make the darkness seem more exciting than the light when we have been in the light and have enjoyed all the benefits of the light. However after we have given into Satan's darkness, we are left stripped of our strength in God and empty and void. Satan only wants to separate us from God and he is willing to give us a short thrill as long as he can have our soul for eternity.

You are wearied in the length of your way: As time went on, the spiritual adultery of God's people wasn't rewarding. After the initial thrill of their spiritual adultery wore off, they were wearied. But even then, they would not repent. (Guzik)

God lives in Heaven and with the Humble

Isaiah 57:15 is a beautiful passage that displays two very different aspects of God's character. On one hand it says that God is the high and lofty one who lives in a high and holy place. It states that God is eternal and even His name is holy. God is all-powerful, all knowing, all wise, all loving. He is majestic and is to be feared and revered. God holds everyone's life and death in his hands. He is the Lord of lords and the King of Kings. No one can begin to compare to Him. His thoughts and plans are far beyond even our understanding. He sits on His throne in heaven and all the angelic host are in constant wonder as they sing His praises constantly. On the other hand, He lives with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit. Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".

God is trying to motivate the Israelites to repent. The more we focus on God's nature, the more impressed, and blown away and emotionally moved we become. The more we examine God's greatness, the more motivated we are to be close to Him and on his side. The more we immerse ourselves in the grandeur and love of God the more our own sin is exposed and His great light shines on our darkness and we are disgusted with our sin and desperately want to be cleansed and empowered to change. As we focus on, examine, and immerse ourselves in every aspect of God's character we will be full of passion and zeal to purify ourselves to be with Him and to be like Him.

Worthless Religion

Isaiah 58 deals with the Israelites going through the motions of fasting and worshipping God but in reality, those actions are not in agreement with their hearts. They are saying, hey we fasted and you didn't see what we were doing, we humbled ourselves and you didn't even notice. It is obvious that the Israelites thought that they could manipulate God to get what they wanted. If I act spiritual and humble then you should bless me.

God's answer to them is that He would only honor their fasting and worship if from their heart they would spend themselves to help others and focus on satisfying the needs of their neighbors. If their hearts would completely turn toward God and others instead of themselves then God would make their light shine and would guide them and satisfy their needs. He would strengthen them and make them a well-watered garden.

We learn from this chapter that God abhors fake religion and wants a people whose hearts are devoted completely to Him and to others. We must always be aware that the sins of hypocrisy and selfishness are always waiting to harden the hearts of the religious and we must counteract this by examining our motives in the light of God's word and be in the habit of repenting when we see these sins creep into our lives.

Isaiah 59 displays the great need for a redeemer. The Israelites were deeply entrenched in their sin and there was no one that cared or was appalled at their sin, so God himself had to design a plan to redeem His people. Verse 16 says that God's own arm would be the redeemer and work salvation for Him. God's own arm refers to Jesus. In verse 20 Isaiah simply says that the redeemer will come to those who repent of their sin.

How do you combat Satan when he gets you to doubt your salvation? Has it been effective?

What are the characteristics of God that motive you to repent of your sin?

How are you most tempted to be a hypocrite? How are you dealing with those areas of your life?

Days 31-32

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 60-64

Heaven and the Christian Age

I love this passage of Scripture. It depicts the Christian age and the upcoming eternal promise of heaven in a wonderful and moving way. Barnes called Isaiah 60 "a description of the Golden Age under the Messiah."

It says in 60:18 that we will "call our walls salvation." Walls protect people from attack and harm. The knowledge of our eternal salvation protects us when Satan attacks us using suffering or temptations. It says we will call our gates praise, meaning we enter into intimacy with God through praise.

Verse 19 says we will no longer need the sun or the moon for light because the Lord Himself will be our light. Revelation 21:23 says the same thing: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

Isaiah 60:19 says God himself will be our Glory. All of our glory will be wrapped up in God, in whom He is, and in our unity with Him.

Verse 21 says the righteous will possess the land forever. Rev. 22:5 says the saved will reign forever. 1 Corinth. 6:3 says we will judge angels in heaven. Daniel 7:18 says the saints will possess the kingdom forever.

