

28 Studies on Isaiah

Isaiah's place at the head of the prophetic books is well deserved. There is nothing to equal his tremendous vision of God and the glory in store for God's people until we reach John's book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament. Other prophets came before him historically, but there was none greater.

From the Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition p 376.

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In preparing these studies I've used the following sources:

Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston
The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb
The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer
Mark for Everyone and Paul for Everyone the Prison Letters by Tom Wright
The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright

Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition
Promoting the Gospel by John Dickson
New Illustrated Bible Dictionary
The Evangelical Universalist 2nd edition by Gregory MacDonald

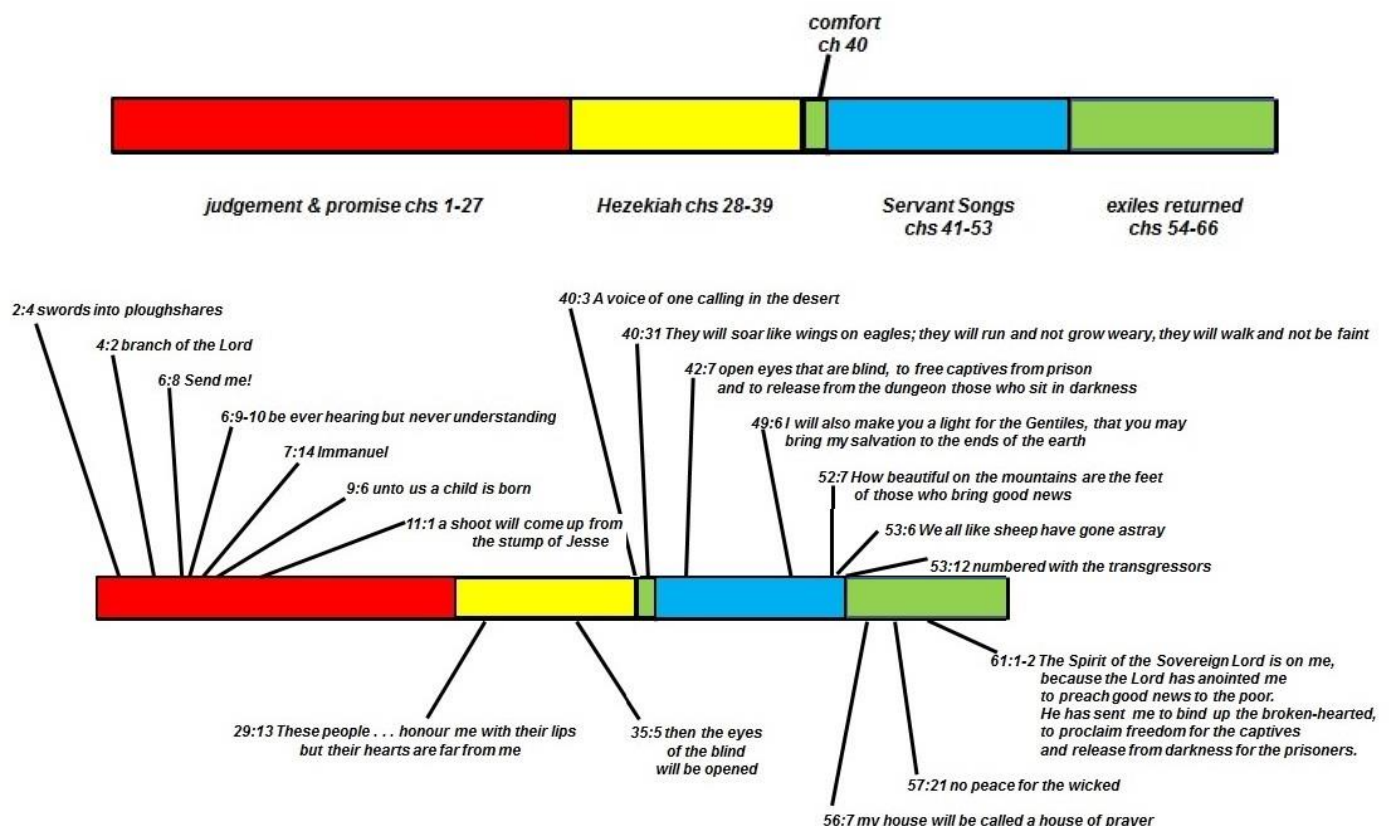
Matthias Media Bible Study booklets: Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris
Postcard from Palestine by Andrew Reid
The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne
Return to the Lord Hosea by James Stone

Other Bible Study booklets: Isaiah by Michael Christopher from the Nelson Impact Bible Study Series
Isaiah by Fighting Word Ministries Inc. 2010
Isaiah 1-39, A Mighty Prophet with A Mighty Message from A Mighty God by Hamish Burke, 2011
Isaiah 40 – 66 Hope in Dark Times Stromlo Christian Church
Kerry Nagel's Bible study booklet on Micah, 4th term 2008
Philippians a series of 8 Bible Studies by Roger Green 1997

Bible Briefs on Isaiah from The Briefing magazine # 308, 350, 360, 373 and 380 by David Starling, Tony Wright, Gordon Cheng, Tony Payne and Antony Barraclough respectively

2012 sermon series (and Bible studies), the Fifth Gospel, at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.
15/3/2015 sermon on Mark ch 11 at St Andrews, Roseville, by John Dickson
Lionel Windsor's "Isaiah in 7 hours" from www.lionelwindsor.net.

Many people know some verses from Isaiah by listening to Handel's Messiah or Colin Buchanan or elsewhere. Below are a couple of charts showing where many of the popular verses come from in comparison to the whole book of Isaiah.



Structure of Isaiah

I like to get a grip on the whole book I am studying, especially a long, complicated book like Isaiah. So I've compressed it down to 4 sections (below) using a variety of summaries from Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 10, The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb pp 30-31, Lionel Windsor's "Isaiah in 7 hours" from www.lionelwindsor.net as well as my own input.

Ed O'Connor 2019

Chs 1-12	Main character: Historical circumstances: Eschatological (last days) section: Also:	Jerusalem Alliance of Israel/Ephraim (the northern kingdom) & Syria Vs Judah (the southern kingdom). Ahaz, king of Judah, then made an alliance with Assyria. chs 9-12 Day of the Lord chs 2-5 vineyard ch 5 Isaiah's commission ch 6 Ahaz ch 7 darkness ch 8 light ch 9 Assyria ch 10 shoot from Jesse chs 11-12
Chs 13-27	Main character: Historical circumstances: Eschatological section: Also:	The nations. At the height of its power Assyria defeated Israel (the northern kingdom) in 721BC and the people were taken into exile. When Assyria began to weaken the Philistines, backed by Egypt, revolted against Assyria and wanted Judah to join them. Babylon was growing in strength but not yet a super power. chs 24-27 Isaiah gets naked ch 20 vineyard 27:2-6
Chs 28-39	Main character: Historical circumstances: Eschatological section: Also:	Hezekiah Chs 28-35. Hezekiah is king of Judah (715-687 BC). Assyria & Egypt are the dominant nations. Hezekiah has broken with Assyria & begun religious reforms. Judah's revolt against Assyria is aided by Egypt. Chs 36-37. Hezekiah is king when Assyria attacks Jerusalem (Zion). Most of Judah had already been laid waste, only Jerusalem was left. But Assyria suffers a devastating defeat and goes home. Chs 38-39. An envoy comes from Babylon who are not yet a super power. Hezekiah shows off Jerusalem's wealth and weapons. This foreshadows Judah's exile to Babylon. chs 32-35 Hezekiah gets sick and nearly dies (ch 38). He actually died in 687. Shadow cast by the sun goes backwards 38:7-8
Is 40:1-66:24	Main character: Historical circumstances: Eschatological section: Also:	The Servant 40:1-51:11 About 150 yrs after ch 39. Judah has been defeated by Babylon and taken into exile. Persia is the next super power and they defeat Babylon in 539 BC. Cyrus, the Persian king, allowed the Judahites (= Jews) to return home. 51:12-66:24 Some of the exiles have returned home but there is a need for the others to return and re-build the temple in Jerusalem, and return to faith in God. most of it Servant Songs 42:1-9, 49:1-13, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12 good news (= gospel) 52:7, chs 60-61 covenants chs 54-55 new heavens & new earth chs 65-66

Study 1, Introduction to the Old Testament

The book of Isaiah is in the Old Testament. To refresh our thinking on the Old Testament I thought it would be fun to read some quotes and listen to some sound bites. Your job is to say where the quote is from and its context in the Bible. I've given the answers but you will need to cut these out before giving the studies to the group so that they can try to work out the answers for themselves.



1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Where? Gen 1:1

Context? creation

2. "The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Where? Gen 12:1-3

Context? God promises Abram that he will become a great nation and lead them to the Promised Land.

3. Play Highway61Short.mp3 or on YouTube https://youtu.be/8hr3Stnk8_k

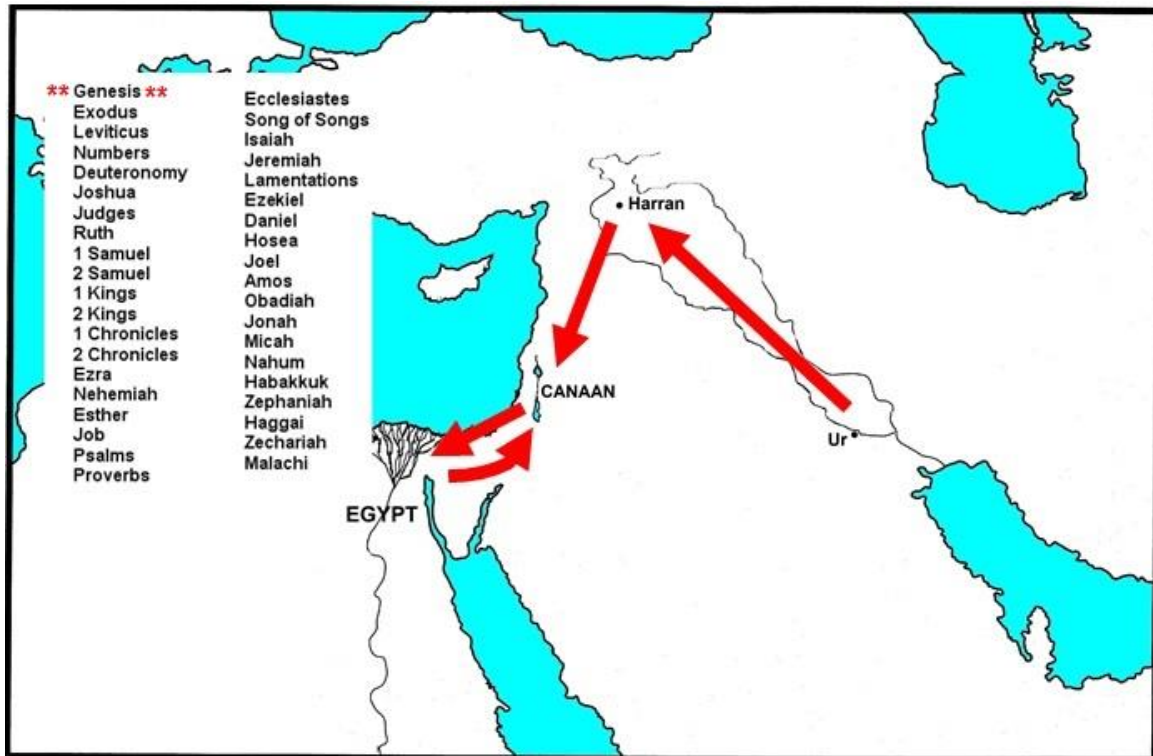
Translation: God said to Abraham "Kill me a son."
 Abe said "Man, you must be putting me on."
 God said "No."
 Abe said "What?"
 God said "You can do what you want to but, the next time you see me coming you better run."
 Well Abe said "Where do you want this killing done?"
 God said "Out on Highway 61."

Bible: Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"
 "Here I am," he replied.
 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Where? Gen 22:1-2

Context? Bible: Abraham & Sarah finally have a son in their old age but God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son as a test of Abraham's faith.
 Bob Dylan: You can get away with anything in America, out on Highway 61.

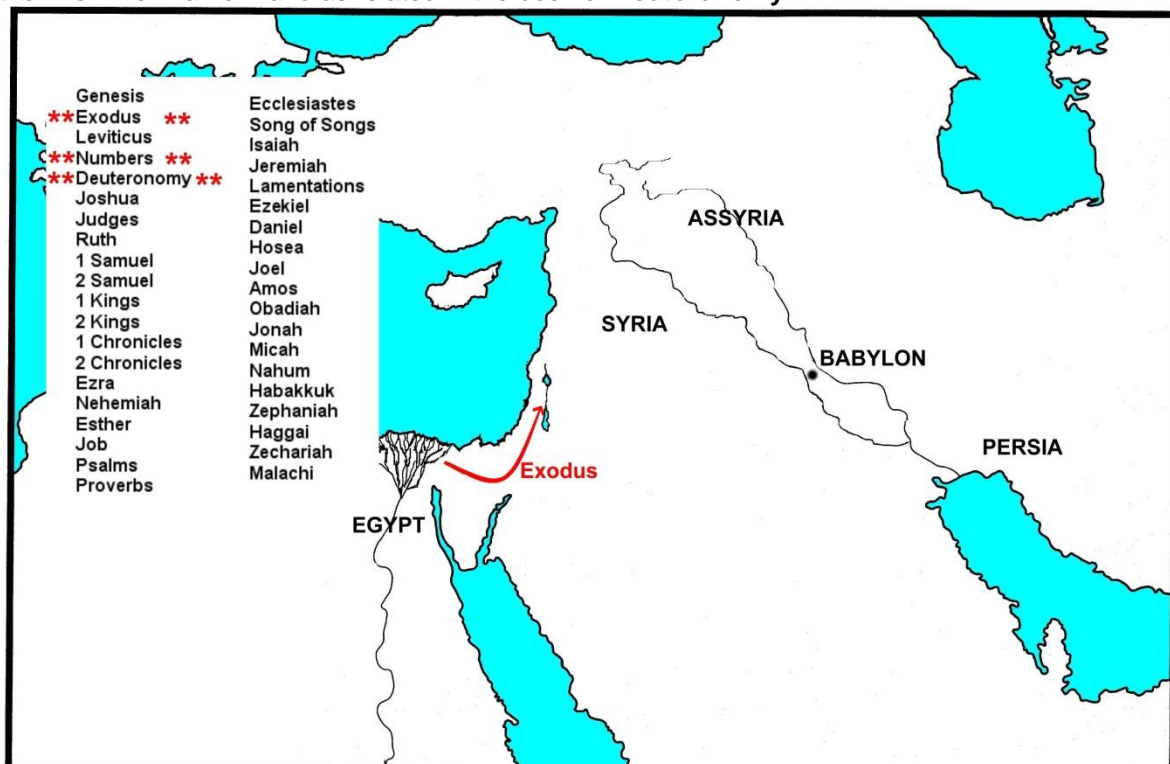
Beginning at roughly 1900 BC, God called Abraham to be a father of a great nation (Gen 12). Genesis relates the story of his travels and eventual settling in the Promised Land, Canaan.



Famine forced God's people to Egypt and they spent more than 400 years in bondage to the Pharaohs. God worked to release them from slavery and, under Moses' leadership, they escaped (the Exodus, roughly 1300 BC) and travelled back to the land God had promised them.

The Egyptians were the major world power from 3000 BC to 1000 BC (these dates are very approximate). The Great Pyramid of Giza was completed in 2600 BC.

The escape from Egypt is described in the book of **Exodus**. The trip of 40 yrs. wandering in the desert before getting to Israel is described in **Numbers**. On the verge of Palestine, Moses lectures his people to prepare them for their new life in a new land as related in the book of **Deuteronomy**.

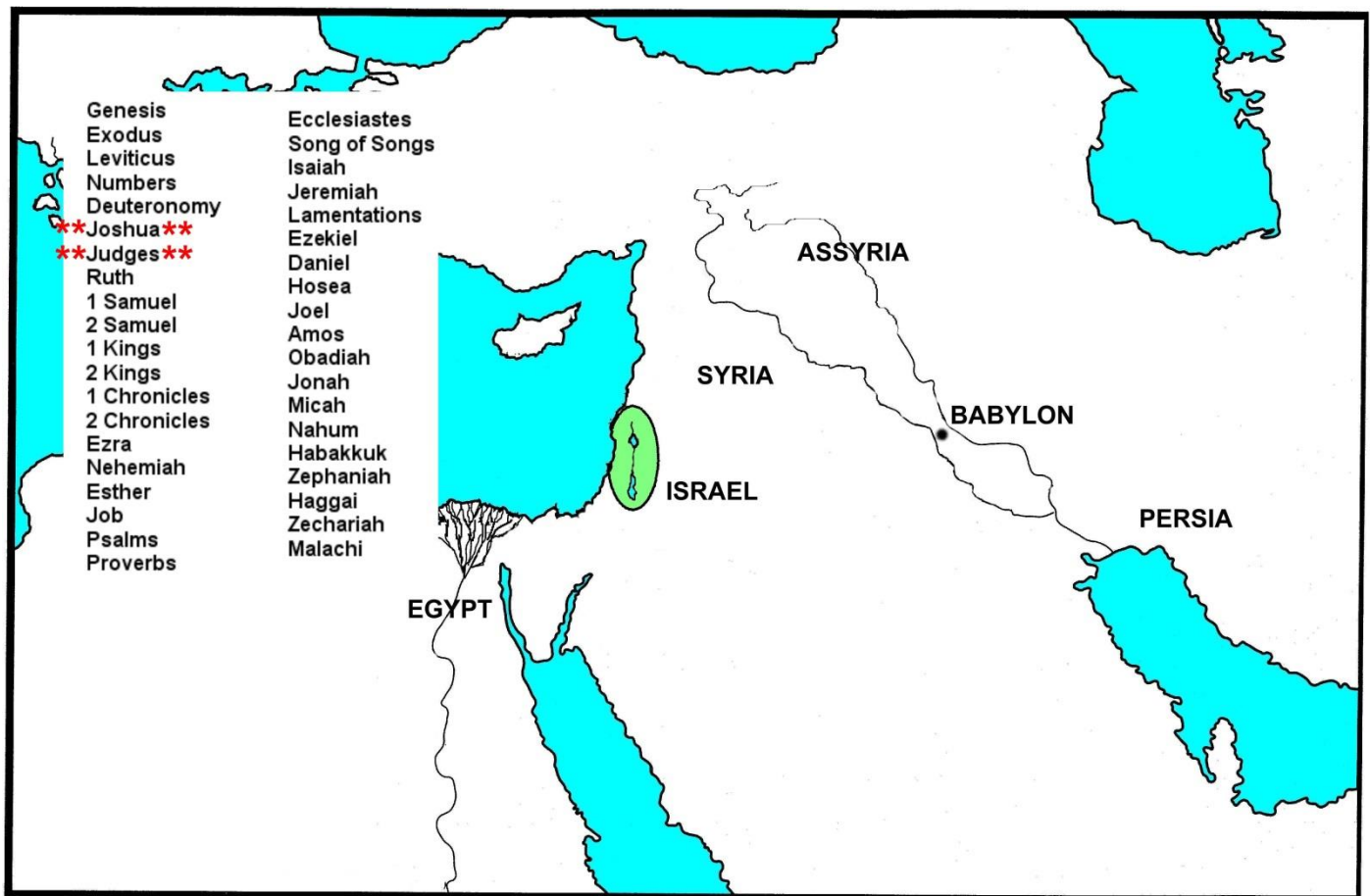


4. "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

Where? Ex 20:12-17

Context? 10 Commandments made at Mt Sinai while God's people were on their way to the Promised Land.

In Israel, God fights for his people to conquer the indigenous peoples. These battles are described in **Joshua** and **Judges**.



Samuel led God's people after the Judges. After Samuel came the kings with Saul as Israel's first king and David as Israel's second and greatest king until Jesus. David began his reign at about 1000 BC. The history of Samuel and Saul is written in **1 Samuel**.

David was a warrior king and expanded Israel's borders (represented by the green area below). David's story begins at 1 Samuel 16 and continues through **1 and 2 Samuel** and **1 Chronicles**, ending with his death in 1 Kings 2. David was also a singer and musician and he wrote many **psalms** describing his feelings, experiences and prayers.

5. As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

Where? 1 Sam 17:48-49

Context? David kills Goliath, the Philistine champion. Israel has a king, Saul, but David will be the next and greatest king besides Jesus.

6. "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want."

Where? Ps 23:1

Context? Psalm of David. Even in the most difficult of circumstances David trusts God to rescue him and bring him goodness and mercy.

