



**Kings & Prophets to Exile and Return
Judah's Fall and God's Faithfulness**

With Special Thanks to Ashland Theological Seminary & Dr. Robert Shirock

Week 61: The Book of Isaiah

Introduction

Isaiah has been called “the prince of the prophets.” His book was placed first in the Jewish collection of prophets because of the scope and significance of his prophecies. His prophecies are quoted more frequently than any other in the New Testament.

Isaiah's name means **“Yahweh Saves;”** or **“Yahweh is Salvation.”** He ministered during the reigns of four Southern Kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Uzziah reigned with zeal for God until the end, but he contracted leprosy from disobedience, so his son Jotham co-reigned, continuing to total 16 years. God called Isaiah as a Prophet and spiritual advisor the year Uzziah died and guided Jotham during his reign.

Ahaz, Jotham's son, turned his back on God, yet God used Isaiah to invite Ahaz to turn back (7:1- 12), but he refused. Hezekiah continuously sought advice and prayer from Isaiah who guided Hezekiah's steps in the Assyrian crisis, and with the major religious reforms Hezekiah introduced. He prophesied during the last 17 years of the Northern Kingdom, using their impending doom by Assyria as a warning to return to their God and forsake their injustices, idolatry and evil against their God, otherwise Assyria would destroy them as well.

Isaiah the Man

Isaiah was passionate about his God, his nation and his message which spanned approximately 50 years. He was fearless in his message to approach the kings of Judah, but also the kings of the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. He passionately shared God's heart for his people – longing for them to turn back while He was still giving yet another window of time offering His mercy.

Isaiah was humble and aware of his own sinful heart and lips, especially in contrast to his Holy God, the King of Kings. Isaiah's vision of heaven's throne room and God's call will be discussed below in detail. Isaiah was married to a woman who was a 'prophetess' (8:3), and together they raised 2 sons. He was told to name each son with a specific name that spoke of God's intentions for Judah:

1. **MaherShalal-hash-baz** ('quick to plunder, and swift to the spoil' 8:1- 4,18);
2. **Shearjashub** ('a remnant shall return' 7:3).

These names foretold the nation's coming judgment and restoration (after captivity and in the distant future at the end of the age).

Isaiah used many forms of speech like similes, metaphors, personification, sarcasm, irony, and songs (chs.5,12,35,54), to drive home God's heart and message. He also willingly did odd things like wear a loin cloth and go barefoot for 3 entire years (20:1-6) to foretell how the Egyptians would be taken captive by Assyria (without clothing!) as a warning to Judah who had often trusted Egypt for security.

The Bible does not say how Isaiah died, but tradition accounts that Isaiah was 'sawn in two' (Hebrews 11:37), during the reign of wicked King Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah (2 Kings 21:16) from the Jewish writings in The Talmud.

Isaiah was an incredibly faithful man who found his identity in His God. He knew from the beginning that he would share the heart break that God carried. He would faithfully speak truth and hope to the people but they would mock him and ignore him.

*"Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced...
Who then will bring charges against me? It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me" (50:4-10).*

When we can find our identity in being His, and living in His love and purposes, then the pressures of people and even ridicule can be shielded from us knowing the LORD is our helper and intimate friend.

Isaiah's Message

His major role was to be God's mouthpiece concerning 4 main topics:

JUDGMENT - He was to announce that God's incredible patience and mercy were about to end. Because of long standing disobedience (over 700 years since the Exodus) to the covenant with Yahweh, judgment was coming in two waves: from Assyria (the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.) and Babylon (destruction of the Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C.).

REMNANT - Yet, because God is always faithful to His covenant promises, Isaiah saw visions of a glorious future for God's chosen people. A remnant would be preserved through every season of chastisement and captivity, until the final days on earth.

MESSIAH - A Messiah (Savior) would someday come first as a 'Suffering Servant' (ch.53) to shed His blood for the sins of humanity to redeem both Jews and Gentiles who would believe in Him.

EVERLASTING KINGDOM - Secondly, Messiah would establish His rule over humanity with an everlasting kingdom that would bring righteousness and peace forever.