I don't know all that is meant by the saints possessing, reigning and judging angels – but it certainly sounds exciting, and it shows God has really thought through a great eternity for those who are saved. As I look at this earth and see how much thought, energy and effort God has put into something temporary, I can't imagine how wonderful and awesome heaven will be, considering He made those plans for eternity.

~ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever. ~ Revelation 22:5

In Isaiah 60:22, God says He will make the weakest a thousand and the smallest a mighty nation. Wow! What an awesome promise that no matter how small or weak we are in the kingdom, God will take what we have and, as we trust and obey Him, multiply us by 1000 times or more. He can do this because our effectiveness does not depend on our ability but on our faithfulness and, more importantly, on God's power.

In Isaiah 61, God continues to show us a vision of the coming kingdom in a poetic and beautiful way.

Proclaim the Lord's Favor

In 61:1-2, Isaiah is in a sense showing us the commission that God gave Jesus as the Messiah. It says God had commissioned Jesus to, among many other things, "Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This is reference to a proclamation of the year of Jubilee, of which the Jews were familiar.

The Jubilee was also based on the number seven. After seven, seven-year restorations – on the 50th year – the trumpets were to be sounded and the Year of the Jubilee was to commence. It was an incredible law. On the Year of Jubilee, this is what was to happen: All debts were canceled. Slaves, indentured because of unpaid debts, were set free. And land was returned to the families of those to whom it had originally been given. (Leviticus 25:8) (Guzik)

Being under the Lord's favor in the New Covenant includes:

- Providing good news to the poor.
- Binding up the brokenhearted.
- Freedom for the captives.
- Release from darkness.
- Provide for the grieving:
 - A crown of beauty.
 - Oil of gladness.
 - A garment of praise.
- The redeemed will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord, priest of our Lord and ministers of our God.
- The redeemed will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated.
- They will receive a double portion.
- They will rejoice in their inheritance.
- They will receive everlasting joy.
- God will make an everlasting covenant with them.
- All who see the redeemed will acknowledge that they are blessed by God.

This is so over-the-top encouraging that you can see why Jesus chose this exact passage in Luke 4:16-21 to announce that He had come to fulfill the role of the Messiah and why this passage was chosen to be the theme of the 2010 Southwest Christian Conference.

No Rest for God nor Man

In Isaiah 62:1 and 6-7, God tells us that He won't rest, we shouldn't rest, and we shouldn't let Him rest until, "Her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch." The word "her" in this passage refers to Jerusalem or the Kingdom of God. It is saying that, because what we have is so incredible, we should never be silent but should keep proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. We should never rest, because our lives are short and the time is short for us to get as many people to heaven as possible. It says we should not give God any rest. This means we should constantly be praying for God to act in opening hearts so that as we proclaim our efforts will be effective.

“A restless Savior calls upon his people to be restless and to make the Lord himself restless — to give him no rest till his chosen city is in full splendor, his chosen church complete and glorious.” (Spurgeon)

“Give him no rest” is our Lord’s own command to us concerning the great God. I do not suppose any of you ever advised a beggar to be importunate with you. Did you ever say, “Whenever you see me go over this crossing ask me for a penny? If I do not give you one, run after me, or call after me all the way down the street. If that does not succeed, lay hold upon me, and do not let me go until I help you. Beg without ceasing.” Did any one of you ever invite applicants to call often, and make large requests of you? . . . He does, in effect, say, “Press me! Urge me! Lay hold on my strength. Wrestle with me, as when a man seeks to give another a fall that he may prevail with him.” All this, and much more, is included in the expression, “Give him no rest.” (Spurgeon)

In Isaiah 63, God returns to the present day, when His people are still in darkness. It is emotionally difficult for Him to watch His people spiritually suffer because of their sin. It is interesting that in verse 17, they blame God for their wandering and their hard hearts. In our sinful nature, we can blame anyone – even God – rather than take responsibility for our spiritual condition as we should.

What are some of the most exciting parts of heaven to which you are looking forward?

For you, what are some of the most motivating promises of the Messiah in chapter 61?