7. When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

Where? 2 Sam 7:12-16

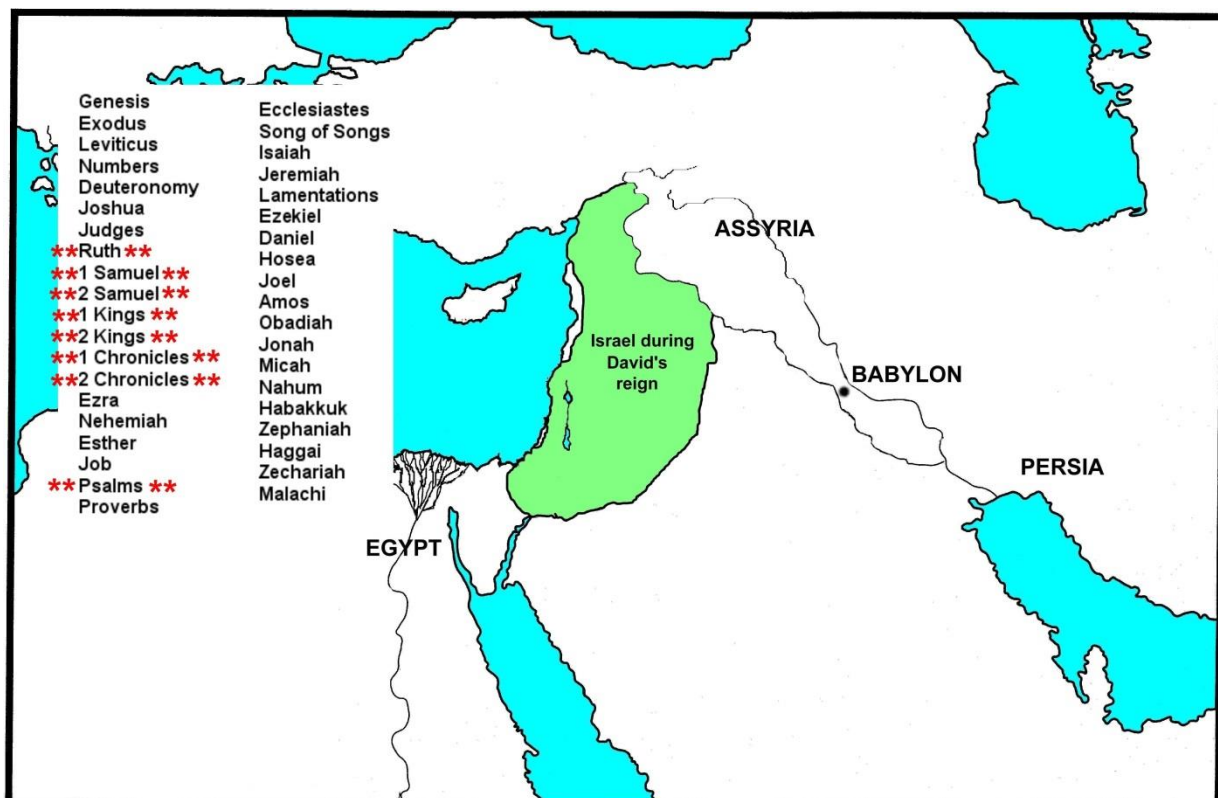
Context? God's line of kings, through David, will be established forever.

Solomon, David and Bathsheba's second son (2 Sam 12), became king in 961 BC. After Solomon Israel was split in two in 922 BC with the northern kingdom called Israel and the southern kingdom called Judah. This division into two kingdoms weakened them both and it wasn't long before other nations threatened them.

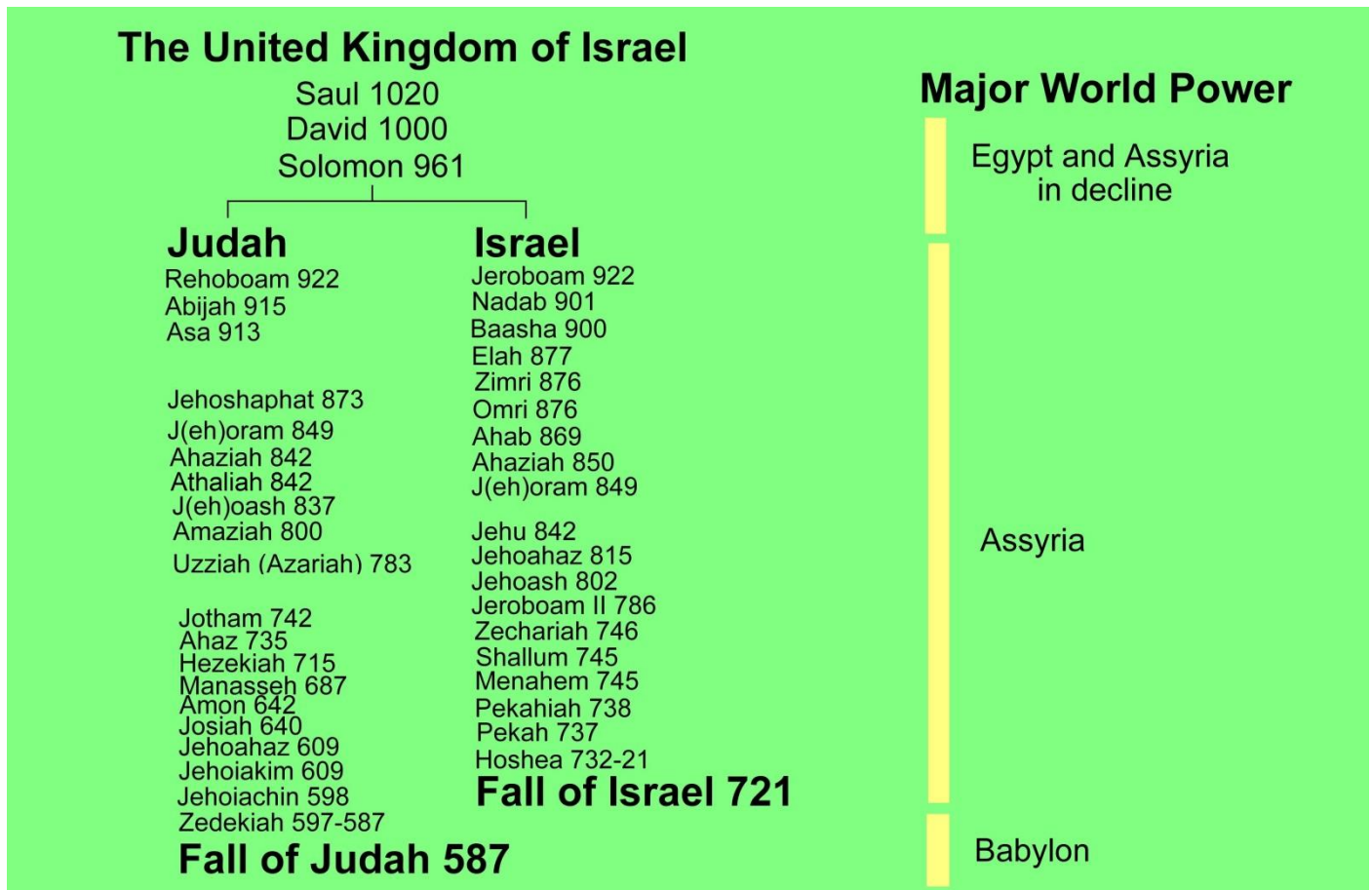
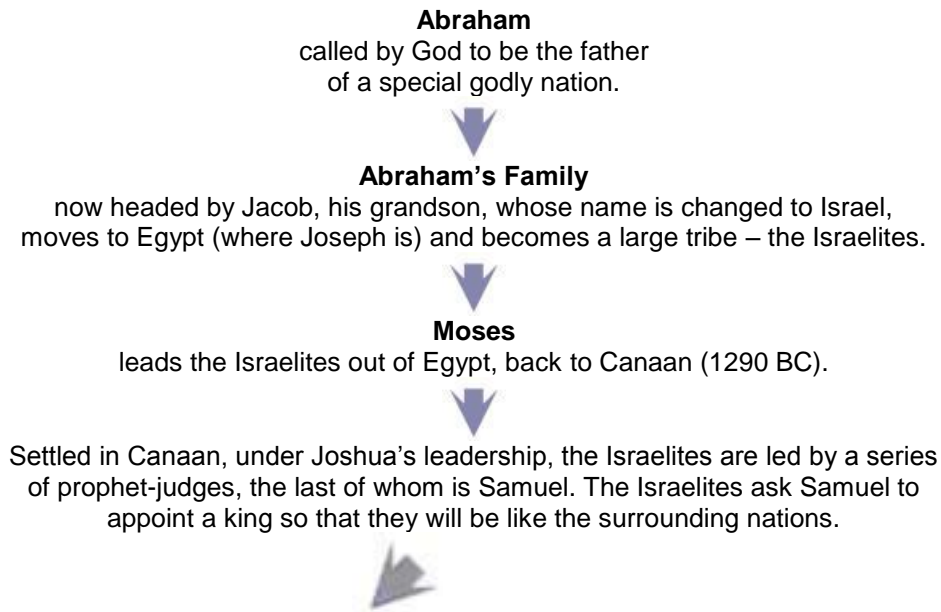
1 and 2 Kings account for four centuries of Israel's history with a succession of kings from both the northern and southern kingdoms, ending in exile. 1 and 2 Kings were written as one book from the viewpoint of an Israelite living in exile in Babylon.

1 and 2 Chronicles follow the kings from the line of David, ignoring the northern kings. The Chronicler wrote from the viewpoint of an Israelite who had returned from exile with Ezra and Nehemiah.

In contrast, **Ruth** is a quiet tale of ordinary life where a mother, Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, move from Moab to Bethlehem and are treated kindly by Boaz. Boaz and Ruth get married and their great grandson is King David.



To recap:



8. Play Redeemer livethShort.mp3 or on YouTube <https://youtu.be/Kg7aXEvCeXY>

Translation: I know that my Redeemer liveth, and he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

Bible: I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;
 I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another.
 How my heart yearns within me!

Where? Job 19:25-27

Context? Bible: Job defends himself against accusations that he has deserved the terrible things that have happened to him. His innocence will ultimately bring him to see God in the flesh.

Handel's Messiah: Comes immediately after the Hallelujah Chorus

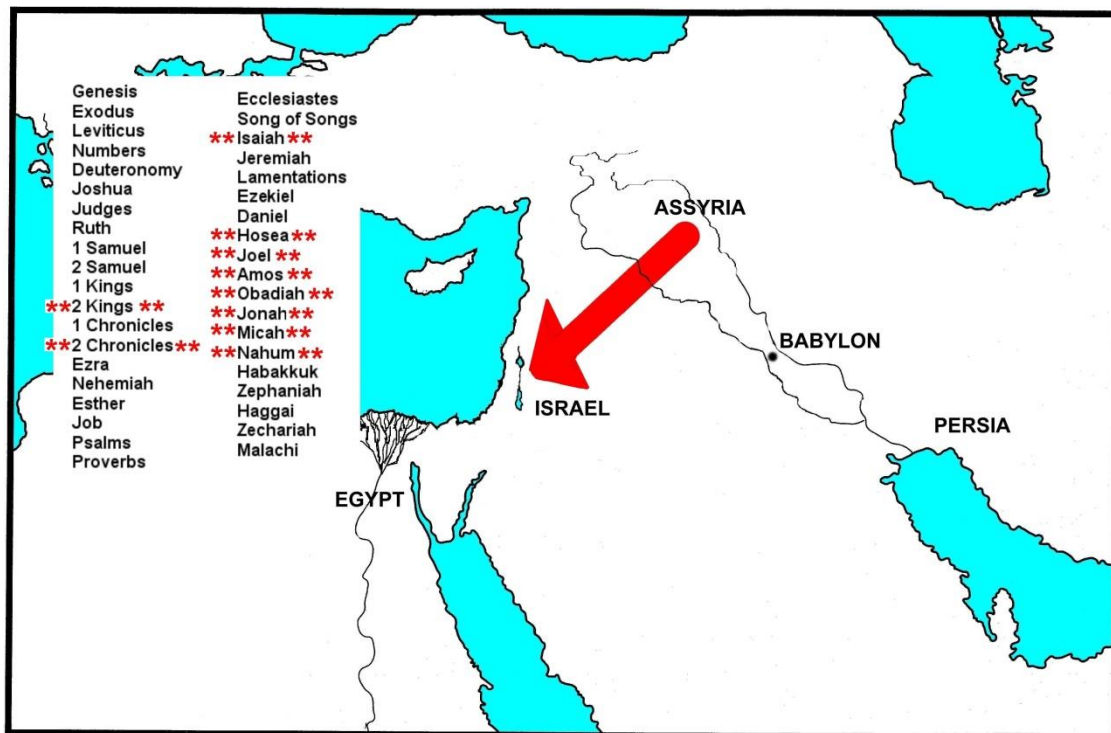
9. Play HisBannerOverMelsLoveSHORT.mps or on YouTube <https://youtu.be/uxgw6pbW59E>

Bible: He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.

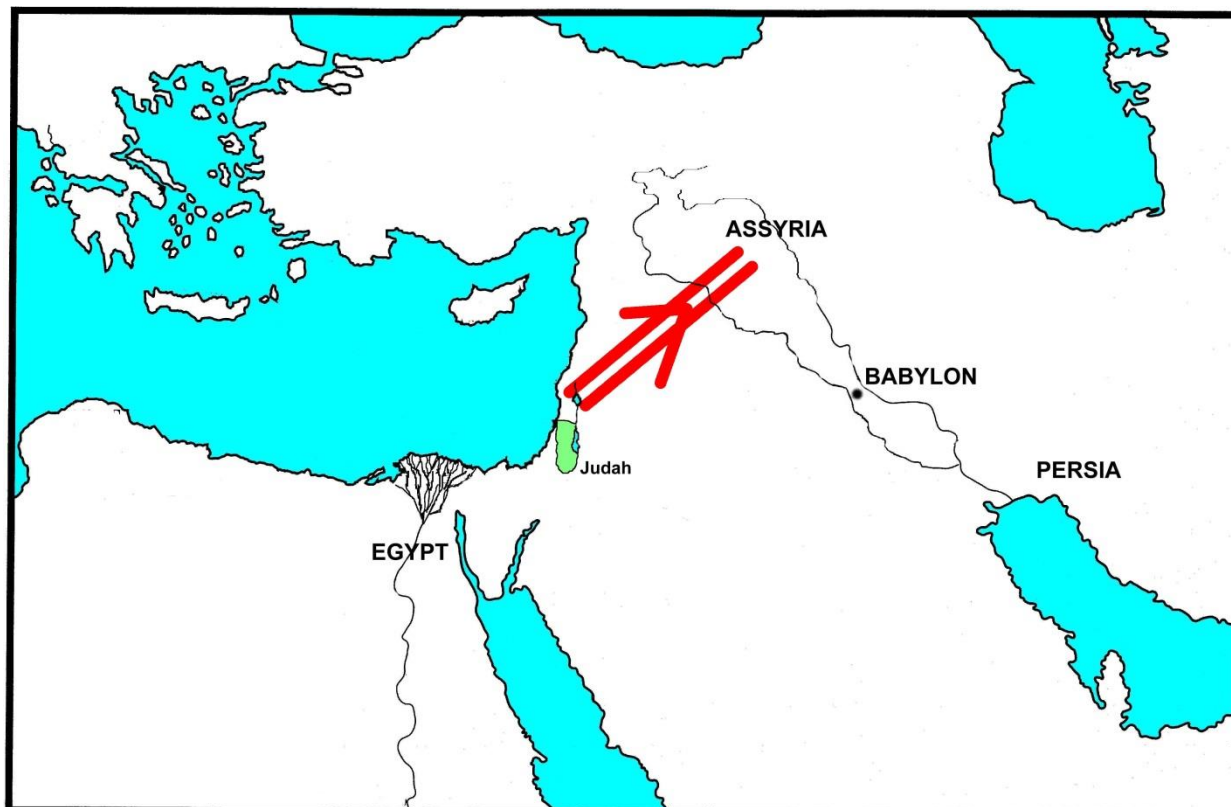
Where? Song of Songs 2:4

Context? Multiple meanings have been suggested for Song of Songs.
The 2 main ones are that it is an allegory for God's love for Israel/the church
OR a poem about the love of a man and a woman.

Assyria became the major world power from about 900 BC to 612 BC. **Jonah** preached God's message of repentance to Nineveh, Assyria's capital, at about 800 BC. They did repent and avoided God's judgement for a time only to re-commit their sins bringing on God's warning through **Nahum**. Israel also needed to repent and a number of prophets warned that God's instrument of judgement would be Assyria. **Isaiah**, **Joel** and **Obadiah** warned Judah (the southern kingdom), **Amos** warned Israel (the northern kingdom) and **Micah** and **Hosea** addressed both kingdoms.

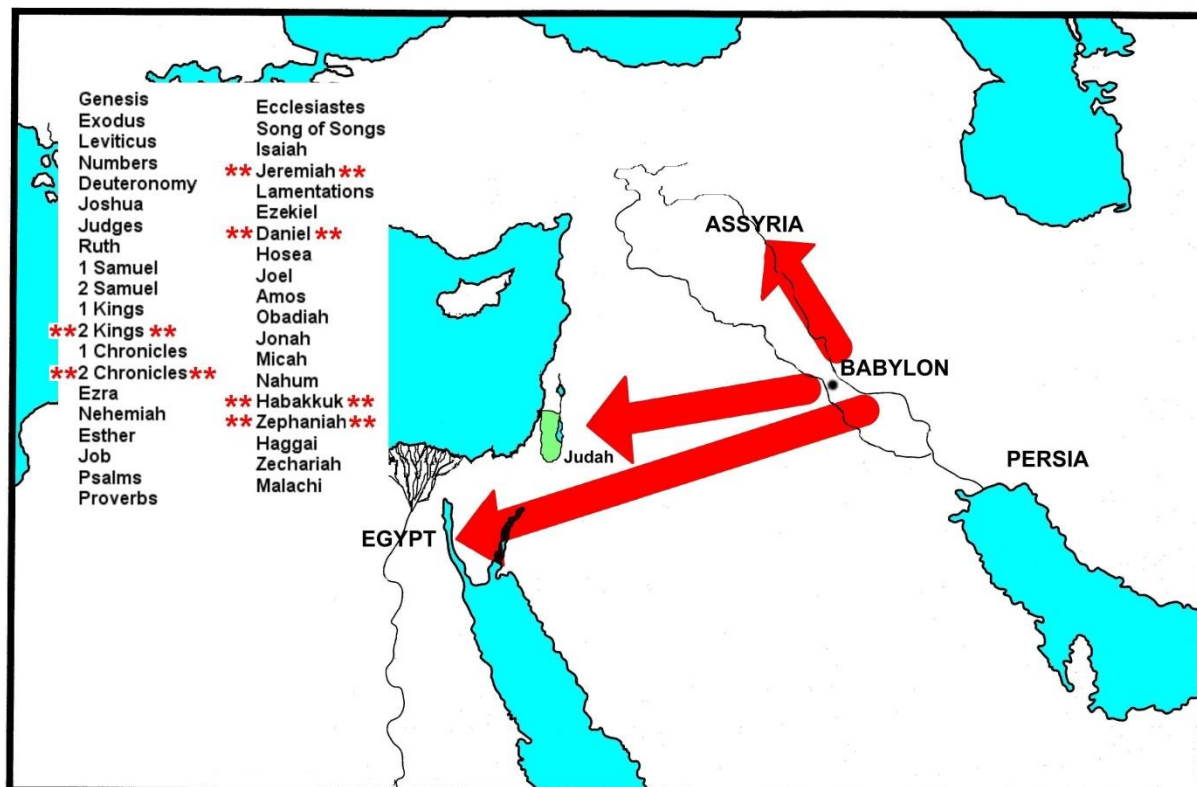


Tiglath-Pileser III became king of Assyria in 745 BC. In 721 BC he defeated Israel (the northern kingdom) and took the people into exile. In 612 BC Nineveh, the capital, was destroyed bringing about the fall of Assyria.



Babylon was the next major world power from 612 BC to 539 BC. They attacked and defeated nearly everybody. **Jeremiah** and **Zephaniah** warned Judah and **Habakkuk** said that, even worse than Assyria, Babylon would be God's instrument of judgement.

Babylon battled with Judah and took people like **Daniel** into exile in 605 BC.



Eventually in 587 BC, Babylon took Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and drove most of the people to Babylon leaving only the poorest behind. This was known as the Exile.

Some **psalms** were written during the exile.

Jeremiah was offered a comfortable life in Babylon but chose to remain in Judah.

Lamentations was written, probably by Jeremiah, about the suffering of the people in exile.

Ezekiel and **Daniel** had already been taken into exile.