Isaiah's prophetic collection is long, being comprised of many prophecies given during his lifetime of ministry. In general, his prophecies can be divided into two "books" as follows:

I. The Book of Judgment: 1-39

- A. Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem 1-12
- B. Prophecies concerning the surrounding nations 13-23
- C. Prophecies concerning the entire earth and its inhabitants 24-35

- D. Historical interlude: Hezekiah and the Assyrian threat 36-39

II. The Book of Comfort: 40-66

- A. The One true God versus idols 40-48
- B. The Lord's Servant Who brings Salvation 49-57
- C. The Future glory of God's people 58-66

Overview of “The Book of Judgment” (chs.1-39)

God appeared to Isaiah in dramatic fashion in the temple (ch.6). Isaiah saw a vision of God in His heavenly temple seated on His heavenly throne being worshipped by fiery heavenly beings- ‘seraphim’.

They cried out “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” (6:3)

Isaiah was shaken to his core, seeing God’s glory, recognizing his own sinfulness. Although he had been speaking to the Jews about their sinful lips and behaviors, now he identified with them, in light of this Holy God.

When God asked for a messenger, Isaiah was quick to respond as His willing messenger. God cleansed and commissioned Isaiah to deliver a difficult message to the nation: Because of centuries of stubborn disobedience and rebellion against Yahweh, a judicial hardening of heart would fall on the people. God would confirm the people in their own condition of stubborn disobedience and this would lead to judgment.

God told Isaiah from the beginning that he would give a message that would not be heeded, and being a prophet would be extremely difficult. Yet, Isaiah was pleased to suffer for His sake.

“Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (6:9,10).

When Isaiah asked God how long this hardening of hearts would last, the reply was clear:

Then I said, “For how long, Lord?” And he answered: “Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (6:11-13).

A. Prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem (ch.1-12)

The hard assignment for the prophets was always to proclaim true reality 'from God's perspective', not what was happening to the people in everyday life which seemed right to them. The nation **seemed** to be prospering, but Isaiah's message was opposite to the false prophets of his day: Judah was a 'wretched victim' (1:5,6), a 'ravaged battlefield' (1:7-9), and Jerusalem was as wicked as ancient Sodom and Gomorrah (3:9; Gen 18-19)!

Key themes appear in this section: The peoples' sins were murder, robbery, bribery, exploiting those who were helpless, deception, denying justice, coveting, drunkenness, idolatry and sexual prostitution for fertility blessings, divination, proud men, arrogant women flaunting and flirting, calling evil good and good evil, spurning God's Law and discipline... yet all was glossed over and impending doom of the Assyrians' invasion was denied.

God's promises and hope: Sprinkled throughout the doom and gloom are some of the most well-loved verses of hope. Eg: After King Ahaz refused to ask for a 'sign', God promised HIS SIGN:

"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel" (7:14).

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light: on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (9:2).

"For unto us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time forth and forever. The zeal of the Almighty will accomplish this" (9:6,7).

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse: from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD... He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes, or decide by what He hears with His ears; but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions to the poor of the earth..." (11:1-5).

"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat... The infant will play near the hole of the cobra... for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (11:6-9).

God's Holy Wrath (anger): We must be careful to NOT judge God's 'anger and fierce wrath' as we would a human out-of control abusive rage, or a child's temper tantrum. Warren Wiersbe describes God's wrath as *'motivated by love, which is anguish. It's the anguish of a father who wants the best for his children, but they prefer to go their own way'* (O.T. History, pg.568).

'Wrath' is an old English word defined as 'deep, intense anger and indignation'. 'Anger' is defined as 'stirring of resentful displeasure and strong antagonism, by a sense of injury or insult'; 'indignation' as 'righteous anger aroused by injustice and baseness'. Such is wrath. And wrath, the Bible tells us, is an attribute of God (J. I. Packer).

B. Prophecies concerning the surrounding nations (ch.13-23).

In this section, God pronounces judgment on all 11 of the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. They were Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus of Syria, Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia and Phoenicia. Although they did not have the Laws of Moses and were not in a special "covenant relationship" with Yahweh, they were still accountable to God for how they treated their fellow human beings.

We see several broad themes in this section.