How do you feel like you are doing evangelistically? How are you doing in praying to God about your evangelism?

Days 33-34

▲ Read Isaiah chapters 64-67

Hope for the Unrighteous

At first, Isaiah 64 can seem discouraging. It says there is no one who is worthy or righteous. We are all in a world of hurt. God responds to the righteous, but since there is no one righteous, how can we ever connect with God? Verse 6 even says that our acts of righteousness are unclean. This means that even when we act righteously, it can be filled with self-directed motives or pride. Even when we pray, we can doubt. Even while we are serving, we can be resentful. The following are commentary from Spurgeon and Guzik on this verse:

The good we may try to do is unacceptable and unclean before the Lord. Even the good we do is polluted. If our righteousness is so bad, what must our unrighteousness be? However, extreme the phrasing, the point is important. Even the works that seem holiest from the outside can be corrupt and unrighteous. There is sin in our prayers; they need to be prayed over again. There is filth in the tears we shed in penitence. There is sin in our very holiness. There is unbelief in our faith, hatred in our love and the slime of the serpent in the fairest flower of our garden. (Spurgeon)

In this prayer, the praying one deals with what seems to be an impossible problem. Because of our sin, we are in a desperate state and need the Lord’s salvation. But the Lord only answers the prayers of a righteous man (Isaiah 64:4-5a) – and a righteous man

wouldn't be in the place we are! Ultimately, the answer is found in the New Covenant, where a righteous Man stands in our place and prays for us. This is why Jesus invited us to pray in His name. When we pray in Jesus' name, He is the righteous Man who appeals to God for us. (Guzik)

Wow! This really makes me feel grateful for Jesus. Paul said it best when contemplating this dilemma:

~ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! ~
Romans 7:24-25

I Hold Out My Hands

In Isaiah 65:1-2, God says he had revealed Himself to a people who did not ask for Him and He was found by a people that were not seeking Him. God said He would accept the Gentiles in Isaiah 9:1, 42:6, 49:6, and 49:22. Here, the Lord said to them, "Here am I, here am I." It is obvious that God deeply desires a relationship with the Gentiles and has made a way for them to have a relationship with Him. The Gentiles responded – and found God.

However, God uses the same imagery with the Jews by saying that all day long, He has held out His hands to them and yet they have rejected Him. Instead, they walk in their own evil ways and pursue their own imaginations. In the next several passages, he describes being rejected, forgotten, defiled and provoked to His very face.

What a vulnerable image of God saying to us, "Here am I, here am I." We serve a God who holds His hands out to us all day long. A God who so deeply wants an intimate, personal relationship with us if we would just respond to His call.

You can almost feel the hurt that God feels as you read these passages about His chosen people rejecting Him. We must respond to God's loving call and run to Him and into His loving protective arms.

Humility is the Key to God's Heart

In Isaiah 66:1-5, God wants the Jews to know that even though they have been busy doing so many religious things; He is not pleased with them because of their stubborn pride. He wants them to know that even though His throne is in heaven and the earth is His footstool, they can still have communion with Him if they are humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at His word.

Contrite literally means lamed or disabled. Here it is used with spiritual significance: one who is aware of the damage wrought by sin, of personal inability to stand upright before God." (Motyer)

The way to God's heart is only through recognizing our sin and taking full responsibility for it. This is a sure way to impress God and it is the road toward fellowship with Him. Satan loves it when we are busy with religious work while our hearts are not intimately connected to God's heart through repentance and humility.

God also mentions, twice, the importance of trembling at His word. In verse 2 and 5, He talks about the importance of holding His word with such a reverence that we tremble when we read it – realizing that the commands, judgments and promises are true. In fact, they are the only absolute truth in this world. God says he will bless us if we hold to His word with this regard.

In 66:22-24, God finishes the Book of Isaiah with a view to the new heaven and new earth for all who answer His call, tremble at His word and are contrite in spirit. But for those who reject Him there is only destruction.

How do you feel about the truth that our righteousness is like filthy rags?

How does God's vulnerability in this passage affect you?

How have you trembled at God's Word in the past? How about now?