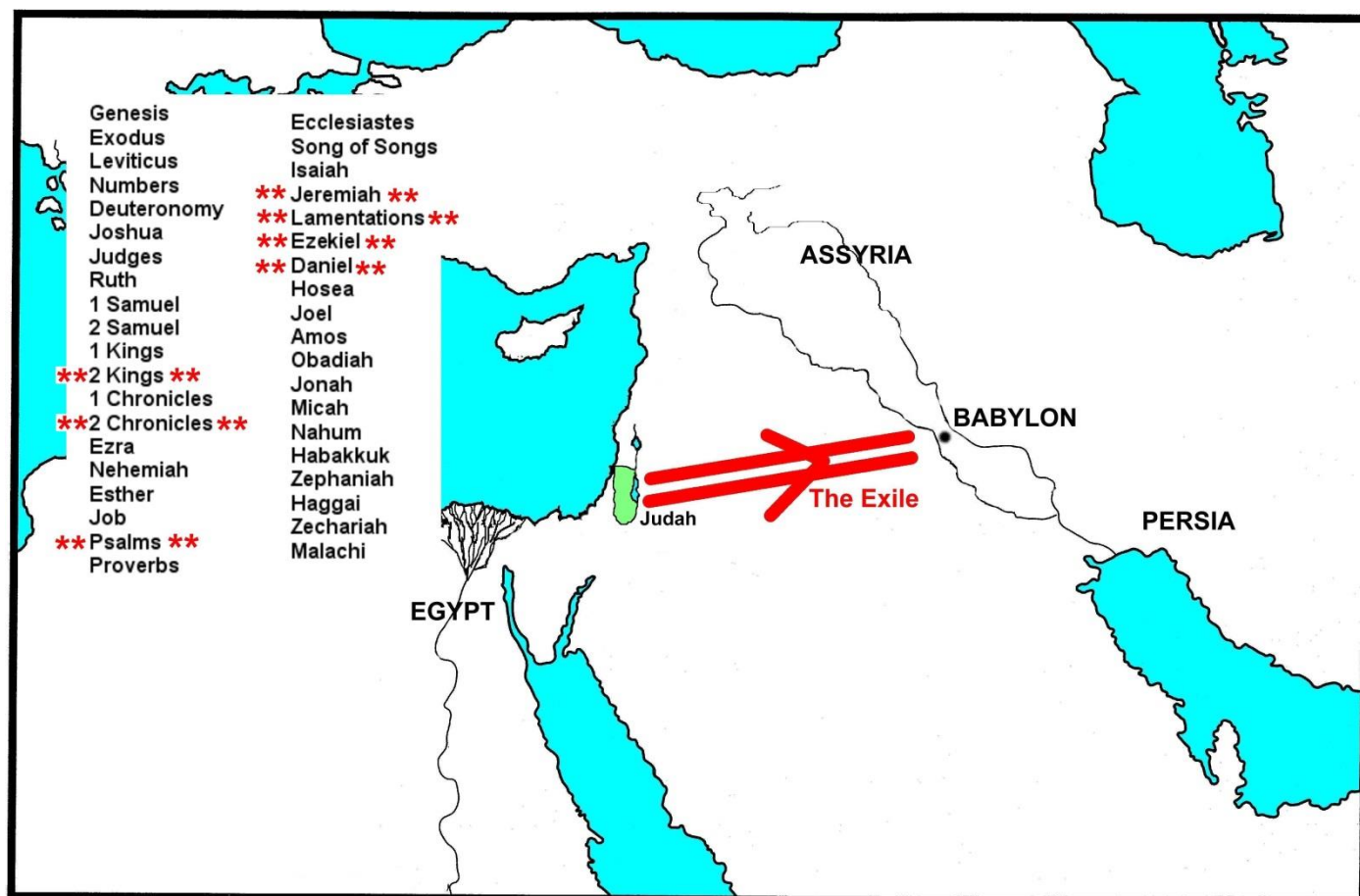
10. Play RiversOfBabylonBoneyMShort.mp3 or on YouTube <https://youtu.be/ta42xU2UXLA>

Translation: By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down. Yeah we wept when we remembered Zion. (twice)
When the wicked carried us away in captivity, required from us a song. }
Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land. } (twice)

Bible: By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

Where? Ps 137:1-4

Context? God's people are in exile in Babylon and living in misery.



Isaiah, **Jeremiah** and **Daniel** prophesied the defeat of the Babylonians and the return of the exiles.

11. Play EricLiddellReadsIsaiahShort.mp3 or on YouTube <https://youtu.be/ZjF59VB0h6g>

As read from KJV: Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket and are counted as the small dust in the balance. All nations before him are as nothing. They are counted to him as less than nothing and vanity.
He bringeth the princes to nothing. He maketh the judges of the earth as a vanity.
Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?
He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no strength he increaseth might.
But they that waiteth on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles.
They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

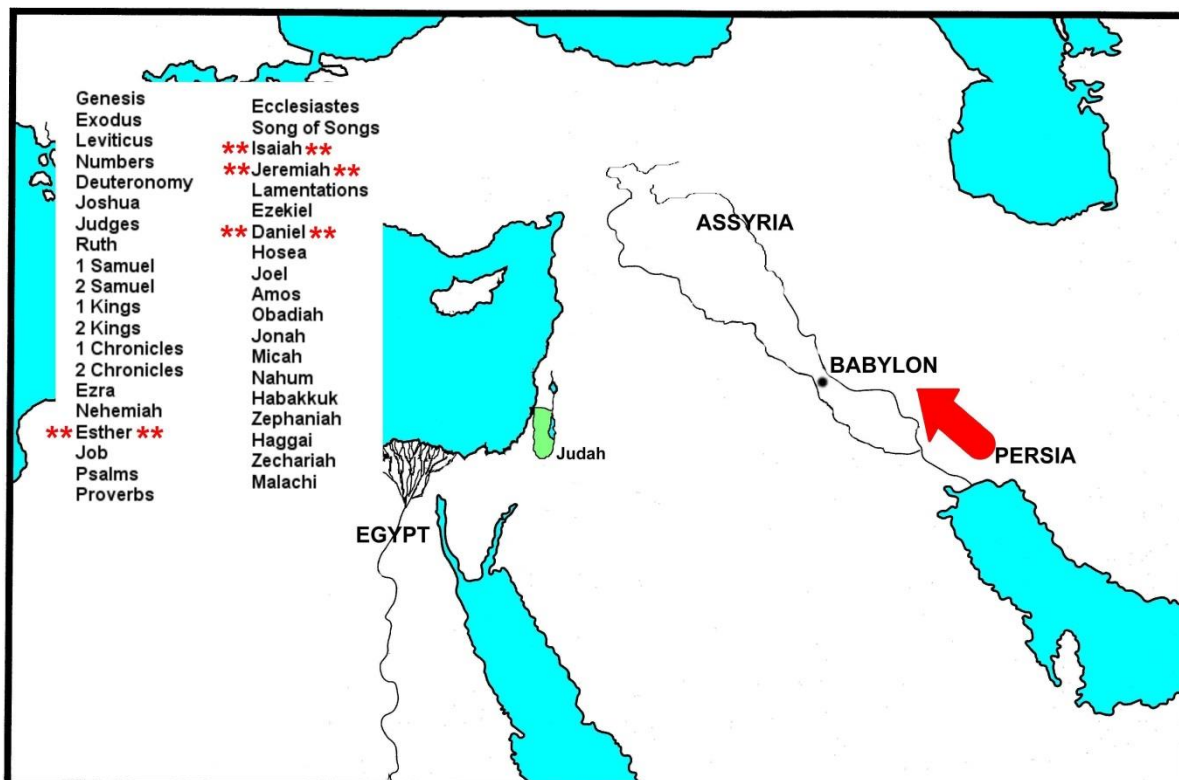
Bible: v 15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales;
V 17 Before him all the nations are as nothing, they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.
V 23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
V 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary,
V 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
V 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Where? Isaiah 40:15-31

Context? Bible: God is bringing his people out of exile in Babylon and back to the Promised Land.

Chariots of Fire: Eric Liddell reads from Isaiah in church before he competes in the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

These prophecies came true when Cyrus the Great defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and Persia became the major world power.



The Persians allowed the Israelites (the remnant) to return to Judah although some preferred to stay in Persia/Babylon e.g. the Jewish community written up in **Esther**.

In 538/7 the main group of Israelites returned to Judah with Zerubbabel, their leader.

Haggai and **Zechariah** were written during the reign of Darius I of Persia (521-486 BC).

Haggai wrote to encourage the re-building of the walls of Jerusalem.

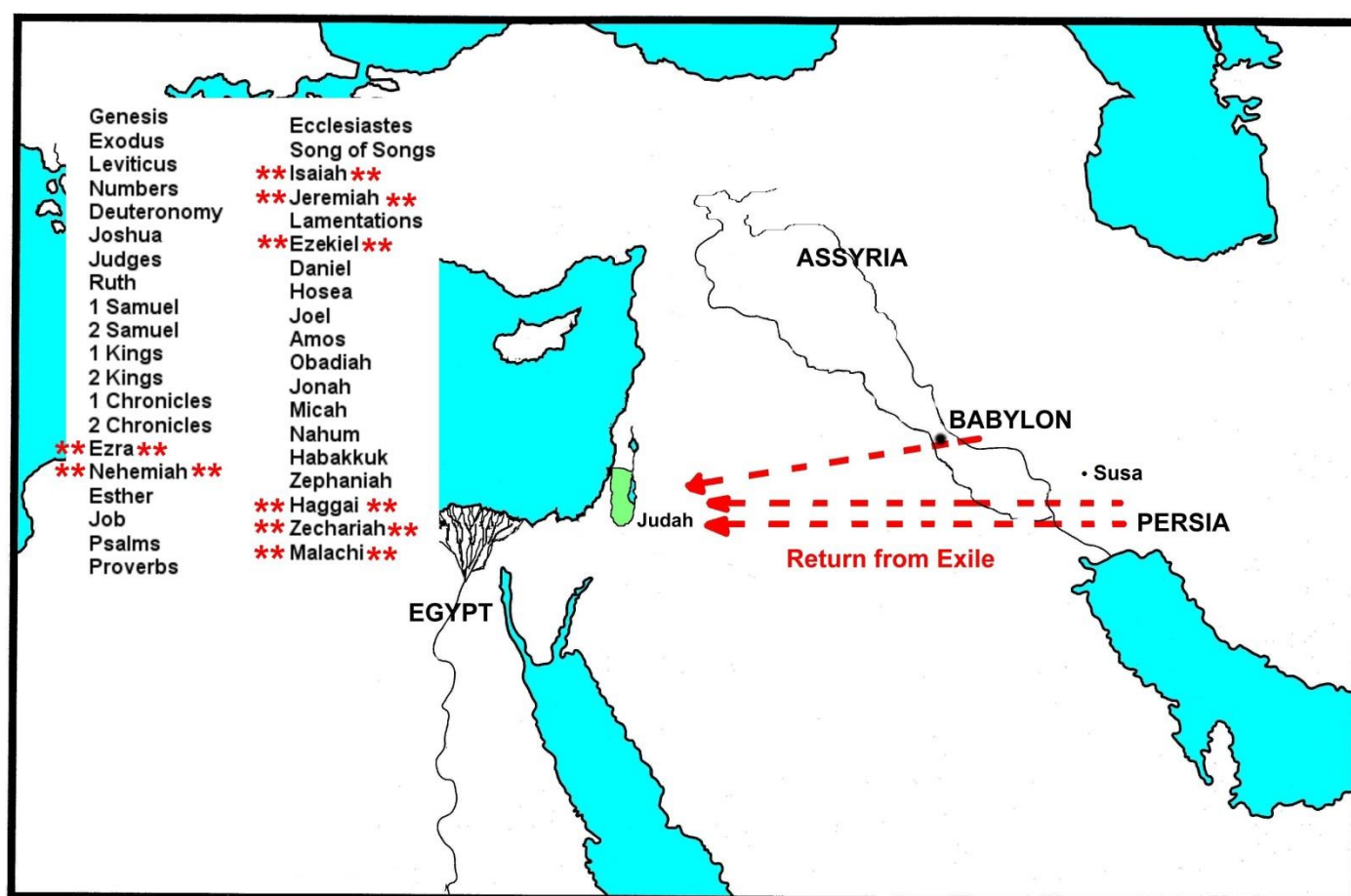
Zechariah looked to the restoration of the Temple and the future of God's people.

(Battle of Thermopylae 480 BC when the Greeks blocked the advance of the massive Persian army under Xerxes I (486-465 BC) depicted in the 2006 movie "300".)

Ezra and a group of Israelites returned to Jerusalem in 458 BC to organise the rebuilding of the Temple.

Nehemiah returned with his group in 445 BC to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes I, was king of the Persians from 465-423 BC, see Neh 2:1.)

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah and **Malachi** all looked ahead to a time beyond the exile, to a time of restoration and a time when God's king, Jesus, would come.



12. 'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD.

'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, "Know the LORD," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

Where? Jer 31:31-34.

Context? God's people are in exile in Babylon but Jeremiah looks ahead when there will be a new exodus and a new covenant.

In 331 BC the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, defeated the Persians, under Darius III (336-331 BC).

331-146 BC – Greek rule.

146 BC – 410 AD – Roman rule.

To finish

13. Why do we have to study the Bible?

Study 2, Isaiah 1:1-9, Leadership

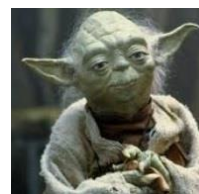
INTRODUCTION

In the book of Isaiah we have a collection of prophecies belonging to various periods of the prophet's life. It is not always easy to follow – partly because we are unfamiliar with the language and ways of prophets and visionaries; partly because we do not know the principles which determined the present arrangement of material. In places there is clearly a time-sequence. Other parts seem to be arranged according to subject. Also, because Isaiah was a visionary, his thoughts range freely over the whole scale of time. One minute he is describing God's judgement on the Jerusalem he knows (the Assyrians about to pounce); the next it is God's universal judgement on evil - the end of the world as we know it; the beginning of a reign of perfect peace and justice. What he sees happening in his own time is the outworking of principles which are eternal and universal. And he moves in a flash from the particular to the universal and back again.

From the Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition p 378.

Getting started

1. (a) Besides God, who has had the biggest influence on your Christian life?



- (b) How has he or she influenced you?

Bible

The book of Isaiah begins by plunging its readers into the grim political and social situation of the time. If you are interested in the historical setting read the explanations on pp 28 & 49.

2. Read Isaiah 1:1-9
 - (a) What time frame does this vision/prophecy of Isaiah deal with (v1 and see p 7)?
 - (b) Who is this directed to?
 - (c) What is the charge(s) laid against these people (v2-4)?

Isaiah [in ch 1] compares his city and nation to a cut-down tree, a vineyard, a prostitute, a farm animal, a hut in a field of melons. He writes of a world in which blind people see and trees clap their hands. If we want to be good readers of Isaiah, we won't always take his words literally.

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 8.

3. The passage describes the nation after God has judged it. What did it look like?

For those people the judgement of God was no mere theological abstraction, or something that existed somewhere else or might be experienced at some future time, as we tend to think of it. It was a very present, painful reality. The situation reflected here is probably the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib the Assyrian in 701 BC.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 42.

4. Isaiah 1:1 mentions 4 kings. Make brief notes on each of them using the passages below:
(Note: "High places" were shrines where people made sacrifices and worshipped pagan gods.)
 - (a) Uzziah (Azariah) – 2 Chr 26

(b) Jotham – 2 Chr 27

(c) Ahaz – 2 Chr 28

(d) Hezekiah – 2 Chr 29:1-2

5. (a) Work out, for each of the 4 kings, if they were 'good', 'evil' or 'okay'.

(b) What makes a king 'good' or 'evil'?

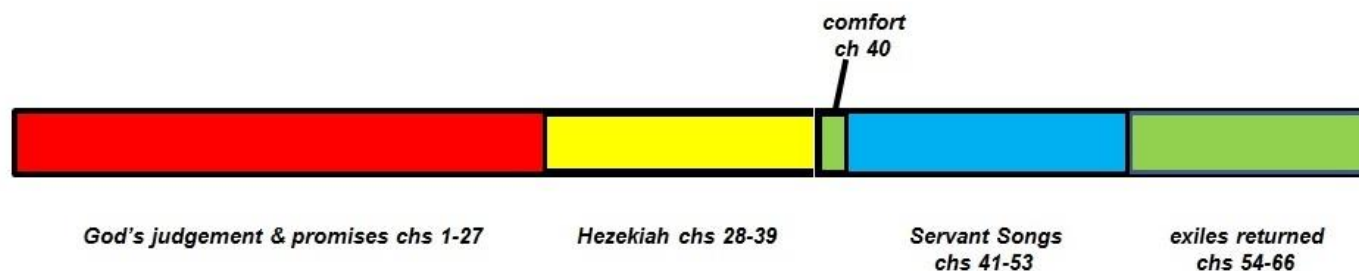
(c) How might the kings have influenced the people?

6. Where is the element of hope in Isaiah 1:1-9?
(For details about Sodom and Gomorrah see Gen chs 18 & 19.)

Already so many of the dominant concerns of the book of Isaiah are before us. God is enraged when his people ignore him and mistreat each other. So we find ourselves wondering: can anything be done to put things right? What is to become of Israel? We will read later in the book of Isaiah (chapter 53) that God can be at work for good, even in a figure who is bruised and broken, like the nation in 1:5. We will learn that God's plan is to bind up the bleeding wounds of his people (see 30:26; 61:1). The next verses are vital for hinting at this hope. Israel has been dealt a terrible blow, but there are still survivors!

Patston p 63.

To get a simple view of the whole book of Isaiah I've prepared the following picture:



The first 27 chapters tell of the impending judgement on Judah and the nations for their sin. But there is hope and God makes promises to his people concerning their future. Judgement comes in the form of an Assyrian invasion but Hezekiah holds out against them (chs 28-39). Isaiah jumps ahead to a time after God's judgement when the people are in exile in Babylon (ch 40). God promises a saviour in the form of a suffering servant (chs 41-53) and a time when the exiles will be returned to the Promised Land (chs 54-66).

To finish

7. (a) Considering the 4 kings of Isaiah 1:1 and their influence on the people, how do the leaders in your church influence you?

(b) What other things influence you?

(c) With all these influences how do you stay loyal to your faith?

Study 3, Isaiah 1:10-2:5, Religion

Getting started

1. Why do you go to church?



2. What are the chief influences on you when you are at church?

The story so far . . .

Isaiah begins with the denunciation of the Israelites for their rebellion against God. But there is hope – some will survive God's judgement.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 1:10-20

Verses 13-14 **New Moons.**

The first day of each month was considered holy, hence the association in the Old Testament of the monthly 'new moon' with the weekly Sabbath. This fresh beginning was marked by special sacrifices over which trumpets were blown. It seems to have been regarded, like the Sabbath, as a day on which normal work was not done.

From Return to the Lord Hosea by James Stone pp 60-61.

"Convocations" is another word for "assemblies" i.e. gatherings of God's people.

Why have the people's religious observances been rejected by God?

3. What sorts of things does God urge the people to do?

4. What is God going to do (vv 18 – 20)?

Video

The Nooma video, #4, "Sunday", by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way. On YouTube at <https://youtu.be/eljHQuxVvKE>

5. (a) What are your first impressions of this video?



(b) What is the main point of the video?

(c) At the beginning there were well-dressed people filing into the building with organ music playing.

(i) Did you think they were going to church?

(ii) Later in the video when the camera showed us a wider vision of people at tables in the restaurant do you think there was a subtle message about people at church?

If so, what was that message?

(d) When Rob Bell starts his commentary he says he used to go to church because he was supposed to but things didn't seem right and he wonders if this is what God had in mind.

Thinking about church as it is today and comparing it with your Bible knowledge, do you think this is what God had in mind?

(e) Rob Bell next describes a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. He begins by talking about how Jesus was invited to a meal but ignores the hand washing rules. He is commenting from 2 passages that are probably describing the same event: Matt ch 23 and Luke 11:37-54. We will look at the Luke passage.

Read Luke 11:37-46.

Rob Bell finishes this bit by saying "Jesus has infinite patience and understanding for people who are genuinely searching for God but people who claim to know and speak for God but have cold, hard hearts – Jesus is relentless in slamming them."

How do you think all this applies to church today?

(f) Then he talks about buying flowers for his wife. He says that if he is buying flowers out of a sense of duty or because they were on sale or because he felt the house needed them then his wife probably won't even want the flowers because she wants his heart. The Bible says something similar.

Read Isaiah 29:13.

Context: Chapters 28 and 29 of Isaiah are full of scorn, particularly for the leaders of Israel and Judah who ignore God's warnings through his prophets. Judgement will follow, beginning with Jerusalem (Ariel).

How much of what we do at church is about obeying rules or going through the motions?

(g) Rob Bell talks about giving money and says that one motive for giving could be guilt i.e. you give to get God off your back. We will read the passage that he refers to in the Old Testament but before we do that . . . why do we give?

(h) Read Isaiah 1:11-17.

Rob Bell is drawing a comparison between the Old Testament sacrificial system and our giving of money to God. What should we be doing instead?

(i) Rob Bell finishes the video by saying that people are turned off by narrow minds and judgemental attitudes, and so is God. He says that a lot of people confuse religion with God, and walk away from both. He continues, "The point isn't Christianity. The point is being a Christian. It means being a follower of Jesus. It's being connected with everything that is true and good and right. Everything that goes on around us that reminds us that there is so much more going on around us than we realise. Could anything be more beautiful?"

What do you think he means by his final statement? Do you agree with it? Why/why not?

6. Read Isaiah 1:21-31
What sins are condemned in these verses?

7. What is God going to do about it?

Verses 29-31 **Oaks and gardens.**

The verse [v 29] reads: 'You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen'. The reference to oaks and gardens seems to be about worship of other gods, with the use of plants suggestive of rites to produce fertility. (In 66:17 there is a reference to some sort of unacceptable worship in gardens.) This offensive worship had been a deliberate choice, even a matter of delight. It will, however, turn to shame and disgrace. You can tell a lot about a person's inner life from what makes them ashamed. It seems that God is changing his people deep inside.

Forever the poet, Isaiah picks up the language of oak trees and gives us a final picture of judgment. We are to imagine the pitiful sight of a tree starved of water, with brittle leaves (1:30). We are to imagine the crackle of dry wood and to see the choice to worship other gods as the suicidal choice to throw a match onto yourself. There is no one to quench the fire (1:31). There is no hope for Jerusalem the dumb animal, the neo-Sodom, the hypocrite, the prostitute, the dying tree.