- God is in control of the nations of the world, and He can do with them what He pleases.
- God especially hates the sin of pride (13:11; 16:6; 23:9). When nations turn from the living God to trust their wealth and their armaments, God must show them that He is the only sure refuge.
- God judges the nations for the way they treat each other. Judah is the only nation mentioned that had God's laws; yet, God held the other Gentile nations accountable for what they did.
- God always gives a word of promise and hope to His people. Babylon will fall, but God will care for Judah (14:1-3,32). Moab will not accept sanctuary from Jerusalem, but God will one day establish Messiah's rule over Moab (16:5). Assyria and Egypt may be avowed enemies of the Jews, but one day the three nations will together glorify God (19:23-25).
- Therefore, no matter how frightening the national or international situation may become, God's children can have peace because they know that Almighty God is on His throne (see Psalm 2:4).

*From Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, The Prophets - Isaiah*, p.29.

C. Prophecies concerning judgment of the entire earth and its inhabitants, and the of the Messianic Kingdom (ch.24-35)

Isaiah turns his God-given prophecies to the whole world. The prophets often refer to this time period of world-wide reckoning as “the Day of the Lord.” The N.T. parallels this time in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Revelation 6-19. Will there ever be justice for the oppressed and judgment for the proud and rebellious? Isaiah affirms that in the end there will.

“Isaiah 24-27 describes a global judgment that will end with the destruction of God’s enemies and the restoration of God’s people Israel in their land” (Wiersbe, OT Prophets, p.30).

The next subsection (chs.28-31) shifts the focus back to God’s people and the reasons they will experience God’s judgment.

“Chapters 28-31 record a series of five “woes” (28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1) that focus primarily on Jerusalem. Interspersed with these “woes” of judgment are promises of restoration and glory. Isaiah is attempting to get the rulers of Judah to stop trusting “power politics” and international treaties and start trusting the Lord” (Wiersbe, p.34).

The last sub-section (chs.32-35) focuses on the reign of the Righteous King in the midst of a restored Zion (Israel). It begins with this:

“Behold, a king will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly” (32:1).

It ends with this:

“And the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (35:10).

D. Historical interlude: Hezekiah and the Assyrian threat and his prayer when he became mortally ill (ch.36-39)

This section covers the same historical incidents found in 2 Kings 18-20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32. There is one major addition to the narrative: Hezekiah's personal account of his prayer for healing at the time of his illness is given in full (Isaiah 38:9-20).

A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?" I said, "I will not again see the LORD himself in the land of the living; no longer will I look on my fellow man, or be with those who now dwell in this world. Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!" But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. Lord, by such things people live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness. The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD."

GOD ON DISPLAY: God's passion for relationship IS with those He has made in His image. Although this was directed to the Jews, the N.T. amplifies God's heart for every human being to know Him and to be brought under His mercy, and salvation.

His holiness is an immutable attribute of His Divinity. He cannot change it but He has made provision for it through His Divine Son, sinless and willing to become one of us to redeem us from God's holy wrath that breaks out against all humans.

Christ bore His Father's wrath against sin for our sake. He is a GOD OF LOVE, and a GOD OF JUSTICE.

His 'unusual work' is judgment, therefore He is so incredibly LONG-SUFFERING in His MERCY and PATIENCE. So many warnings, so many chances to turn back (repent). May we lean into His indescribable LOVE and choose to believe that He is FOR US.

Discussion Questions on Isaiah 1 - 39

1. How does Isaiah's vision of God's HOLINESS and his response impact you (Isaiah ch.6)?
2. It was God's MERCY that caused Him to offer cleansing and forgiveness to Isaiah. How does the mercy of God for your life impact you?
3. God's FAITHFULNESS led Him to give Isaiah many visions of the future, including the Messiah and the Kingdom. Which future vision is your favorite? How does the faithfulness of God minister to your soul right now?

Isaiah 40 - 66

Isaiah chapters 40-66 naturally divides into three mini-books with specific themes:

- I. God's Strength brings Security: 40-48
- II. God's Servant brings Salvation: 49-57
- III. God's Servant brings the Kingdom: 58-66

I. God's Strength brings Security: 40-48

Comfort because of God's Incomparable Majesty: 40

The second half of Isaiah opens with a clear announcement of the theme: Comfort because of God's incomparable majesty.

"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins" (40:1,2).

The good news of Israel's future restoration should be proclaimed from the highest mountain.

Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (40:9-11).

The longest part of chapter 40 is devoted to a stunning description of the majesty and might of Israel's incomparable God (40:12-26). (We will not quote this long section; but you should read it.) This description is a critical part of Isaiah's message of comfort because: It is God's incomparable greatness that assures His people that He will overcome ANY adversary in order to restore their place in the world. Thus, the question . . .

Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God" (40:27)?

A definitive answer . . .

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary" (40:28-31).

The people of God must not lose heart. They must turn to God in the midst of their desolations and keep their hope in Him. If they "wait for the Lord, they will gain new strength" from Him.

Whatever challenges we face in life, the picture of God in Isaiah 40 should encourage us. There is NO problem too great for God to handle.

Thus, we must learn to "wait for the Lord" (to rest in Him, rely upon Him, trust Him) with our problems. When God decides it is time to move on our behalf, NOTHING will stop Him from accomplishing His purposes for our lives.

Is there a situation in your life right now that you need to completely hand over to the Lord? Use Isaiah 40:9-31 as a guide. Read it through and commit your ways to the God who can hold the entire universe in the palm of His hand. Surely He is strong enough to take care of you!

Other nations trust in vain idols: 41

Israel was terrified by the powerful nations that threatened them; but the reality was that Israel had a GOD that was unlike the “gods” of the other nations, therefore, they could rest assured:

“But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend, you whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its remotest parts and said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you. Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’” (41:8-10).

The Servant will bring forth Justice on Earth: 42:1-9

Sprinkled throughout the second half of Isaiah are the “Servant Songs.” These are fascinating. In some passages, the Servant is Israel (see above, 41:8-10); but in other passages, the Servant is a special Israelite; a man that God would raise up to save His people. Chapter 42 provides the first clear example of a Servant prophecy that has a special person in view, the Messiah:

“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law” (42:1-4).

This passage was quoted by Matthew with reference to the public ministry of Jesus (see Matthew 12:18-21). Further, the Servant will bring the light of God’s truth to all nations:

“I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison” (42:6,7).

This passage, along with 61:1-3, formed the basis of Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth, in which He set forth His mission as Israel’s Messiah and Savior of the world (see Luke 4:16-19).

Note: Isaiah the prophet is quoted 55 times in the New Testament; second only to Psalms, which are quoted 68 times.

Who can reverse what God has planned? 43, 44

There was much uncertainty in the hearts of God's people (as a result of the prospect of captivity in Babylon). Their fears are met by strong words of reassurance, based on God's greatness:

"Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no Savior besides Me. It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed . . . Even from eternity I am He, and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?" (43:10-13).

Even Babylon would someday fall under the mighty hand of Israel's God (43:14-21). The message is: Have no fear! There is NO OTHER GOD besides YAHWEH!

The Cyrus prophecy: 44:26-45:4

As proof of the certainty of Israel's blessed future (and of the power of God over against the false gods), God gave Isaiah the supernatural prophetic ability to name the specific Persian king that would someday arise to overthrow the Babylonians. This king (Cyrus) would also issue a proclamation for Jewish captives to return to Jerusalem to rebuild God's house. (Note: Isaiah prophesied about 150 years before Cyrus, lived and reigned!)

It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.' Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed . . . 'I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known Me" (44:26-45:4).

How reassuring to know that God can even raise up a pagan king (who does not worship God) to fulfill His purposes in the world. Perhaps there are people in your life right now who are not making things easy for you.

Consider this: God uses even your opponents to further His purposes in and through your life. Take some time to ponder: How might God be using this seemingly difficult person (relationship) to bring about His purposes in your life? How is He growing you through this situation? How might He use your life as a witness in this very situation?

The One True God will be Worshipped! 45

The uniqueness and preeminence of God is a major theme throughout this part of Isaiah. Now, the call is made to all people to turn to Him and be saved.

“Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance” (45:22,23).

This passage points to the supremacy of God in the world; but it also points to the deity of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul used this precise verse to describe the Lord Jesus Christ:

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Babylon’s idols cannot save her from the True God: 46-47

The people of Israel are reassured once again that the “gods” of other nations, like Babylon, are worthless and impotent.

“I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (46:9,10).

Ch.47 is a lament sung over a fallen Babylon (a fall that would occur much later in history at the hands of the Persians). Yes, it was God who raised up the Babylonians to chastise His people, Israel. Yet, their pride and idolatry as a nation would be judged by God. Their beauty and power would be stripped from them.