Patston p 68.

8. Read Isaiah 2:1-5
Chapters 1 & 2 both begin in the same way but how is this vision of Jerusalem here different from chapter 1?

Isaiah 2:2 returns to a picture of something raised up, more magnificent than a son growing up (compare I :2). God intends to raise up Mount Zion. That is, his intentions to treat his people with honour and privilege will not cease despite the shocking extent of their rebellion.

Patston p 69.

Isaiah 2:4 **Ploughshares and pruning hooks**

Ploughshare – the blade of a plough used for tilling the soil. In early times ploughs were constructed of wood; but with the development of metallurgy, metal tips were placed over the wood.

Pruning hooks – small knives with curved blades used for pruning grapevines.

From New Illustrated Bible Dictionary pp 1011-1012, 1044.

(e) Where is Jesus in all this?

The Christian culture that I live in can easily assume that authentic Christian living centres on studying the Bible and doing evangelism. The path of Christian theology over the last few centuries has created the strange impression that seeking justice, encouraging the oppressed, defending the cause of the fatherless and pleading the case of the widow (1:17) are the kinds of things that liberal Christians do, because they have lost evangelism. Or that they are the kind of thing secular governments should do. It is disturbing to note that God's people in Isaiah's day were good at all the religious duties, but overlooked justice. And God told them to stop going to Bible study, to stop going to church and to forget prayer, because he wasn't listening.

Patston p 73.

Study 4, Isaiah 2:6-5:30, the Day of the Lord

Getting started

1. What is your most valued possession and why is it of such great value to you?
2. Would you call this possession an idol?
3. What does it mean to “worship” something or someone?



The story so far . . .

Isaiah begins with the denunciation of the Israelites for their rebellion against God. But there is hope for forgiveness and hope for people from all nations coming to God.

Bible

4. Read Isaiah 2:6-22. (The following notes from Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris pp 16 – 17 might help you understand this passage a little better.)

Divination (v6) and magic were strictly forbidden in Israel. The nations used these practices to gain control of their destinies and to manipulate their gods.

“Clasp hands with pagans” (v6) meant doing business with foreigners but often involved the recognition of the foreigner’s gods.

“Cedars of Lebanon” (v13) were large, spreading, coniferous trees which grew abundantly on Mount Lebanon. They were great wonders for Palestinians, who only knew the small and warped trees of the hill country.

“Oaks of Bashan” (v13) were sturdy, hardwood trees which lived to a great age. Bashan, to the East of the Jordan, was renowned for its groves of oak trees.

Mountains, hills, towers and walls (vv 14 – 15) were symbols of power and security in Canaan.

“Every trading ship” or “every ship of Tarshish” (v16) probably referred to large, long-range Phoenician merchant boats that were used for the longest routes and acted as flagships of the fleets. Israelites feared the sea and therefore ships were a source of wonder and amazement for them.

5. “For” (ESV) connects v 5 with v 6. How does v 6 continue on from v 5?
6. What have the people of Judah been up to?
7. What will “that day” (v11, v12, v17, v20) be like?

8. Chapter 3 gives us another view of “the Day of the Lord”. Read Isaiah 3:1 – 4:1.
 (a) In this chapter what is similar in how the Day of the Lord was described in chapter 2?

(b) What is different?

The judgment of God is one of those where the punishment fits the crime. Godless leadership will lead to desperate leadership.
 Patston pp 78-79.

9. But there is hope. Read Isaiah 4:2-6.
 After describing judgement in chapters 1 – 3 Isaiah hints at the hope of salvation. What ideas come to mind when you read . . .
 (a) 4:2 “the Branch of the Lord”

(b) 4:3 “remnant”

(c) 4:4a the women cf. Isaiah 3:16-4:1

(d) 4:4b “cleanse the bloodstains” cf. Isaiah 1:18

(e) 4:5-6 cf. Ex 13:21

10. How does Jesus fulfill these images?
 (a) 4:2 “the Branch of the Lord” see John 15:1-6.

(b) 4:3 “remnant”

In Isaiah 40-55, this remnant is further reduced to one godly individual. One individual will do what all the others had failed to do. In so doing, he will atone for all the sin of those who should have fulfilled God’s mandate, but didn’t.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 52.

(c) 4:4a the women see John 4:4-26.

(d) 4:4b “cleanse the bloodstains” see Heb 10:19-22.

(e) 4:5-6 see Rev 21:1-5.

11. Read Isaiah 5:1-7

(a) Who is singing the song about the vineyard (vv 1,7)?

(b) Who is the vineyard (v 2,7)?

(c) What was the problem God had with the vineyard (vv 2-4)?

(d) What is going to happen to the vineyard because of this (v5-6)?

(e) What is the point of the comparison between the vineyard and the house of Israel?

Isaiah writes a poem — a love-song, he calls it — about God planting Israel like a vineyard, watching over it, hoping for good grapes, and finally discovering wild grapes. Israel had gone to the bad, despite all his care. All that is left is judgment; the vineyard will be broken down, and wild animals will come and take over. It's a terrifying picture of what happens if the people of God persistently reject the purpose for which God has called them.

Jesus has taken the story [in Mark 12:1-12] and told it somewhat differently. God is still the vineyard-owner, Israel still the vineyard. But Jesus weaves into the story the idea, which many Jews of his day would have believed, that God was waiting at a distance, addressing his people through prophets, longing for the time when Israel would at last obey his call to be the people he wanted them to be. The prophets, as was well known, had mostly been rejected by the people; Israel had persisted in going its own way. Now, at last, God was sending one who was doing the job of a prophet, but who was himself more than a prophet. He was the beloved son. Mark's readers know what this means: Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, marked out as such in his baptism, confirmed as such at the transfiguration. And now, as Jesus knew would happen, Israel — in the person of its highest authorities, the chief priests — is going to reject him too, and kill him. There is no happy ending to this story. As it stands, it is pure tragedy. The vineyard tenants overreach themselves; they realize it's either him or them. Either the son will inherit, or they will.

From Mark for Everyone by Tom Wright p 159.

12. Read Isaiah 5:8-24

What are the people doing wrong that they deserve these 6 “woes”?

Taken together, these woes probably reflect the conditions that developed in Judah during the reign of Uzziah (= Azariah, 791-740 BC). . . . this was in many ways a golden age of impressive achievements, but it also had a darker side. A new, wealthy elite emerged, who grew more and more corrupt and oppressive as they became intoxicated (in more ways than one!) with materialism and the pursuit of pleasure.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p56.

13. Read Isaiah 5:25-30

What happens next?

14. What other things do we learn about the Day of the Lord from Joel 2:28-32?

Context: Joel chapter 1 describes a locust plague that destroys much of the land and devastates the people. "Grain, wine and oil were necessary for the staple diet of Mediterranean countries – the grain to make bread; the fruit of the vine as daily drink; olive oil for cooking, cleansing, soothing, lighting and much else besides." (From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior p 24.)
Now it was all gone and Joel calls on the Lord.

15. What do we learn about the Day of the Lord from 2 Peter 3:10-13?

Context: Written at about 63 AD Peter is facing death and writes letters of encouragement and assurance because the church is facing persecution.

16. Taking into account the prophecies that Jesus has fulfilled as well as ideas about the Day of the Lord from Isaiah 2:6-5:30, Joel 2:28-32 and 2 Peter 3:10-13 make a summary statement of what the Day of the Lord will be like.

To finish

17. How does the Day of the Lord fit in with your idea of heaven?

Study 5, Isaiah ch 6, "Send me!"

Getting started

1. Name a task that you were given to do or name a task that you set yourself.



2. (a) Did you accomplish the task?

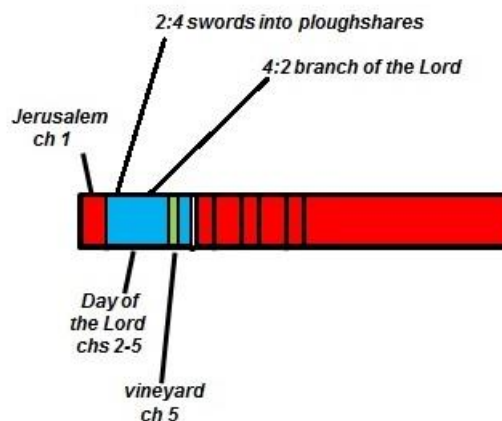
(b) What were the difficulties?

(c) What were the rewards?

The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

Patston p 84.



Bible

3. Read Isaiah 6:1-7. (Note: "Seraphs" literally mean "burning ones".)
What do we learn about God?
4. What does Isaiah see (v 1) and when did he see it?

The death of King Uzziah (6:l) ended a substantial reign (possibly 791—740 BC). It had been a time of prosperity - consistent with the vision of affluence that we have encountered in Isaiah 1- 5. With the king's death, questions about the future would have been on everyone's mind. Isaiah gets to hear what God has in mind for the

future of his people. Isaiah gets to see that there is a throne higher and more exalted than Uzziah's and that the true king is the Lord Almighty (6:1).

Patston pp 87-88.

5. What is the condition of Israel so far (chs 1-5) and how does Isaiah see his own condition (v 5)?

6. (a) How does Isaiah feel about being in the presence of God?

(b) Why does he feel this way (see also Ex 33:20)?

7. Verses 6 & 7 are reminiscent of Num 16:41-48. How is Isaiah saved from "ruin"/death?

8. Read Isaiah 6:8-13
How does the vision of verses 1-7 imply the need for God to send someone (v 8)?

9. Why would God ask rather than command (v 8)?

10. What does God tell Isaiah to tell his people (vv 9 – 10)?

11. What has Isaiah already been telling his people in chapters 1 – 5?

12. How do verses 9 & 10 fit in with what Isaiah has been telling his people?

13. How long will Isaiah have to preach this stuff (vv 11 – 13)?

14. (a) What hints are offered in v 13 about what is to come at the end of this long period of judgement and devastation?

(b) Does this remind you of anything earlier in Isaiah (see 4:2-6)? How is it similar?

15. How does Isaiah 6:9-10 apply to Jesus (see John 12:37-41)?

16. (a) What is the point of Isaiah's preaching if it will make the people's hearts calloused, their ears dull and close their eyes?
- (b) How do people get saved if even seeing Jesus' miracles and hearing Jesus preach won't convince them (see John 12:42a)?
- (c) What does this mean for our own attempts at evangelism?

To finish

17. (a) Does "Send me!" describe your attitude to evangelism?
- (b) What other ways can we promote Christ to the world?
- (c) Play "The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission – Introduction" by John Dickson available at YouTube <https://youtu.be/9aHOPkiwLAW>.
- (i) Do you agree with any of John Dickson's "problems" with modern evangelistic courses (self-consciousness, talking too much, feeling the talk was all there was to evangelism)?
- (ii) Why/why not?

I have tried to demonstrate that seeking the salvation of others involves more than our lips. . . perhaps the best kept secret of Christian mission is that the Bible lists a whole range of activities that promote Christ to the world and draw others toward him. These . . . include financial support for the work of the gospel, prayer for the lost and for those who preach and, of course, good works that beautify the news of Christ and win others to the worship of the Father.

From Promoting the Gospel by John Dickson p 102.

However in Isaiah 1 - 6, the text has given us clues on how to read the account of Isaiah. In 1:9, we are invited to read the book of Isaiah as though we are survivors of an act of God's judgment. We stand stunned that we are still alive and wondering what to do next. We are urged to walk in the light of the Lord and to stop trusting human beings. Then in Isaiah 6 we are given a close up of another survivor. By writing Isaiah 6 in the first person, the writer lets us into Isaiah's world. This makes it possible for us to identify with Isaiah, to stand with the man Isaiah. When Isaiah says he is a man of unclean lips who lives among a people of unclean lips, we hear ourselves described. We then read that Isaiah stood in the presence of God's superlative holiness and lived! The next thing he did was to utter 'Send me!' He wanted to walk in the light of the Lord and trust him.

Patston p 94.

Study 6, Isaiah chs 7 – 8, King Ahaz, Assyria and Judgement

Getting started

1. What does it mean when someone says “Don’t judge me!”?



2. How are these “judgements” different from being discerning about people?

The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation [ch 6] that did not have to wait for the future.

Patston p 84.

Bible

3. Read Isaiah 7:1-12

Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah (capital at Jerusalem)

Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel = Ephraim (capital at Samaria)

Rezin, king of Aram = Syria (capital at Damascus)

Abraham – Isaac – Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter (Gen chs 29 – 35). Judah was Jacob’s 4th son and Joseph was Jacob’s 11th son. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel (Gen 32:28) and all of Jacob’s sons had families that become the tribes of Israel. Instead of a tribe of Joseph, Joseph’s 2 sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, form 2 half tribes.

[Ephraim’s] descendants became one of the most prestigious of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was the Ephraimite, Jeroboam, who was responsible for splitting the ten northern tribes, including Ephraim, from the southern tribes during the reign of Rehoboam. The prophets often use ‘**Ephraim**’ as an alternative expression for ‘Israel’. . . .

Judah is the tribe from which King David and all the kings of the southern kingdom come and, for this reason, ‘Judah’ is often used to describe the whole southern kingdom.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 32.

Verses 5-6. Such nonentities are the men concerned that Isaiah feigns not to be able to recall their names and refers to them as *the son of Remaliah* and *the son of Tabeeel*. This may be irony but certainly it prompts Ahaz to think in dynastic terms. If Pekah is the son of Remaliah, whose son is Ahaz? Ultimately, the son of David, the occupant of a throne with divine validation, resting on divine promises. *The son of Tabeeel* is otherwise unknown, but he signifies the extra element of threat now imposed: to bring the dynasty of David to an end. Human purposes thus challenge divine promises.

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer p 82.

How do Ahaz and the people respond to the threats made by Israel and Aram?

4. What is God’s advice (vv 4 – 9)?

5. How should Ahaz respond (v11)?

6. How does Ahaz respond (v12)?

7. Read Isaiah 7:13-25

The Hebrew word for 'you' is plural in verses 9, 13 and 14 (referring to the whole dynasty of David), and singular in verses 11, 16 and 17 (referring to Ahaz himself).

"Curds and honey" (v15) in this context is not the food of luxury but the food of poverty (cf vv 21-25).

"When/before he knows to refuse the evil and choose the good" (vv 15-16) is possibly a Hebrew idiom for growing up (cf 8:4 "before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother'"). It would be reading too much into the verse to interpret it as making a statement of some sort about Jesus' moral development as a child.

From Reading 13 of the Bible Brief on Isaiah by David Starling in The Briefing magazine # 308.

Verse 20: *The hair of your legs* is (lit.) 'the hair of the feet'. "Feet" is a euphemism for private parts (cf. 1 Sa 24:3-4 and is indicative of the indignities heaped on the conquered. The contrast between *head* and *feet* and between the hidden hair of the body and the visible *beard* expresses totality. No part of the land (18-19), no part of the person (20) will be free of enemy occupation.

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer p 89.

How does God respond to Ahaz's response in v12?

When God offers him hope, he doesn't believe it. When God moves toward him with a gracious offer of a sign, he doesn't get it. Just as chapter 6 had predicted, Isaiah preaches and Ahaz hears but doesn't understand. Ahaz sees but doesn't perceive.

Patston p 98.

8. The term **virgin** does not necessarily mean that Isaiah is referring to a virgin birth (v 14). He is giving Ahaz a time frame. If the virgin was to marry and conceive it would be about 12 years until the event took place. What event is Isaiah referring to here?

9. What event does Matthew tie to this prophecy in Matthew 1:23?

[T]he word 'virgin' (7:14). The Hebrew word can certainly refer to a woman who has not been sexually active and this is how it was understood by the ancient translators who produced the Old Testament in Greek. But it can also be used of a young woman, without necessarily commenting on her virginity. In either case, this seems to be a small detail that quickly gives way to a description of agricultural disaster that is at the heart of the sign. Perhaps the original hearers heard something like: a young woman (who is maybe even a virgin at the moment) will conceive by the usual sexual means) and give birth to a son. That's not to say that the reading offered by Matthew is illegitimate! It's just that it's not the only possible reading.

Patston p 99.

10. What aspect of the prophecy ties these two events together?

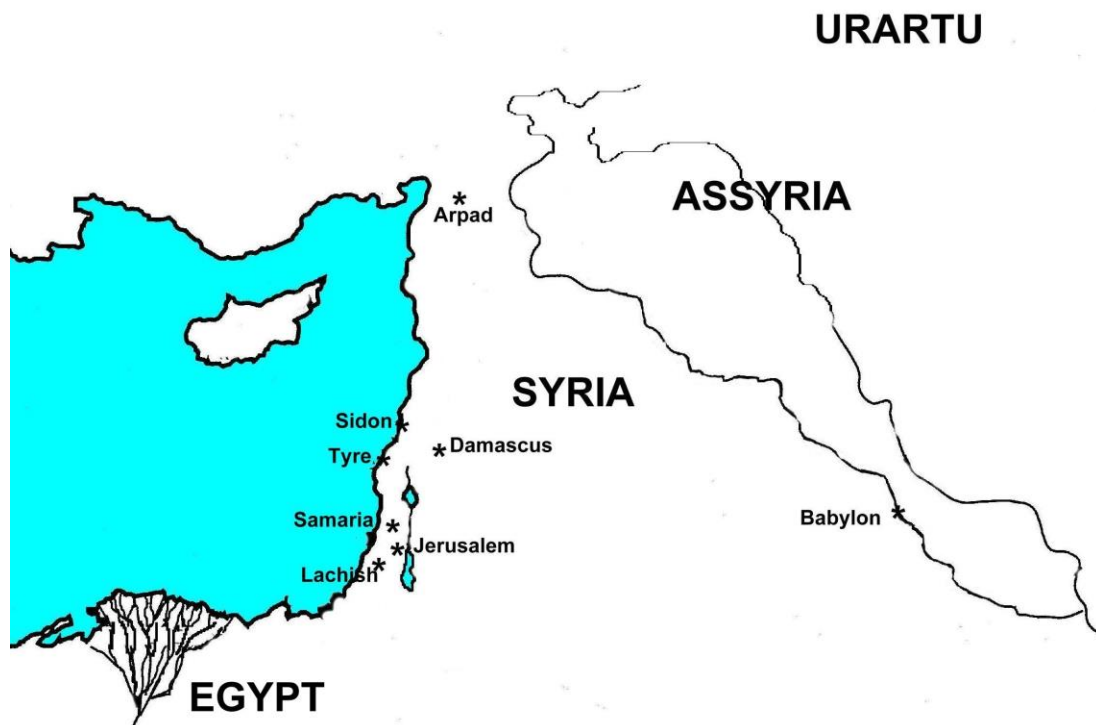
11. Assuming that he is a royal son, the heir to David's throne, how will it be a sign of judgement on the House of David that he will be born of a virgin?

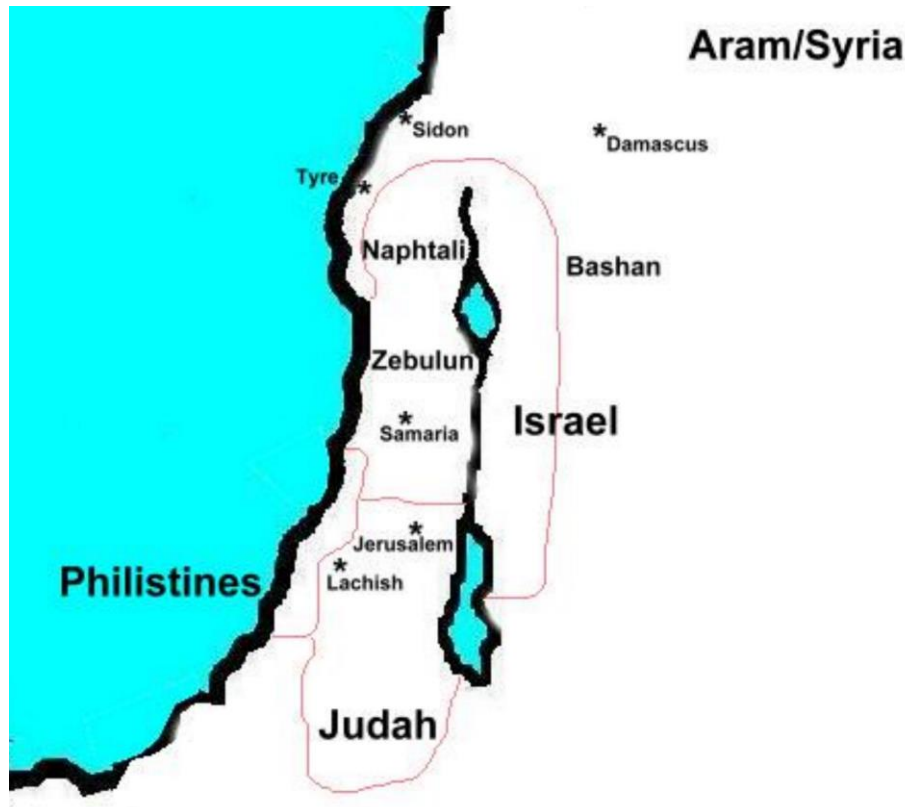
Putting this together, Ahaz is told that he will be able to see the birth of a child to a young woman and to know that before the boy is too old Aram and Israel will be laid waste (7:16). Further, that Judean boy will have to live through a time of agricultural hardship caused by an invasion of the Assyrian army (7:15,17). The name of this boy will be 'Immanuel', which can mean in Hebrew 'God is with us' or God be with us' (see 8:8,10). At first this can seem a positive name. How good it would be for Ahaz to know that God is with him. The problem with this reading is that the flow of the passage makes the presence of God threatening and dangerous. Since Ahaz has rejected God's salvation, he will experience a God who is with him in judgment. God will be at work right there in Judah, not in parting the sea or in sending plagues on Judah's enemies. He will express his presence by calling in the ruthless Assyrian army (7:17—18).