Israel's stubbornness and God's faithfulness: 48

In the closing chapter of this first mini-book (chs. 40-48), God reminds Israel of her long standing hardness of heart toward Him (48:1-11). Nevertheless, His covenant loyalty makes their future deliverance and restoration a certainty!

Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, send it out to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob" (48:20).

Each of the three mini-books ends with a warning to the wicked (compare 48:22 with 57:20,21 and 66:24). *"There is no peace for the wicked," says the LORD (48:22).*

II. God's SERVANT brings Salvation: 49-57

The second mini-book (chs.49-57) emphasizes the role of God's Servant in bringing salvation to the world. There are Servant passages elsewhere in the book, but the major ones occur here, especially the monumental Servant Song in ch.53.

The Servant will bring Judah and Israel back to God: 49:1-13

Chapter 49 opens with a clear, extended reference to the Messiah.

Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me. He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; and He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver . . . And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength), He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, to the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You" (49:1-7).

God's Servant (Messiah) will not only bring Judah and Israel back to the Lord, but also the Gentile nations so that the salvation of God may reach the ends of the earth. Yet, in the process, He will be "abhorred by the nation."

God will never forget His people: 49:14-26

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me" (49:14-16).

What a beautiful picture of the faithfulness of God toward His people!

The Servant will obey God's specific instructions: 50

As the Servant Songs progress, it becomes clear that the Servant will obediently follow God down a path that involves suffering at the hands of wicked men.

"The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back. I gave My back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord GOD helps Me, therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed" (50:4-7).

The Servant will suffer for the sins of the world: 52:13 – 53:12

This particular Servant Song is of utmost importance. It describes the suffering, death and restoration of the Servant. Here we learn that the Servant suffers as a guilt offering for the sins of the people. We will examine this song section by section.

- He will be highly exalted because of His suffering.

"Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand" (52:13-15).

His exaltation comes as a result of His suffering. The word "sprinkle" has connotations of the blood of the atonement that was sprinkled on the altar by the High Priest, bringing forgiveness of sins. The message: The Servant will be abused and marred; but in the process of suffering, He will sprinkle nations with the blood of atonement, leading to the forgiveness of sins. Then, He will be exalted as the King of all kings as people realize Who it was that suffered.

- He will have an obscure, vulnerable beginning.

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tendershoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him” (53:1,2).

He will not have a stately, majestic upbringing, as a typical royal heir. In fact, His beginnings will be so fragile that God will have to provide special care over Him. People will not recognize that a future King is in their midst.

- He will be despised by men; a man of sorrows.

“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (53:3).

The typical messianic vision in Israel was of a mighty son of David who would come to rule the world from his throne amidst an exalted Israel. Yet, the Messiah that Isaiah sees is rejected and forsaken; a “man of sorrows.” We can now begin to see why many Jews pondered the possibility of two separate Messiahs – a royal, reigning Messiah from the line of David, and a priestly, suffering Messiah from the line of Levi. It was inconceivable to them how these two very different pictures of Messiah (suffering and ruling) could be united in one person.

- He will suffer as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of others.

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (53:4-6).

The Old Testament sacrificial system was built around the idea of substitutionary atonement (a sacrifice given in place of the sinner). Thus, animal sacrifices would be given to “bear the sins” of the one coming to receive forgiveness from God. Here in Isaiah 53, the Servant is depicted as the One sent by God to “bear the sins” of the people – to be the substitute sacrifice. It would be the LORD Who would cause “the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

WE have gone astray . . . but HE takes the penalty for our straying!
That is the very definition of GRACE!

- He will suffer willingly and silently.

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth” (53:7).

- He will die and, surprisingly, be buried in a rich man’s grave.

“By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth” (53:8,9).

Jesus, as a condemned criminal, would have been buried on the garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem. Yet, it was Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Jewish Council (and a secret follower of Jesus) who asked Pilate for the body of Jesus so that he could bury Jesus in his own (rich man’s) grave (Matt.27:57-60).

- He will be restored so that He can see His offspring.

“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (53:10,11).