It is fascinating to see how this sign came true. A boy who was born around this time (735 BC) would have been a young child when Aram fell to the Assyrians (732 BC). He would have been a young adolescent when Israel fell (722 BC) and around 30 years old when Judah almost fell completely into Assyrian hands.

Patston p 100.

12. How does the prophecy about the sign of Immanuel, born of a virgin, heir of a dead monarchy, into a invaded and devastated land; echo the prophecy of Isaiah 6:11-13?
13. How does the coming of Jesus mean both judgement and salvation?





History 783-733 BC

The time of the ministry of Isaiah was a crucial time in Israel's history. He ministered during the reigns of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

At the time of Uzziah the dominant power in the world of the Ancient Near East was Assyria. Uzziah had taken advantage of the lull afforded by unrest in Assyria and the crippling of another nearby power-broker, the Aramean [Syrian] state of Damascus. It had been a time of relative peace and prosperity.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 67.

Five years before Uzziah's death, in 745 BC, an ambitious and capable new ruler, Tiglath-Pileser III, had come to power in Assyria. He quickly took control of Babylon, and secured his northern border by a decisive victory over Sardur II of Urartu [modern Armenia]. By relentless campaigning he put down all rebellion and re-organized the country into a network of provinces controlled by his appointees, and then turned his attention to the west lands. First to feel his wrath was the Syrian city of Arpad, which had been in league with his northern enemies. It was placed under siege for two years and was finally annexed in 740 BC. Seeing the writing on the wall, the rulers of other states in the region soon began to bring tribute, including Rezin of Damascus, Menahem of Israel, and Hiram of Tyre. The direction of Assyria's advance was clear, and everything between it and Judah was beginning to crumble. In the year Uzziah died the international scene was full of threat. . . .

Under Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, Judah was to lurch from crisis to crisis and Assyrian pressure built relentlessly. In 734 BC Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus formed a defensive alliance and tried to persuade Ahaz to join them. When he refused, they invaded Judah in order to replace him with someone who would. It was a severe test, and Ahaz proved unequal to it. Isaiah counselled him to stand firm and trust the Lord; instead he appealed to Tiglath-Pileser for help and effectively subjected Judah to Assyrian domination [Isaiah 7:1-12, 2 Kings 16:5-9]. From then on tribute would be a heavy drain on the national exchequer, and refusal to pay it would constitute rebellion which would attract swift retribution.

Webb p 22.

14. Read Isaiah ch 8.

Verse 6: *Shiloah* was the stream from the Gihon spring into Jerusalem. First, it stood for the Davidic monarchy (for it was at Gihon that the monarchy passed from David to his sons; 1 Ki 1:33-34, 45), and secondly, it stood for Jerusalem as the city of faith. In 7:3 Ahaz, under threat of invasion and siege, was looking at his vulnerable water supply. Though Jerusalem occupied one of the most impregnable sites of the ancient world, its source of water was outside the city walls and the supply ran overground in conduits into the city. To live in Jerusalem, therefore, required faith that the Lord would stand by his promises that this was the city he had chosen and which he would defend. The defection of the northern tribes was their rejection of David, of the chosen city and of the way of faith. Instead they rejoiced in *Rezin* (i.e. when they looked outside their own resources it was not to the Lord but to the power of earthly

kings) and in *the son of Remaliah* (i.e. not the divinely appointed monarchy of David but a monarchy of their own devising). Such comprehensive abandonment of the Lord, his city and his king must reap its reward.

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer p 91.

(a) What message is conveyed by the name given to Isaiah's second son (v1, 3)?

(b) How is it fulfilled?

15. How is Isaiah's first son's name relevant (Isaiah 7:3)?

16. What huge mistake do the people of Judah make (vv 5-8)?

17. When God brings the pagan nations to make war against Israel, what is the one word that offers hope (Isaiah 8:8, 10)?

18. What do vv 9-10 teach us about the "God with us" concept?

19. (a) In what ways are Isaiah and his disciples to be different from the rest of their nation?

(b) How does this apply to Christians today?

20. Isaiah 8:13-14 "The Lord Almighty . . . will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall."

(a) What does this mean in the context of Isaiah ch 8?

(b) What does this mean in 1 Pet 2:4-8?

Context: Peter is writing to Christians to give them advice on how to live as God's people, especially in the face of persecution.

To finish

21. Why is it okay for God to judge people but not okay for us to judge people?

Study 7, Isaiah chs 9:1–10:4, God's Kingdom and God's Anger

Getting started

1. Consider this scenario: You are friends with your next door neighbours, Tom & Marie. They are a middle class couple with a childhood background in Roman Catholicism but they have not gone to church since then and so you are careful not to use Christian jargon. One day Tom asks "What would I get out of it if I became a Christian?" What would you say?



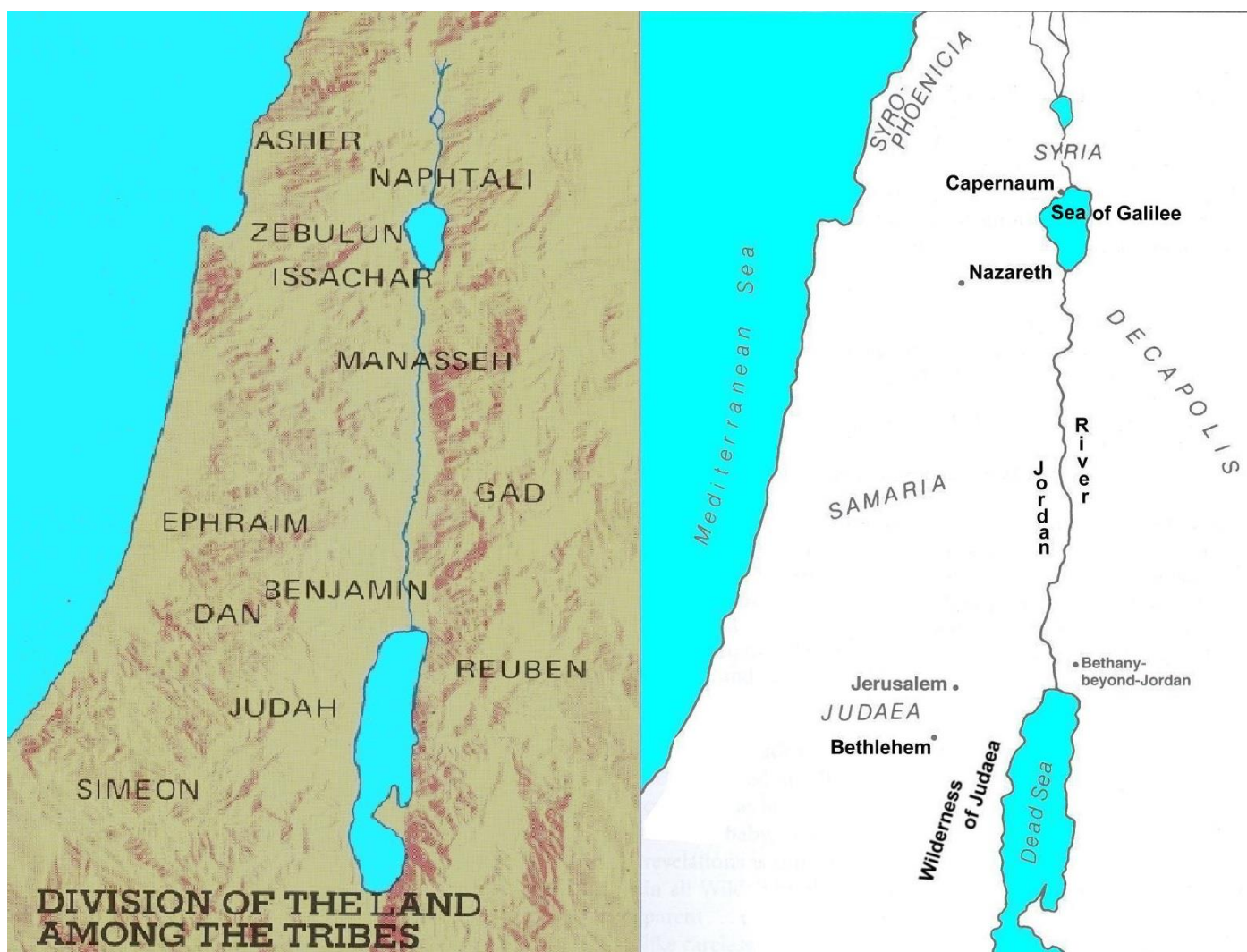
The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

Chapters 7 & 8 give specific details of God's judgement through Assyria's invasion of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Aram (also called Syria). Judah is also under threat of invasion but Isaiah tells Ahaz and his people to trust in God.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 9:1-7 (LHS map from the [Lion Handbook to the Bible](#) p 215).



Isaiah turns his eyes to the northern extremities of Israel and pictures a land of gloom, humiliation 9:1), darkness and death (9:2). From the point of view of Isaiah's time this may have been because this was the place where Assyrian soldiers would first enter the Promised Land and apparently undo God's plans to bless and provide for his people. . . .

Mention of the defeat of Midian [v 4] refers to a surprising victory when Gideon led a small army who blew trumpets and shouted, and then watched, amazed as the Midianites turned on each other with their swords (Judges 7:22). Another day is coming of surprising victory achieved by the small and weak.

Patston pp 104-105.

Play "For unto us a child is born (chorus)" (Isaiah 9:6) from Handel's Messiah or go to YouTube <https://youtu.be/owcn6fgYwpw>

What is the connection between the imagery of Isaiah 8:19-22 and the imagery of Isaiah 9:1-7?

3. Why is it remarkable about Zebulun, Naphtali and honouring Galilee of the Gentiles (v 1) (see maps on previous page)?
4. What indications does the text give us that the child spoken of here is the same child in Isaiah 7:14-16 and 8:8, 10?
5. (a) What is the promise to the people 2700 years ago?

(b) How do we understand these verses today?
6. How does this passage (a) add fuel to the idea of a militant Kingdom of God?

(b) support the idea of a peaceful Kingdom of God?

(c) What sort of Kingdom of God did Jesus have in mind?

(d) How can this passage be understood from Jesus' point of view?

People who had seen Ahaz's faithlessness and then Hezekiah's faith may well have wondered if the child who would be 'God with us' was, in fact, Hezekiah. He would have been a young boy at the time of the sign in chapter 7 and he did take up David's throne with righteousness. But, he did not set up a throne and kingdom that would last forever (9:7). . . .

There are a few words and phrases that are worth defining to help us make sense of Isaiah's words. The first is the word 'virgin' (7:14). The Hebrew word can certainly refer to a woman who has not been sexually active and this is how it was understood by the ancient translators who produced the Old Testament in Greek. But it can also be used

of a young woman, without necessarily commenting on her virginity. In either case, this seems to be a small detail that quickly gives way to a description of agricultural disaster that is at the heart of the sign. Perhaps the original hearers heard something like: a young woman (who is maybe even a virgin at the moment) will conceive (by the usual sexual means) and give birth to a son. . . .

Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that a supreme manifestation of Isaiah's words happened in first century Palestine when a literal virgin conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus was born. In a magnificent way, Jesus was 'God with us' - an experience that at once judged and saved Israel (Matthew 10:34-36). Matthew notes that Jesus was from Galilee (Matthew 4:15-16) consistent with 9:1 and its hope that the Assyrian invasion will be reversed.

Patston pp 107, 99, 108.

7. By possibly adding to your answer to Question 1 (a) how is Jesus a light (v 2)?

(b) how has Jesus shattered the yoke that burdens you (v 4)?

(c) how is the government on Jesus' shoulders (v 6)?

(d) how does Jesus bring peace (vv 5, 6)?

8. Read Isaiah 9:8-10:4
(a) Why is God angry?

(b) Who is God angry with?

9. What is the people's initial response to the disaster they face?

10. (a) What ominous note is sounded as the chorus line of this section (vv 9:12b, 17b, 21b, 10:4b)?

(b) What do you think it means?

(c) How is God's anger turned away?

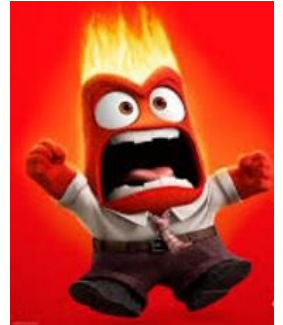
It seems that Assyrian soldiers are starting to make their presence felt in Israel. The Israelites are standing amongst the rubble and debris of fallen walls and trees, but still boast of plans to rebuild and replant. They see their disaster as an opportunity to upgrade, not as a time to repent!

Patston p 111.

11. What is the connection between the arrogance of 9:9 and the injustices spoken of in 10:1-2?

To finish

12. How is our anger different to God's anger?



13. (a) Do you think God is sometimes angry with Christians? Give reasons for your answer.

- (b) If you think God is sometimes angry with Christians
what can Christians do to stop God being angry with them?

- (c) What does it mean to be "in Christ" (see Rom 6:3-11)?

What does it actually mean to be **in Christ**? Let me try an analogy. Imagine yourself at the airport, about to board a plane. The plane is on its way to, let's say, beautiful Perth. You're at the airport. There's you. There's the plane. It's going to Perth. And my question is: What relationship do you need to have with that plane? . . . Of course, the key relationship you need with the plane is not to be under it, behind it or inspired by it. You need to be *in* it. . . . At its heart, the New Testament idea of being in Christ is something like that. What the New Testament is saying is that through faith in Jesus Christ, we become united to him. And we are in him, so that whatever is true of Jesus is also true of us.

From One Forever the Transforming Power of being in Christ pp 34-35 by Rory Shiner.

14. How does God's judgement work today (see Rom 1:24)?

Study 8, Isaiah 10:5-34, Assyria and the Remnant

Getting started

1. Play BattleHymnRepublicMormonTchoir.mp3 or on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/QSiVjlknuSw>
What is this song all about?

Battle Hymn of the Republic (6 verses originally)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damp;
I can read His righteous sentence in the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
[originally ...His day is marching on]

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free;
[originally ...let us die to make men free]
While God is marching on.
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
[originally ...While God is marching on]

Above are verses 1, 2 and 5. The other verses are:

3. I have read a fiery gospel writ in **burnished rows of steel:**
"As ye deal with my **contemners**, so with you my grace shall deal";
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on.

4. **He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;**
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

Howe's original manuscript differed slightly from the published version. Most significantly, it included a final verse:

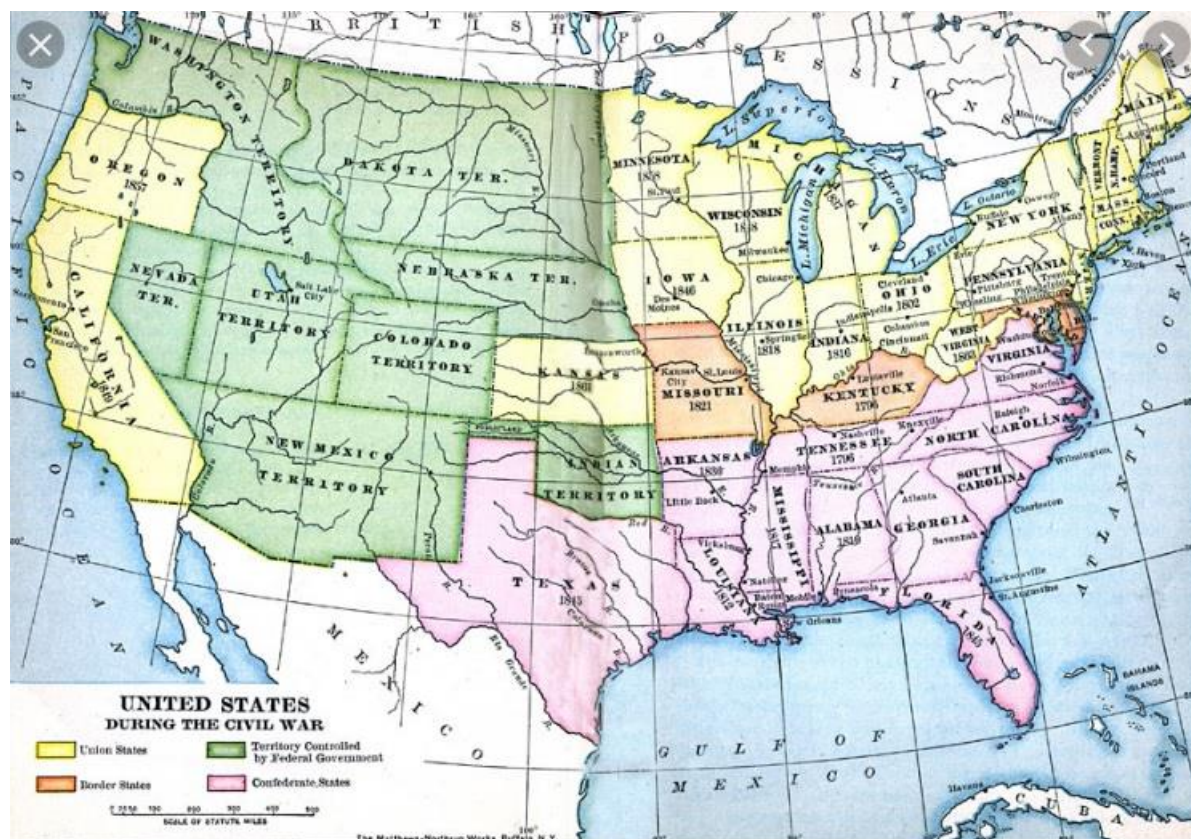
6. He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,
He is Wisdom to the mighty, He is Succour to the brave,
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of Time His slave,
Our God is marching on.

Julia Ward Howe modified the words of two songs, "Canaan's Happy Shore" and "John Brown's Body". The new song suggested that the soldiers she passed [during the American Civil War 1861-1865] were fighting to build God's Kingdom on earth. In the very first line she proclaimed that this was no common historical event unfolding before them; this war was being fought to bring about "the glory of the coming of the Lord." In other words, crushing the South was part of a much larger series of events—the Second Coming of Christ and the realization of God's kingdom on earth. In the second and third lines, Howe made it even clearer that God was striding alongside man in his resolution to wipe out the evil that plagued the nation. God was trampling things, shooting lightning, and swinging a

terrible sword. And for those slow to get the point, Howe stressed again in the first lines of the second verse that God had sided with the North: "I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps."

Nations and armies almost always manage to find God on their side, but "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" employed Biblical passages and quickly recognizable Christian phrases to make a very specific argument. God did not just favour the Union; He was marching alongside the Union soldiers as they paved the way for the Second Coming of His Son and the realization of His kingdom on earth.

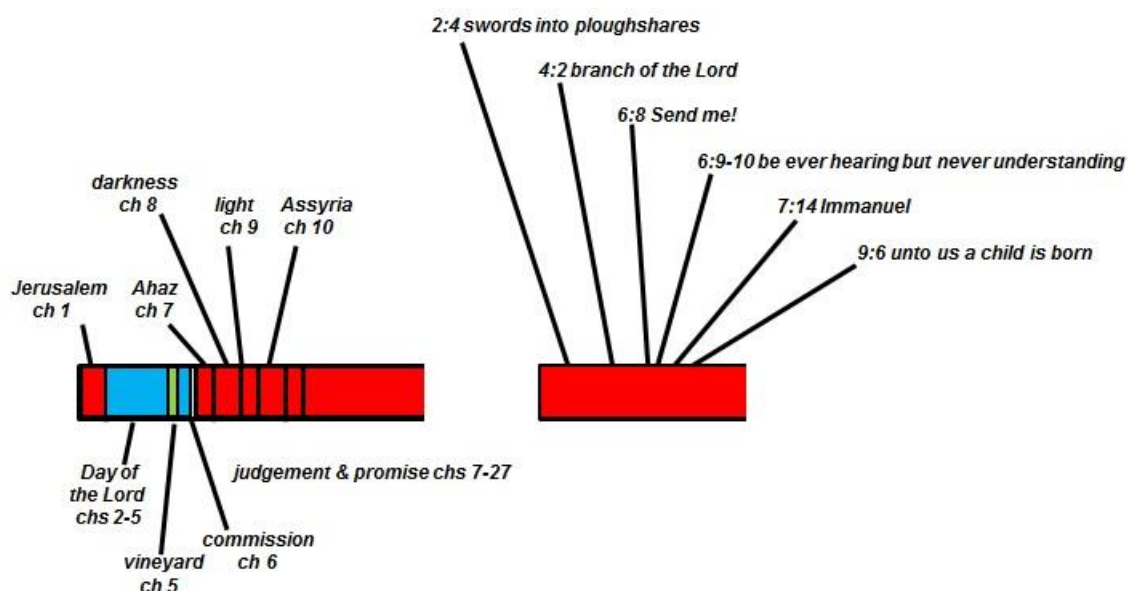
From www.shmoop.com



The story so far . . .

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Chapters 7 - 9 give specific details of God's judgement through Assyria's invasion of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Aram (also called Syria). Judah is also under threat of invasion but Isaiah tells Ahaz and his people to trust in God because a saviour will come (chapter 9).



Bible

2. Read Isaiah 10:5-19

Verse 9. Six cities are named in pairs. In each pair the first is further south than the second and the king is reasoning: 'I took that; I can take this'. *Carchemish* is on the upper Euphrates in the far north of Palestine; *Calno* and *Arpad* are fifty miles further south; *Hamath* is one hundred miles north of *Damascus*. The list (cf. verses 28ff.) is not a historical description of the march but an impressionistic expression of the idea of inexorable advance; disaster ever nearer – *Samarita* next!

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer p 114.

What is the difference between how God sees the Assyrians and their role in history, and the way they see themselves?

3. What does this section suggest about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility?

4. How does human responsibility work out in the life of someone who already is forgiven for all their sins (i.e. a Christian)?

5. Read Isaiah 10:20-34

The towns named in verses 28-32 are towns just north of Jerusalem, and the passage is a poetic description of the Assyrian invaders coming down from the north, having devastated the northern kingdom, and shaking their fists at the capital city of the south, Jerusalem.

From Reading 18 of the Bible Brief on Isaiah by David Starling in The Briefing magazine # 308.

(a) In this passage who will get God's judgement?

(b) Who will get God's salvation?

(c) How are they connected?

6. (a) What does v22 remind you of (see Gen 12:1-3, 15:5)?

(b) What does v26 remind you of (see Ex 14:29-30)?

(c) What hope do such reminders provide?

(d) What grounds for hope does this passage give Christians?

To finish

7. (a) Why do you think Isaiah is so much about sin and judgement?

(b) What does Jesus' death and resurrection teach us about the defeat of God's enemies?

Study 9, Isaiah chs 11 - 12, The shoot of Jesse

Getting started

1. Think of leaders (other than Jesus) in sport, politics, business, religion etc.
 (a) Which of these people is/was the best leader?

 (b) What qualities made them so good?



The story so far . . .

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In chapters 9 & 10 God promises salvation through a ruler on King David's throne but there will also be judgement on Assyria and Israel and only a remnant will return to God.

Bible

3. Read Isaiah 11:1-16.

What is the "stump of Jesse" from which the shoot will come forth (see Matt 1:6-11)?



In 11:1 we are to picture the stump and roots of Jesse. We are to picture the barest beginnings of Judean kingship. God has acted to judge the kings of Judah who, as Ahaz exemplifies, were given to trusting humans, not God. But if one cut away the years of dynastic succession, the palaces and treasures, the military prowess and the astute political alliances, one would be left with a humble shepherd boy who would face a Philistine with a mere slingshot, rather than tolerate the Lord's name being belittled (1 Samuel 16-17). This is where the Lord's work will begin.

Patston p 116.

4. What will "the shoot's" relationship with God be like (vv 1-3)?

5. How do the qualities of this leader (vv 3-5) compare with the qualities mentioned in question 1?

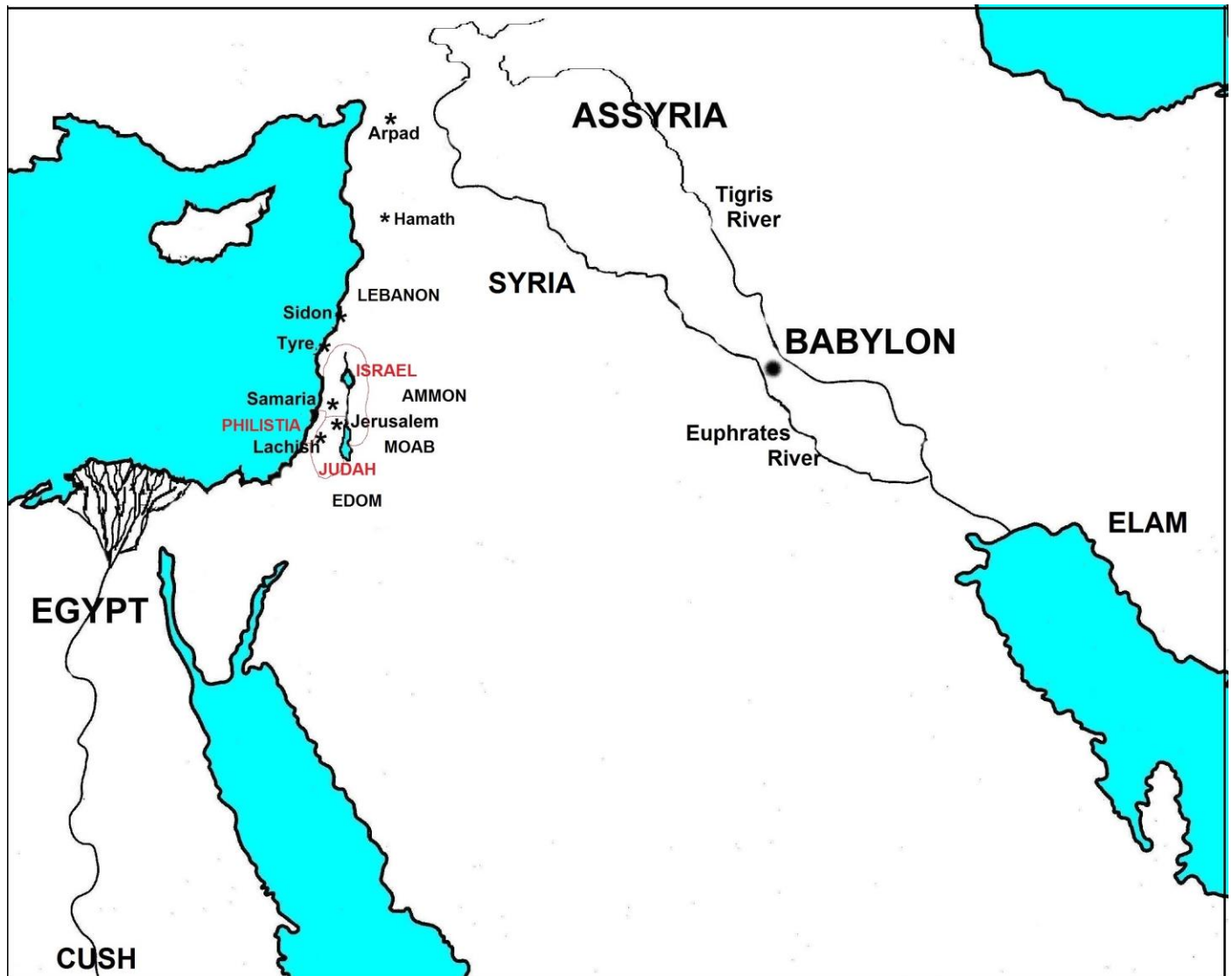
Verse 13: **Ephraim and Judah** – see p 29.

Verse 14: **Philistia**: The Philistines are descended from Ham, the son of Noah. Abraham and Isaac had reasonably good relationships with the Philistines. During the period of the judges and monarchy in Israel the Philistines were very aggressive.

Ammon and Moab were the sons of Lot as the result of incest between Lot and his daughters. Both nations descended from these men were a constant source of aggravation and temptation to Israel during the journey to the promised land and its conquest and settlement. Moabites are specifically excluded from Israel (even though Ruth was a Moabitess) and the prophets often single both nations out as a people whom God will severely judge.

Edom: Isaac, the son of Abraham, married Rebecca. They had twin sons – Esau (also known as Edom) and Jacob (also known as Israel). There was continual tension between the two brothers and the two nations descended from them.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris pp 31-32.



6. What do you think it means when it says “with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth” (v4)?
7. How will creation be transformed by his rule (vv 6-9)?
8. Who will he rule over (vv 10-16)?

9. How is Jesus the fulfilment of Isaiah ch 11?

The movement from the overthrow of the human kingdom (represented by Assyria) to the setting up of the kingdom of God (represented by the Messiah) is a natural one theologically, even though it involves a radical foreshortening of the historical processes involved. Appropriate also, in another sense, is the movement from the felling of a forest at the end of the previous chapter to the emergence of *a shoot* from *a stump* at the beginning of this one. But this is only a surface continuity. The deeper reality involves a sharp contrast. Assyria is felled never to grow again; Judah is felled only to have new life emerge from its stump.

Webb p 74.

10. Read Isaiah ch 12.

(a) What does salvation mean for the original hearers of this?

(b) What does salvation mean for us?

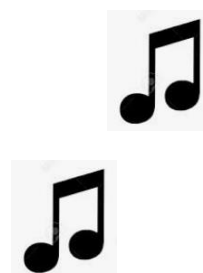


(c) How do you explain the difference (if any)?

11. What does the song of praise (v1-6) rejoice in ...

(a) v 1?

(b) vv 2-3?



12. What response does this song call for (vv 4-6)?

All of this gives us reason to sing, even today. People do not sing when they think others are looking, when they're worried about how they might sound. In short, people do not sing when they are paying attention to themselves. The book of Isaiah invites us to sing - to move to a place where our attention is so much on God that our selves seem less important.

Patston p 121.

13. Why do we make known his deeds among the nations (v 4)?

14. How do these verses fit in with chapter 11?

To finish

15. Jesus rules “now” but “not yet” do we see the wolf living with the lamb and leopards lying down with goats etc. What other things in your life, under Jesus’ rule, are happening “now” but “not yet” do they find their fulfilment or completion?

Study 10, Isaiah chs 13 – 18, Judging the nations

Getting started

1. (a) Just off the top of your head how would you describe God's "godness"?

(b) Now describe Jesus' "godness".

(c) Are there any differences? Why/why not?

The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

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In chapters 9 to 12 God promises salvation through a ruler on King David's throne but there will also be judgement on Assyria and Israel and only a remnant will return when God gathers the exiles.

Bible

After pronouncing judgement on Israel (chs 1-11) God pronounces judgement on Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre (chs 13-27) but there are glimmers of hope (14:1-3, 16:5, 19:18-25). Note: "The biblical *Cush* was the large region south of the fourth cataract of the Nile, embracing modern Ethiopia, Sudan and Somaliland. In the time of Hezekiah, late in the eighth century BC, it merged with Egypt under the rulers of the twenty-fifth dynasty, who were Ethiopians.

Webb p 92.

2. Read Isaiah ch 13.

As you read this chapter from vv 1 to 22 what ideas come to mind as to . . .

(a) who is suffering God's judgement?

(b) who is God's instrument of judgement?

(c) which "land" is being devastated?

(d) who is effected by the Day of the Lord?

(e) By the end of the chapter who have you decided . . .

(i) is suffering God's judgement?

(ii) is God's instrument of judgement?

3. What might be the significance of “hearts” and “hands” (v 7)?

4. Why is God punishing the world?



5. How is the Day of the Lord, as described here, . . .
(a) different in Isaiah chs 2 and 3?

(b) similar to the Day of the Lord in Isaiah chs 2 and 3?

(c) From chs 2, 3, and 13 what is the Day of the Lord?

As readers our impression is that Hezekiah was able to outdo the Assyrians, but not the Babylonians. This gives Babylon a unique role as the unstoppable enemy of God's people - a notion that becomes more important in Isaiah 40-48. Further, the word used for Babylon is Babel, the place of the pretentious tower building in Genesis 11. In the Bible's opening chapters, Babel is given the role as the emblem of human autonomy. This means that Babylon in the book of Isaiah is more than the Mesopotamian city that opposed Assyria in the eighth century BC and defeated Jerusalem in the sixth century BC. It functions as a theological symbol of human independence from God, the antithesis of transformed Zion.

Patston p 129.

6. Read Isaiah 14:1-3.
What good news does God promise?

7. Read Isaiah 14:3-23.
Who and what are being described?

Isaiah 14:12	NKJV	How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! <i>How</i> you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!
	NIV	How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

[M]any people believe that “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14:12 is a direct reference to Satan (which, in turn, comes from *Ha'Satan*, his title in Hebrew) and that Lucifer was even a common name for the devil in Isaiah's time. But the word *lucifer* itself comes from a fourth-century AD Latin translation of this verse – *quomodo cecidisti de caelo lucifer qui mane orievaris coruisti in terram qui vulnerabas gentes* (emphasis added) – which eventually found its way into most English translations. In the Latin translation, the word *Lucifer* was simply another name of Venus – the “morning star” Venus. The Latin word, in turn, came from another word meaning “bright light” or “to shine brightly”.

In other words, Lucifer has gradually become a common name for Satan, but this is probably not how Isaiah meant it at all. On the contrary, he was referring to Sennacherib, the “rising star” of the then-near future who would eventually be eclipsed.

From Isaiah by Michael Christopher p 34 from the Nelson Impact Bible Study Series.

The cosmic sweep of the poem led some early interpreters, and many since them, to see here a symbolic description of the fall of Satan. But if this reads too much into the text (and I think it does), it is equally misguided to reduce it to a description of the fall of a particular earthly monarch. The king of Babylon here, like Babylon itself in chapter 13, is a representative figure, the embodiment of that worldly arrogance that defies God and tramples on others in its lust for power. It is this which lies at the heart of every evil for which particular nations will be indicted in the following chapters. It also lies at the heart of all the horrendous acts of inhumanity which human beings and nations still commit against one another today. That is why the tone of his song should not cause us any embarrassment. This is no cheap gloating over the downfall of an enemy, but the satisfaction and delight which God's people rightly feel at his final victory over evil.

Webb p 83.

8. Read Isaiah 14:24-27.
(a) What is the promise to God's people?

(b) What assurance do the people have of this?

9. Read Isaiah 14:28-32.
God will strike down the enemies of his people. Philistia were long time oppressors of Israel.
What is their future?

10. Read Isaiah ch 15.

The plethora of placenames is rather bewildering, but it does help to shed light on both the weeping and the flight of the refugees. The weeping takes place in the far north (**Heshbon** and **Elealeh**, 4), in the extreme south (**Luhith** and **Horonaim**, 5), in the streets and on the housetops (3). There does not appear to be any progression. References to the wailing move erratically from north to south to centre to north and to south again. It is as though a great cry goes everywhere, filling the land from end to end.

Webb p 86.

Ar is placed by Deuteronomy 2:18 on the border of Moab. **Kir** is possibly Kir Hareseth (16:7, 11) in central Moab twelve miles east of the Dead Sea (cf 2 Ki. 3:25; Je. 48:31, 36). Since Kir means 'city', the references to 'Ar of Moab' and 'the city of Moab' could indicate a devastation of the whole country from the border to the capital. . . .

Dibon was north of the Amon; **Nebo** and **Medeba** further north still. The heaping up of names is characteristic of Isaiah (e.g. 10:9-10, 28-32) and here creates the impression of widespread disaster. . . .

Heshbon, **Elealeh** and **Jahaz** were the furthest north of the cities so far mentioned. . . .

Zoar (Gen 19:21-22) was in the southern Dead Sea area. **Eglath Shelishiyah** is unknown. . . .

Nimrim (Nu. 32:3, 36; Jos. 13:27) is probably the Wadi Numeirah in southern Moab. . . .

The Ravine of the Poplars may be Wadi Zered on the southern border of Moab (Nu. 21:12; Dt. 2:13).

Eglaim and **Beer Elim** are unknown.

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer pp 150-151.

The final verse is clearly climactic. Here the place name Dibon, which first occurs in verse 2, is changed to **Dimon** to echo dam, the Hebrew word for 'blood'.

Dimon's waters are full of dam,

but I will bring still more upon Dimon...

This is the ultimate horror, to which the wailing and the flight are despairing, futile responses: bloody slaughter from which there is no escape. Some details in the second half of verse 9 are obscure, but its general sense is clear. Those who manage to evade the sword will be devoured by wild beasts [taking "lion" here as representative]. Running away will prove, in the end, to be as futile as remaining.

Webb p 86.

What is the future of Moab?

11. Read Isaiah ch 16.
 - (a) Where is the hope of Moab to be found?

 - (b) Why would we expect this to be the case?

12. Read Isaiah ch 17.
 - (a) What will happen to the stronghold of Damascus (vv 1-3)?

 - (b) Is there a hint of grace (vv 4-6)?

 - (c) How will God reveal himself in these times (vv 9-11)?

 - (d) What is the message for Israel (vv 12-14)?

13. Read Isaiah ch 18.
 - (a) Rather than messengers (envoys) coming to Israel calling on them to make treaties God says you are not in a position of power. What should happen instead (v 2)?

 - (b) What is their message (vv 3-7)?

To finish

14.
 - (a) What does God's judgement teach us about God's "godness"?

 - (b) Do you think of Jesus in the same way? Why/why not?

Study 11, Isaiah chs 19 – 23, Isaiah gets naked

Getting started

1. If you were trying to get an idea across to a group of people, what creative methods could you use?



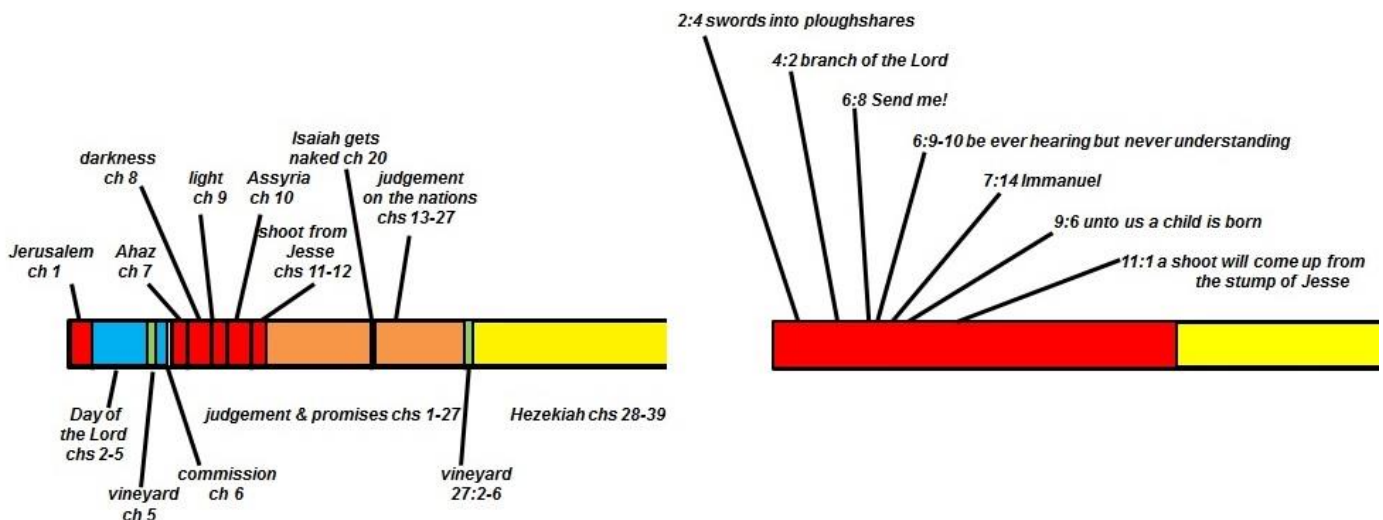
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In Isaiah chapters 13 to 27 God pronounces judgement on Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre but there are glimmers of hope.



2. Read Isaiah ch 19.
 - (a) What means will the Egyptians have to combat God at his coming (vv 1-4)?
 - (b) What is their coming plight (vv 5-10)?
 - (c) Where has the wisdom of Egypt landed her (vv 11-15)?

3. Read Isaiah 19:16-25.
 - (a) How will God reverse the roles of Egypt and Judah?
 - (b) How is salvation depicted in these verses?
 - (c) How does the prophecy in this passage fulfil God's promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3?
 - (d) How is God's promise to Abraham ultimately fulfilled in Rev 7:9-12?

One of the great surprises of this section of Isaiah is the scandalous generosity that God extends to his enemies: Egypt and Assyria. The book of Acts explores how radical it was that Gentiles could truly be among the people of God, without the need to become Jews first. We live in the age when God's special love for Israel has stretched to embrace the nations. Isaiah 19:25 dares us to think of the group of people who most offend us and who seem most opposed to the purposes of God. Then we are to hear God's big-hearted but shocking words spoken to them, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.'

Patston pp 147-148.

4. Read Isaiah 20:1-6.

Israel made a pact with Egypt. They paid money for Egypt to protect them from Assyria (v6).

 - (a) Why does Isaiah get naked?
 - (b) Compare Isaiah's actions with your answer to question 1.

Parables are a punchy form of communication designed to creep up on you without your knowing it. They are like time bombs. They look innocuous and are therefore received quite readily, only to go off suddenly and shatter your way of looking at life.

From Postcard from Palestine by Andrew Reid p 48.

Like the ancient prophets of Israel Jesus conveyed a lot of his message through what we call **prophetic signs** or **enacted parables**. He offered pieces of public theatre to drive home the message. This is such a massive part of the Jewish background that I think modern Christians, and certainly the general public, don't spot.

Just to give you some examples:

Hosea, the prophet 700 years before Jesus, was told to marry a known prostitute [Hosea chs 1-3]. Why? It was a prophetic symbol. He actually did it but it was meant to be a prophetic symbol of the fact that God was married to Israel who had prostituted itself. . . .