The Lord was pleased to crush the Servant as a guilt offering. Then, the Servant will have “His days prolonged” and He will be allowed to “see His offspring.” His “children” are all those who have been “justified” (declared righteous) by means of His guilt offering. Of course, the resurrection of Jesus explains how the Servant could die, yet live again to see His “children.”

- He will be exalted because of His suffering.

The Servant song ends as it began (see 52:13-15) with the exaltation of the Servant as a result of His willingness to suffer unto death.

“Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (53:12).

The suffering Servant will become the exalted King. What a mystery!

Jesus was not just a great teacher, a prophet, or a religious leader. He was GOD in flesh Who came to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, in order to bring people back into relationship with God.

Did Isaiah and the other prophets fully understand WHO they were describing and WHAT He would do when He came to earth? It seems that even they were left with much mystery surrounding their own prophecies.

Read 1 Peter 1:10-12. Prophets like Isaiah were told by God that their messianic prophecies would be fulfilled in a later generation; but they were not told the specifics of WHO and WHAT they were being allowed to describe under the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (See also 2 Peter 1:21 on how “inspiration” happened.)

The Future Joy and Fertility of God’s People: 53-57

After the powerful Servant Song of ch.53, the picture shifts to the future joy and glory of God’s people – precisely because of the Servant’s willingness to bear their sins and bring God’s forgiveness. There are several calls for people to respond to God’s grace:

“Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (55:6,7).

This second mini-book, like the first, ends with the identical warning to the wicked who spurn God’s grace and mercy:

“There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked” (57:20-21).

III. God's Servant brings the Kingdom: 58-66

The final "mini-book" (chs.58-66) depicts the future glory of Israel as a result of the Servant's ministry of redemption.

Israel will take center stage in the Lord's Kingdom: 60

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (60:1-3).

The Servant will announce both liberty and judgment: 61-63

The Servant takes center stage again. The following passage is the one that Jesus chose to quote and apply to Himself in His defining sermon in His hometown synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19).

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified" (61:1-3).

The Servant will not only proclaim "the favorable year of the Lord" (a reference to the Year of Jubilee, in which all debts were forgiven); but He will also proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God." The future holds bright prospects for those who respond to God's redeeming love; but it holds the prospect of judgment for those who spurn His love and mercy.

A final call to humble repentance: 66

Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (66:1,2).

God does not need our temples. The universe is not a big enough temple for Him (recall ch.40 on the immensity and magnificence of God).

What God wants is our hearts – in a humble and contrite condition. He wants people who have a deep reverence for His Word.

Does this passage describe your spirit before God? Are you humble and contrite over your own brokenness before a holy God? Do you have a receptive, reverent countenance toward His Word? What an amazing thought: the universe is not big enough to be His throne; but He willingly enthrones Himself in the hearts of those who bow before Him.

“For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (57:15).

Discussion Questions for Isaiah 40 - 66

1. Read Isaiah 40. The promise is that the strength of God is available to all who wait for Him. Is there some area in your life where you need Almighty God to come through for you?
2. Review the following 4 Servant passages: 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12. 61:1-3. How do these passages enrich your understanding of Jesus and His mission?
3. Read Acts 8:26-40. Notice that the Ethiopian man was reading from Isaiah 53, yet he did not know who Isaiah the prophet was referring to. What do you think Philip told the man when he asked him about this passage? Is there someone that God is leading you to in order to point them to Jesus?
4. What is the biggest ah-ha that you will personally take away from our brief journey through the book of Isaiah?

Historical Note: In 1946 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves by the Dead Sea in Israel. An entire library of ancient Jewish sacred scrolls had been preserved in pottery jars. This was the library of a radical Jewish sect known as the Essenes who lived in these caves right around the time of Jesus.

Among the scrolls was a complete Isaiah scroll, dated by scholars to have been written around 200 B.C. Before this discovery, the earliest scroll of Isaiah was from roughly 1,000 years later. ***When scholars compared the scrolls that were 1,000 years apart in date, they found that there was very little difference between them, proving the integrity of the Hebrew Bible over the centuries.***

Thus, the argument that time had introduced corruption and error into the books of the Bible was proven false. ***God had seen to the careful preservation of His Word over the centuries.*** (The integrity of the New Testament documents is based on the vast number of ancient manuscripts that are available for comparison – roughly 10,000.)