Ezekiel. I think he probably got the rawest deal. He had to do a whole bunch of things: lie on his left side for months, lie on his right side for months [Eze 4:4-8]. But he also had to build a little model of Jerusalem in the public court. Then, everyone's watching the prophet and he had to attack it – play war games against this little model of Jerusalem without saying anything and everyone was saying he's playing war games against this little model of Jerusalem [Eze 4:1-3]. The point was clear: Jerusalem would fall. . . .

This is such a huge part of the prophetic mindset and of Jewish culture that unless you look at the life of Jesus through this lens you really miss a lot of what Jesus was trying to do. He selected 12 apostles, not 11, not 13. Why? A symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel. These were the 12 new patriarchs. Israel begins again. He dined and wined with sinners not just because he was a leftie liberal. No, it was a prophetic enacted parable of the invitation God was making to sinners to join his table. He was acting out his message of preaching.

From a sermon by John Dickson on Mark ch 11 at St Andrews, Roseville, 15/3/2015.

5. (a) What is the response of the people who live on the coast (v6)?

(b) What is the answer to their question?

(c) How is Jesus the answer to that question?

6. Read Isaiah 21:1-10.

Verse 1: Babylon was situated on a vast plain which bordered on the sea. See map p 42.

Verse 2: Elam = Persia

(a) Who is "I"?

(b) What is his reaction to what happens?

(c) Why do you think he reacts that way?

(d) Who is attacking whom?

(e) What does the lookout see?

(f) Why are "my people" crushed?

[A]s the eighth century drew to a close, Judah's attention began to swing away from Egypt and towards Babylon as a prospective ally against Assyria (witness the warm reception given to the ambassadors by Hezekiah in 39:1-4). But Isaiah sees in this vision that Babylon, like Egypt, is doomed, and so, by implication, are those who align themselves with her. Hence the warning note on which the oracle ends (10). . . .

[Babylon's] fate would not be sealed finally until its fall to a coalition of Medes and Persians [Elam] under Cyrus the Great in 539 BC.

Webb p 99.

7. Read Isaiah 21:11-17.

Verse 11: The one who calls to [the watchman] from Seir (= Edom), a visionary figure, is probably a fugitive who has fled westward from Dumah (Edom is directly south of Judah [See map p 42]).

Between Judah and Babylon lay the north Arabian desert with its bedouin tribes, its oases and its overland trade routes. Dumah, Dedan and Tema (11, 13, 14) all lay in this region.

Kedar in verses 16-17 is a collective term for the desert tribes in general.

Webb p 100.

(a) Where are the fugitives coming from (v 14)?

(b) Is God showing compassion for the fugitives? Why/why not?

The Babylonian envoys of 39:1 probably passed this way *en route* to Judah in order to avoid going through the Assyrian heartland to the north, and as they did so they no doubt tried to enlist the support of these desert tribes for their cause. If they succeeded, as they appear to have done, then the subsequent action taken by the Assyrians against Babylon would have had serious repercussions for these people, and that appears to be the situation reflected here.

Webb p 100.

8. Read Isaiah ch 22.

Verse 6: The location of Kir is unknown (cf. Amos 1:5, 9:7; it is not Kir in Moab of Is 15:1).

Verse 8: The Palace of the Forest (cf. 1 Kings 7:2-12) was possibly originally a royal treasury (1 Kings 10:14-17).

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer pp 183-184.

Shebna (v 15) and Eliakim (v 20) were court officials under Hezekiah (Is 36:3, 2 Kings 18:18, 19:2).

Eliakim was Shebna's replacement.

Webb p 102.

(a) How can a valley provide a place for vision – don't you climb a hill to see what lies ahead?

The haunting mood of Isaiah 21 gives way to a comic yet tragic portrait of Jerusalem in chapter 22. The vision begins with another cryptic title: 'Valley' seems to parody Mount Zion and 'Vision' is the very thing that the people of Jerusalem lack.

Patston p 152.

(b) How does Isaiah respond to this vision (v 4)?

(c) Israel makes many (useless) preparations for the ordeal ahead (vv 5-11) but they overlooked the most important one of all. What did they overlook?

(d) What was the Lord looking for (v 12)?

(e) What did he find (v 13)?

(f) What does the Lord have to say about Israel's attitude and preparations (v 14)?

(g) What do you make of Shebna and Eliakim (vv 15-25)?

9. Read Isaiah ch 23.

Tyre is on the coast (hence the reference to ships, v 1) (see map p 32). God has spoken against nations of the land and now he speaks to nations of the sea.

Tyre and Sidon were the two leading cities of Phoenicia, and Tarshish, in what is now Spain, was one of the many far-flung colonies the Phoenicians had established around the Mediterranean world (see 7b). They served as bases for Phoenicia's lucrative sea-borne trade, of which the ships of Tarshish were the outstanding symbol. These trading ships brought great wealth into her coffers and gave her much influence in the world. . . .

Egypt weeps because of the impact on her wheat exports (5, cf. 3), and finally refugees carry the news right back to Tarshish (6).

Webb p 104.

(a) What does this tell you about the far reaching nature of God's power?

(b) What use will their riches and institutions be when Yahweh comes to visit (vv 2-18)?

(c) Why is Tyre called a prostitute (vv 15-17)?

(d) What will happen to Tyre in the end (vv 17-18)?

(e) Where is true confidence found?

10. Isaiah's proclamation of judgement against the nations in chs 13-23 were never heard in any of those nations. Why then, did Isaiah bother making these announcements?

It seems that the purpose of all these judgment oracles against the nations isn't to warn pagans about divine judgment – none of these nations would ever have heard Isaiah's preaching. It is rather to convince God's people to find their security in the Lord, not in the power and wealth of the pagan nations.

From the 2011 sermon series at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

To finish

11. When facing the threat of an advancing Assyria Israel was tempted to form alliances with other nations rather than trusting the Lord to protect them. When are we tempted to find our security in money and power rather than the Lord?
12. It's easy for us to agree with God's judgement on tyrants and ruthless oppression (Is chs 13-22) but how do you feel about God's judgement on hoarded, unshared wealth (Is ch 23)?
13. Besides going to heaven what security do we get out of believing in Jesus?

Study 12, Isaiah chs 24 – 27, Praise for God's Judgement, a Banquet & a Vineyard

Getting started

1. (a) What is the best party you have ever been to?



- (b) Why was it so good?

The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

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In Isaiah chapters 13 to 27 God pronounces judgement on Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre but there are glimmers of hope.

Bible

God's judgement will be on the whole earth (ch 24), Moab (25:10b-12) and God's people (27:7-13). God is praised for ridding the world of evil (24:14-16a, 25:1-5) and looking after his people (26:1-27:1) like a vineyard (27:2-6). God will prepare a banquet in celebration of the salvation of his people (25:6-10a) who will return from exile (27:12-13).

2. Read Isaiah 24:1-13.
 - (a) What is the plight of the earth and from whom?
 - (b) Why is God going to do this (v 5)?
 - (c) What covenant is this (v 5)?
 - (d) How comprehensive will the punishment be (v 2)?
 - (e) When is this going to happen?
3. Read Isaiah 24:14-18a.
 - (a) Who are those praising God in response to this promise?
 - (b) What is the response of Isaiah (assuming that the 'I' of v16b is the prophet)?
 - (c) Why does he respond this way and not with joy at God's righteous judgment?

4. Read Isaiah 24:18b-23.

(a) The imagery of the opening verses of this section (vv 1-3) hark back to the flood narrative. In these verses what really causes the need for the earth to be renewed?

(b) Whose power will reign supreme?

This message needs to be sounded clearly today when the church has grown squeamish about the truth of divine retribution. There will be no escape for rebels who refuse to lay down their arms. The day on which he will punish them has already been entered in God's diary (21a).

Webb p 107.

5. Read Isaiah ch 25.

(a) Why does Isaiah praise God for this destruction (vv 1-5)?

(b) What city and town (v 2) is Isaiah talking about?

The *city* of verse 2, like that of the previous chapter, represents the world as a whole organised in opposition to God. He destroys it, not for any spiteful satisfaction he may have in doing so, but in order to bring the *nations* to their senses (3) and to deliver those who have been the victims of their misuse of power (4-5).

Webb p 108.

(c) What is the hope in this chapter?



(d) Is this the sort of party you were thinking of in Question 1? Why/why not?

(e) What does this teach us about an Old Testament view of salvation?

(f) Who will enjoy this salvation?

(g) What is the plight of Moab (vv 10-12)?

God always has been and always will be on the side of the poor and needy. It is something that we who profess to believe in him would do well to remember.

This focus on the poor and needy in the opening song makes it particularly appropriate that final salvation should be pictured in verses 6-8 as *a feast* at which, by implication, the food is free (cf. 55:1). That food is the very finest of fare, and the host is *the Lord Almighty* himself (6).

Webb p 108.

(h) What is God going to do about death (25:8 see also 26:19)?

(i) What does Jesus have to do with God's way of dealing with death (see 1 Cor 15:20-28)?

6. Read Isaiah ch 26.

(a) What is the response to God's salvation (v 1a)?

(b) How does this help you understand the importance of singing as God's people?

(c) What if you don't like singing?

(d) What are the various aspects of God's actions listed in this song and how are they used as praise points?

(e) What does this chapter say about peace (vv 3, 12)?

(f) If you were to write a song of praise what would you include?

(g) How is grace shown to the wicked (v 10)?

(h) What is this saying about life after death (v 19)?

7. Read Isaiah 27:1-6

Verse 1: seems to be a conclusion to chapter 26 rather than an introduction to the thought of chapter 27. Remember that the chapter numbers are a 'new' way of presenting the text of the Bible. In this verse it seems that Isaiah is referring to a well-known myth of the day regarding the slaying of a sea monster, Leviathan, in order to establish peace and tranquillity. It is akin to me referring to someone being as strong as Hercules. I don't believe Greek mythology but he is a well-known figure – so it was with the Leviathan myth.

From Isaiah 1-39, A Mighty Prophet with A Mighty Message from A Mighty God by Hamish Burke.

The final triumph of God will be over a gliding sea monster called Leviathan. We don't know a lot about Leviathan. The word suggests a coiling creature like a snake. References in Job and the Psalms make us think of a terrifying, many-headed sea monster who is the pinnacle of pride (Psalm 74:14; Job 41:34). Genesis 3 makes us think of the serpent as a manifestation of Satan and the book of Revelation connects the Bible's serpents and dragons into a portrait of Satan or the devil (Revelation 12:9).

Patston p 164.

What or who is the vineyard?



8. What does God do for the vineyard?

9. (a) How is this a reversal of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7?

(b) How can Isaiah 27:1-6 be consistent with Isaiah 5:1-7?

(c) What is the connection with Jesus (see John 15:1-8)?

10. Read Isaiah 27:7-13.

From these verses how does God cleanse his people (v 9)?

These four chapters [chs 24-27] together constitute the climax of the whole second part of the book (chapters 13 - 27). Here particular nations are lost to view as the focus broadens to encompass the whole earth (24:1). Devastating judgment (chapter 24) is followed by song (25:1-5), feasting (25:6-8), song (25:9-12), more song (chapter 26) and still more song (27:1-11). The final two verses (27:12-13) act as a summary conclusion to the whole. The theme is the triumph of God, which is good news (hence the singing) because it means that the reign of sin and death is at an end; the kingdom of God has at last come in its fullness. This 'apocalypse' or 'unveiling' of the end (for that is what the word means) in many ways anticipates that better-known apocalypse, the book of Revelation, which serves as the grand finale of the Bible as a whole.

Webb p 105.

To finish

11. (a) How does God cleanse us?

(b) Do you feel clean? Why/why not?

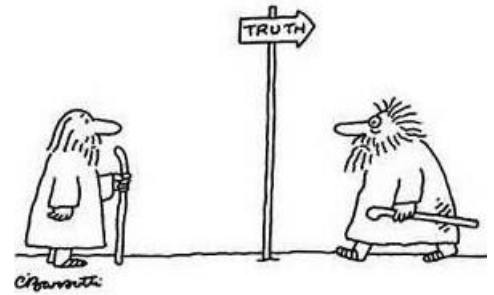
Atonement – sacrifice language (see Rom 5:6-8).

"I couldn't get rid of my sins. God wouldn't overlook them. Jesus took my sins. He died in my place."

Study 13, Isaiah ch 28, cornerstone

Getting started

1. What is the most basic truth of your life?



The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

Chapters 7 & 8 give specific details of God's judgement through Assyria's invasion of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Aram (also called Syria). Judah is also under threat of invasion but Isaiah tells Ahaz and his people to trust in God.

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Bible

2. Read Isaiah 28:1-13.

Ephraim here is the northern kingdom, Israel, at least what was left of it after the severe mauling it received from the Assyrians in 733. Its capital city, Samaria, was ideally situated at the head of a fertile valley (1) which extended westward to the Mediterranean Sea. In its heyday it was a beautiful city, and breathtaking views can still be enjoyed from the hill of Samaria where its ruins remain to this day. The *Woe* pronounced on it here (1) anticipates its imminent fall, an event which in fact occurred in 722.

Webb p 118.

What are the problems of the people of Ephraim?

3. What hope do they have (vv5-6)?

Verses 10, 13: the lines in question are quite obscure and there is no consensus among scholars about how they should be rendered. Most likely *tsav* and *qav* are not words at all, but artificial syllables used for teaching infants the letters of the alphabet (in this case *ts* and *q*). The drunken leaders mock the word of God through the prophet as infantile nonsense, childish prattle.

Webb p 120.

4. Read Isaiah 28:14-29.
Why have the people of Jerusalem made a covenant with death (vv 15, 18)?

A biting satire follows. Perhaps the political movers and shakers who had brokered an arrangement with Egypt have come back to Jerusalem with good news. 'We have made a covenant with Egypt!' they exclaim, understanding this to be a guarantee of safety when the 'overwhelming scourge' (28:15) of the Assyrian army comes

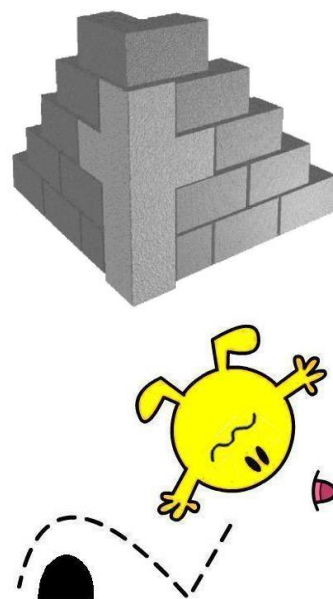
by. Isaiah mocks the boasting by calling the alliance a 'covenant with death. Isaiah anticipates that the Egyptians will renege on their promises, so Judah is setting herself up for disaster (28:18-20). God will rise up and show his power against his people in the way that he used to show his power for his people (28:21a). God is going to act in a manner that is surprising enough for Isaiah to call it 'strange' and 'alien' (28:21b).

Patston p 176.

5. How does their hope (v 16) fit in with the image of being swept away on "an overwhelming scourge" (vv 15, 18)?

To finish

6. Read Rom 9:33 and 1 Pet 2:6-8. How is Jesus both the "cornerstone for a sure foundation" (Is 28:16) as well as a cause of stumbling and judgement?

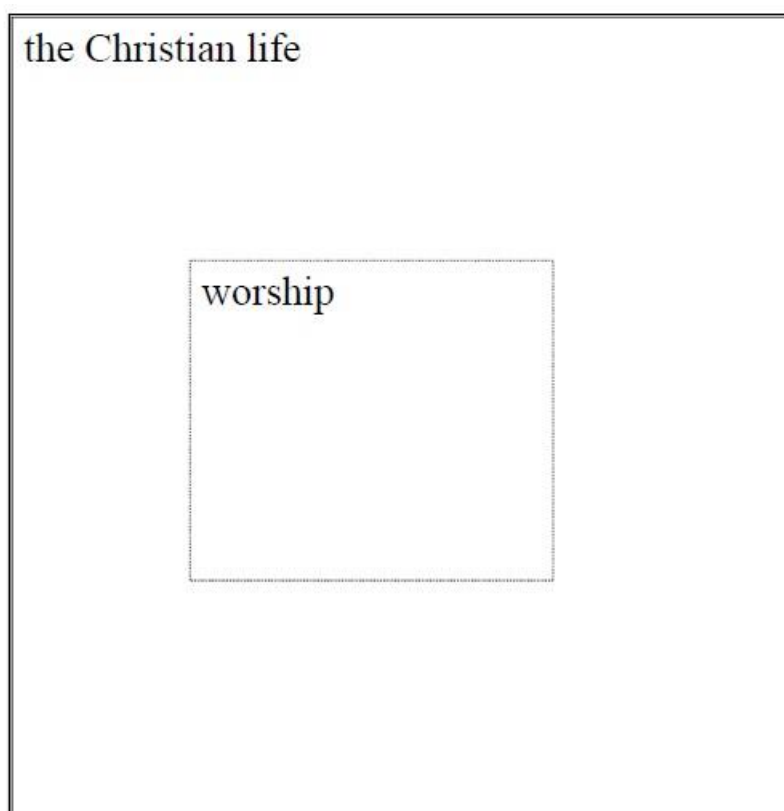


7. How could Jesus be the most basic truth?

Study 14, Isaiah ch 29, worship

Getting started

1. (a) Decide which of the following activities (below) should go in the bigger “The Christian Life” square OR the “Worship” square.



go to church
 sing hymns
 worship songs
 show hospitality
 feel close to God
 draw near to God
 say “hi” to someone new
 donate to a sponsor child
 content with current computer
 give praise to God

- (b) Can you think of other activities that would go in one of the two squares?
If you can insert them into the squares above.
- (c) Should some activities go *outside* both squares e.g. going to war? Give reasons for your answer.

The story so far . . .

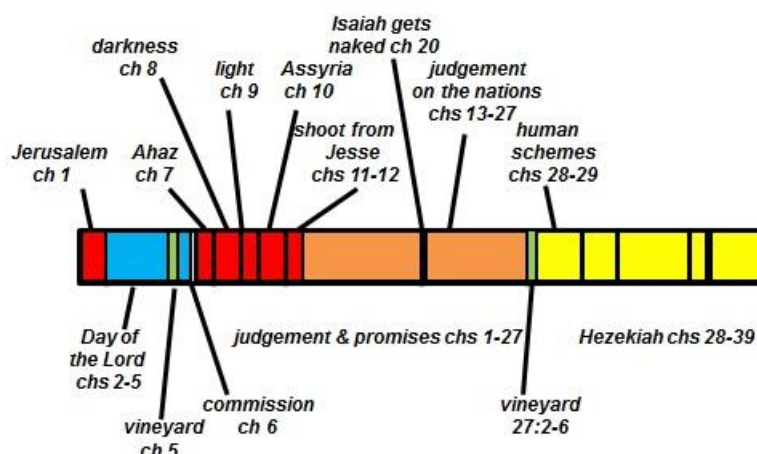
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Chapters 28 and 29 are full of scorn for the leaders of Israel (Ephraim) and Judah who ignore God's warnings through his prophets. Judgement will follow, beginning with Jerusalem (Ariel).



Bible

2. Read Isaiah 29:1-4.

(a) Who is going to besiege Jerusalem (or 'Ariel')?

(b) What does he mean by 'add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on' (v 1) (see also Isaiah ch 1)?

(c) Are there some clues as to the timing of this prophecy?

Isaiah 29:1-14 presents another 'woe' that keeps the sin and judgment before our eyes. It's a witty criticism that plays with a nickname for the city: Ariel, a name that sounds like 'altar hearth'. The point seems to be that Jerusalem was very religious. There was always one sacrifice or another being offered in the temple of the city (29:1) but one day Jerusalem itself will be like a slaughtered sheep being licked up by fire (29:2).

Patston p 177.

3. Read Isaiah 29:5-8

Any more clues to the timing?

4. Read Isaiah 29:9-12, 29:17-24 and 32:15

(a) What does it mean to be sightless?

(b) How can you be drunk without wine or beer?

(c) Who is Isaiah blaming?

It is truly astounding what depths of inconsistency religious people are capable of, especially in positions of leadership, where backroom decisions and policies all too often belie the faith in God that is professed in the pulpit. Webb p 125.

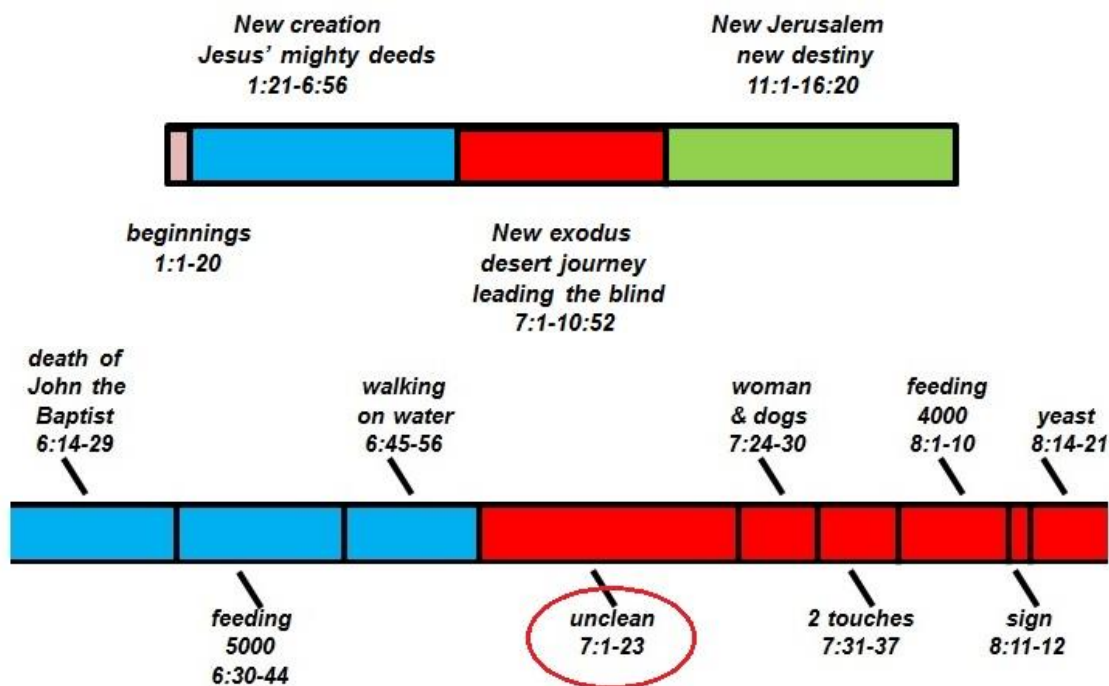
5. Read Isaiah 29:13-16.

(a) What are the people's sins?

(b) What do you think 'worship' is referring to here? Just singing?



6. Read Mark 7:1-13



Why would Jesus bring in the parents issue when the problem was cleanliness?

7. Read Mark 7:14-23

(a) What has this part got to do with the previous section?

(b) Given vv 20-23, is there any real hope for mankind?

(We need to die with Christ and to the basic principles of this world, see Col 2:20 ff.)

8. Read Isaiah 29:17-24.

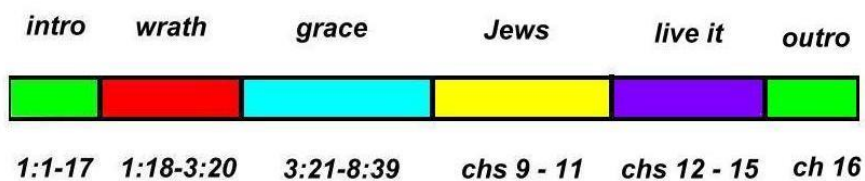
What are the key features of their hope?

9. How does this hope point to Jesus (compare Is 29:14, 24 with 1 Cor 1:18-25)?

To finish

10. (a) In what ways could we honour God only with our 'lips'?
- (b) How could we worship God with rules taught by men e.g. saying or singing the 'right' things?
- (c) So how can we please God (see also Col 2:20-4:6)?
11. What is worship (see Rom 12:1-2)?

Romans



Study 15, Isaiah chs 30-32, repentance

Getting started

1. What is repentance?



The story so far . . .

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Bible

2. Read Isaiah 30:1-17.
(a) What is the response to the Assyrian threat?

(b) Why is this a problem?

"It may be strange to modern ears to hear politics and religion so intimately connected, but for the people of God in Old Testament times life was not compartmentalized into the sacred and the secular as it all too often is with us. The one Lord was Lord of all, and whether or not you respected his lordship was inevitably reflected in the way you made political decisions, just as in any other sphere.

Webb p127.

3. Read Isaiah 30:18-33.
What will God do when he hears the people of Jerusalem cry for help?

The mention of Topheth in 30:33 brings associations with human sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31) so it conjures a frightening picture of the king of Assyria being burnt alive.

Patston p 179.

4. Read Isaiah 31.
Why is reliance on Egypt (31:1) such a bad thing (see Deut 17:14-16)?

5. How will God help his people?

6. Read Isaiah ch 32.
How do the hopes of this chapter contrast with the reality of the situation?

Conversely, the verses expose the irresponsibility and deception of those Judean leaders who insisted that the wisdom of Egypt was their pathway to safety. Isaiah sharply notes that a righteous king brings peace. Egypt's help does not. . . .

But the turning point in the poem is unusual: 'till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high'. Within the context of chapters 28-35 the point is that it is the pouring out of the Spirit that will make for peace - not trust in Egypt. . . .

Patston pp 180-181.

To finish

7. (a) What do we learn about the radical nature of repentance in Isaiah 31:6-7?

(b) What does repentance mean in our lives?

In essence, **repentance** is a change of mind towards God with an accompanying change of behaviour. It is the point at which I admit that I have rebelled against God's rightful rule over my life and I declare my intention to obey God in the future to the best of my ability.

A genuine repentance would require that where my rebellion against God involved other people as well then I would need to make restitution whenever that was possible. . . .

Repentance is not basically feeling sorry. . . . Some of our sins make us feel bad. Others leave us fairly unaffected. Some make us feel guilty, others hardly cause a ripple across our pond. You may feel really sorry about something you have done, but have no real desire to start living a new life under Christ's authority. You may feel a strong sense of relief when something which has really been bothering you moves on. That is not repentance. It is possible to experience real sorrow and not be repentant. On the other hand you can be truly repentant and not feel sorry. . . .

1. *You can be sorrowful and not be repentant.* In repentance the question is not "Are you sorry?", but "Why are you sorry?" Is it because you feel bad or because you have sinned against God and have turned your back on Him. . . .

2. *You can be repentant and not sorrowful.* Jesus tells the story about a farmer and his two sons – "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

'I will not,' he answered, but later changed his mind [repented] and went.

Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing.

He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

Which of the two did what his father wanted?" (Matthew 21:28-32).

You can imagine the situation. The father comes to the first son, "Go work in the vineyard," he says.

Whether in his mind or out aloud you can hear the son say, "I'm sick of this place, I'm sick of the farm and I'm sick of work! I'm not going." He doesn't like it. But finally he repents and the reason we know that he did repent was that he went to work. I dare say he didn't like the farm or the farm work anymore when he went, than when he said that he wouldn't go. But he did change his mind and exercised his will and obeyed. The second boy was full of good feelings toward his father but he was no real son, he said one thing and meant another. He changed his mind and exercised his will and disobeyed.

From A Fresh Start by John Chapman pages 152-156.

It is sobering that in Isaiah's day it was the religious people who seemed most skilled at silencing God. So we need to ask if we are in danger of silencing the word of God.

We can get busy and have too many other words bidding for our time: mobile phones and emails and newsletters. We can become academic, always asking, 'What does this passage mean?' without getting to 'What can I obey?' We can be passive and live our lives as if we don't make choices, so there's no room for listening that is poised for such obedience. Isaiah 28-29 should make us deeply thankful for any means that God has given for us to know and understand his living word and keen to tolerate no obstacles to hearing from God.

The recurring theme of trusting Egypt demands that we ask about our own subtle systems of alliances. If someone followed me they'd see that most of my money each week is spent on paying for a house. So, do I trust in its physical protection? Am I hoping that a stable address will make my life safe and happy? If someone followed me around they'd see that most of the people I mix with are Christians. So, do I depend on the words of people who basically agree with me to feel that my life choices are good and valid and right?

Patston p 183.

Study 16, Isaiah chs 33 – 36, Assyria at the gates

Getting started

1. What particular temptation have you struggled with lately?



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In Isaiah chapters 13 to 27 God pronounces judgement on Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre but there are glimmers of hope.

Chapters 28 and 29 are full of scorn for the leaders of Israel (Ephraim) and Judah who ignore God's warnings through his prophets. Judgement will follow, beginning with Jerusalem (Ariel).

Chapters 30 to 32 denounce Israel's alliance with Egypt but with repentance and God's Spirit a new age will begin.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 33.

As we think about the role of Assyria within the book of Isaiah, we can discern an act of betrayal. Assyria was the nation that Judah turned to for help in Ahaz's time. But Assyria ended up attacking Judah in Hezekiah's time. Reading with 2 Kings in mind, we also know that Assyria accepted tribute from Hezekiah, but attacked him anyway. But then, 37:38 narrates the betrayal of the betrayer. Sennacherib was murdered by his sons.

Patston pp 180-181.

What is God going to do for his people?

3. (a) Who is the king (vv17, 22)?

(b) How is this king like Jesus?

4. Read Isaiah 34.

(a) Who is God angry with (vv 1-2a)?

(b) What is their fate (vv 2b-7)?

(c) Why (v 8)?

(d) If God has used them to bring destruction on Israel how can God be angry at them for doing it?

God's opposition to the armies of the world is presented as an event that ushers in the end of time and takes place both in heaven and on earth.

One puzzle of this section is why Edom suddenly appears. . .

Edom is actually a well chosen emblem, because it can symbolise two things at once. Edom is the nation descended from Abraham through Isaac's son Esau, not Jacob. Edom can thus symbolise a descendant of Abraham who is excluded from blessing. Edom can also symbolise the nations outside of Jacob-Israel.

Patston pp 188-189.

5. Read Isaiah 35.
What good things will happen, as indicated in vv 1-7?

6. Read Luke 7:18-23. When John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the one they had been waiting for, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 35:1-7 and Isaiah 61:1-4. What is Jesus saying about himself and Isaiah 35?

7. Isaiah looks a long way forward to a time when God's people will come back from exile.
(a) How are the returning exiles described?

(b) What sort of road will they come on?

A highway in verse 8 suggests international peace arising from a shared commitment to the Lord (compare 19:23-25). A highway will become a way of picturing salvation from exile (40:3) as God himself comes as rescuer. A highway also suggests a path of wisdom, speaking of a world in which people's ethical choices are God-fearing, just and kind. . . .

Isaiah 33:2-35:10 evokes a picture of a highway and a day when the world is set right. There may be a general backdrop to the way the Gospel writers present Jesus as a man on his way to Jerusalem. As Jesus travels the way, he notices and heals blind, deaf and lame people. Jesus talks of coming to Jerusalem to achieve a new exodus (Luke 9:31). He comes into Zion to shouts of praise and his work there is the strange beginning of God's whole new world. It is no mistake that the early Christians are called followers of the Way.

Patston pp 190, 192.

History 732-696 BC

The northern alliance [Israel with Samaria as its capital and Syria with Damascus as its capital] collapsed, beginning with the fall of Damascus in 732 BC. Samaria followed in 722 BC. The northern kingdom of Israel was dismantled and reorganized as a province of an empire whose border now lay only 8 miles north of Jerusalem. In the years that followed, Judah and its southern neighbours struggled on, economically crippled, and restive under the Assyrian yoke . . . it involved acknowledgment of the imperial gods, a price too high to pay. Ahaz had been willing [2 Kings 16:10-18], but Hezekiah was not. He nailed his colours to the mast by implementing major reforms in the very first year of his reign [2 Kings 18:1-6], and from then on it became a war of nerves as Hezekiah bought time to prepare as thoroughly as possible for the showdown which had to come sooner or later. Abroad, there were signs that events were playing into his hands. Following the death of Sargon II, there were widespread risings against his successor Sennacherib (705-681 BC). In the east, Babylon was already in rebellion and viewed Judah as a potential ally [Isaiah 39:1-2]. Egypt, too, was experiencing something of a revival and seemed ready to offer support [Isaiah 18:1-2]. A simultaneous uprising in east and west offered the best opportunity to capitalize on Assyria's weakness, and it looked as though it would have to be now or never. This time Hezekiah did not hesitate. He hazarded all by throwing his hat unreservedly into the ring. He withheld tribute, forced the reluctant Philistines to fall into line, and strengthened Jerusalem's defences [2 Kings 18:7-8]. It was also at this time that Hezekiah constructed his famous tunnel to bring vital drinking water from an outside spring back under the wall and into the city itself (2 Kings 20:20, 2 Chr 32:30).

It was a fateful move; well-intentioned perhaps, certainly courageous, but dreadfully mistaken, and it brought Judah to the brink of extinction. Sennacherib moved more quickly, and proved to be far stronger than anyone had reckoned on. In less than a year he got the reins firmly in his hands at home, brought Babylon to heel and secured his northern border. By 701 BC he was ready to move west, determined to settle matters once and for all. It was a massive campaign in which he systematically ravaged Palestine from Sidon in the north to Lachish in the south and finally placed Jerusalem itself under siege. . . . It looked like the end, and would certainly have been so if the Lord had not intervened [Isaiah 37:36-37]. Miraculously, Jerusalem survived, but the whole Judean countryside was a smoking ruin. . . .

Within five years of the debacle of 701 BC [Hezekiah's death was probably in 698 BC], Manasseh had completely reversed his father's policies, plunging Judah into one of the darkest periods of its history. Submission to Assyria became the new political orthodoxy, pagan rites of the most detestable kinds were reintroduced, and all dissent was ruthlessly crushed [2 Kings 21:1-16]. Tradition has it that Isaiah was martyred at this time, sawn in two by Manasseh's men.

Webb pp 22 – 25.

8. Read Isaiah 36.

(a) What is going on here (vv 1-3)?

(b) Taking into account all that God has said leading up to this point how would you assess the message of the envoy (vv 4-10)?

(c) Note particularly the claim that God is on their side. Is this the case here? Why/why not?

(d) What has God promised previously (cf 31:5)?

(e) Note the promises of the spokesman for the Assyrian king. Notice how his curses and blessings sound like those God has spoken (vv 13ff). What is the difference?

(f) What is the field commander trying to do with his speech?

(g) Which bits of the speech are true?

To finish

9. (a) What might Hezekiah have been tempted to do (Isaiah 36)?

(b) How do you feel when you struggle with temptations?

(c) (i) How much harder is it to battle temptations when they are based on partial truths?

(ii) How does the gospel help you in your struggle with temptation?

Study 17, Isaiah chs 37 – 39, King Hezekiah

Getting started

1. (a) Think of one crisis you have faced in your life. How did you get through it?



- (b) How did your feelings change as the calamity progressed from its beginning to its climax to its resolution?

The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

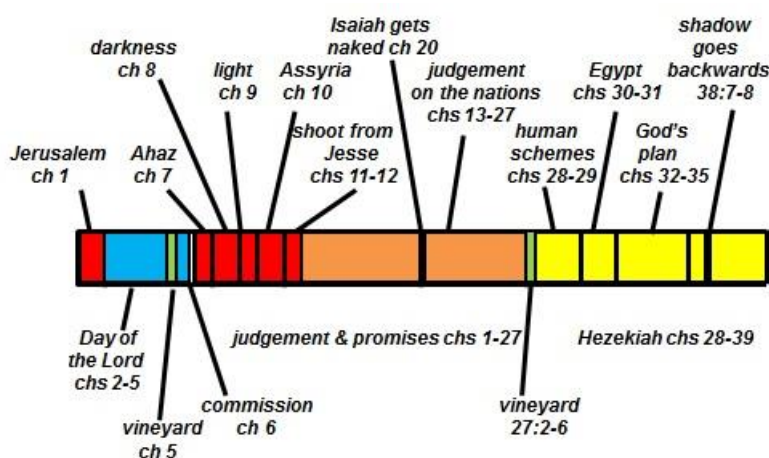
Chapters 7 & 8 give specific details of God's judgement through Assyria's invasion of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Aram (also called Syria). Judah is also under threat of invasion but Isaiah tells Ahaz and his people to trust in God.

In chapters 9 to 12 God promises salvation through a ruler on King David's throne but there will also be judgement on Assyria and Israel and only a remnant will return when God gathers the exiles.

In Isaiah chapters 13 to 27 God pronounces judgement on Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre but there are glimmers of hope.

"The key issue in chapters 28 - 35 is whether Judah, and in particular its leaders, will rely on Egypt or on the Lord in the face of the growing threat posed by the ever-increasing power of Assyria." Webb p 116.

Chapter 36 brings us into the heat of the action as the Assyrians lie at the gates of Jerusalem.



Bible

2. Read Isaiah 37.
The situation is desperate. What does Hezekiah do (vv 1-4)?

Tearing clothes and putting on sackcloth are acts of grief, repentance or both. Going to the temple captures a desire to address God.

Patston p 28.

3. What is God going to do (vv 5-7)?

4. What are the Assyrians doing (vv 8-13)?

5. (a) What does Hezekiah pray for in his second prayer (vv 14-20)?

(b) What is the larger motive for his prayer?

I am always moved by the picture of Hezekiah spreading out the letter in the temple before God. It is such a deliberate expression of faith. It amounts to a surrender of Hezekiah's power and prerogatives and speaks of a real desire to wait upon God alone to act.

Patston pp 30-31.

6. (a) What happens to the Assyrians (vv 21-38 and 10:16)?

(b) Why?

(c) Outline Yahweh's promise to king Hezekiah (vv 30-35).

(d) What does this teach us about trusting God, even when the solution is not obvious to us?

7. Read Isaiah 38:1-8.

The incidents recounted in Isaiah 38-39 seem to have happened before the deliverance from Assyria described in 37:36-38 (cf 38:6).

From Reading 16 of the Bible Brief for Isaiah chs 28-39 in The Briefing magazine # 373 by Tony Payne.

(a) What bad news is Hezekiah faced with (v 1)?

(b) How does his response show wisdom (vv 2-3)?

(c) What is God's response and how does he reassure Hezekiah (vv 4-8)?

(d) Why does God tell Hezekiah he is going to die, only to answer his prayer and prolong his life?

(e) What do you make of vv 7-8 (God makes the shadow cast by the sun go back 10 steps)?

8. Read Isaiah 38:9-22.

(a) Why does God deliver Hezekiah?

(b) What is Hezekiah's take on his brush with death?

9. Read Isaiah 39.

On the surface the Babylonians seem very concerned for Hezekiah's welfare. But what else might be going on in their hearts?

11. Hezekiah is being hospitable but what other motive might be involved?

12. What does God (through Isaiah) say will happen?

13. Babylon won't actually fulfill the prophecy until 586BC.

(a) What does this tell us about God's reign over that of human kings or nations?

(b) How might this truth give God's people hope?

14. What do you make of Hezekiah's reaction (v 8)?

15. Notice Hezekiah's response in v 8. He takes God at his word even though his self centredness is a little repulsive. However, what kingdom is reigning over all the earth at that time in history?

16. How might Hezekiah's illness and reprieve (chs 38-39) serve as an illustration of what will happen to Judah?
17. Chapters 38 and 39 describe events which happened *before* the Assyrian invasion (chs 33-37) yet they are positioned here in Isaiah. How does Isaiah 39:8 and your answer to the previous question explain why chs 38 and 39 are put here?

To finish

18. How does the gospel help us in times of crisis?
19. We can quickly move from agonized cries for help and grateful praise to God for deliverance, to pride, self-satisfaction and presumption. How does the gospel guide us to a realistic view of ourselves?

One of the most wonderful things about reading the accounts of Jesus' life and teaching in the New Testament is the fact that he so consistently acts and speaks what is right. While Hezekiah is something of a hero in the book of Isaiah, he does blunder. He can make us wonder if the people of God will ever fully express God's intentions in the world. His false step here in chapter 39 makes us appreciate Jesus and praise him for his single-minded devotion to God.

Patston p 55.

Study 18, Isaiah ch 40, Comfort and forgiveness

Getting started

1. Have you ever heard Isaiah 40:28-31 out of context (perhaps you have seen the 1981 movie “Chariots of Fire”)?

“Chariots of Fire” tells a fact-based tale which focuses on two young men as they prepare to compete in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris: Eric Liddell, a devout Scottish Christian who runs for the glory of God, and Harold Abrahams, an English Jew who runs to prove a point and overcome prejudice. The film's title was inspired by the line, “Bring me my chariot of fire,” from the William Blake poem adapted into the popular British hymn “Jerusalem”; the hymn is heard at the end of the film. The original phrase “chariot(s) of fire” is from 2 Kings 2:11 and 6:17. The 1981 film was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won four, including Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay and the theme song, composed by Vangelis, won the Academy Award for Best Original Score.

Play EricLiddellReadsIsaiahShort.mp3 or on YouTube <https://youtu.be/ZjF59VB0h6g>

In “Chariots of Fire” Eric Liddell reads this passage as the church lesson a few days before competing in the final of the 400 metre race.

Why do you think this Isaiah passage was used?



2. What is the gospel or “good news” of the Christian faith?

The story so far . . .

In the early chapters of Isaiah the nation as a group does not come up well. Sure there is hope for them, but it is for the future. The present is disappointing. [Chapters 5 & 6] transition from the sin and judgement in the people as a whole, to the experience of one man: Isaiah. Isaiah gives us one glimpse of a transformation that did not have to wait for the future.

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Chapter 36 brings us into the heat of the action as the Assyrians lie at the gates of Jerusalem.

Chapters 37 to 39 – Hezekiah prays and God defeats the Assyrians. Hezekiah gets sick and Isaiah says he will die but Hezekiah prays and God lets him live another 15 years. As a sign to confirm this, God makes the sun’s shadow go back 10 steps. Hezekiah receives envoys from Babylon and shows off all his kingdom’s wealth.

Bible

3. Read Isaiah 40.

Verse 2: Yahweh replies to all her sins . . . not with the grocer’s scale and weights, but with a double pardon . . . the pardon of grace . . . If, however, the noun means ‘the double’ . . . this points to a meaning like ‘the equivalent’ or ‘that which exactly matches’.

From The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer p 299.

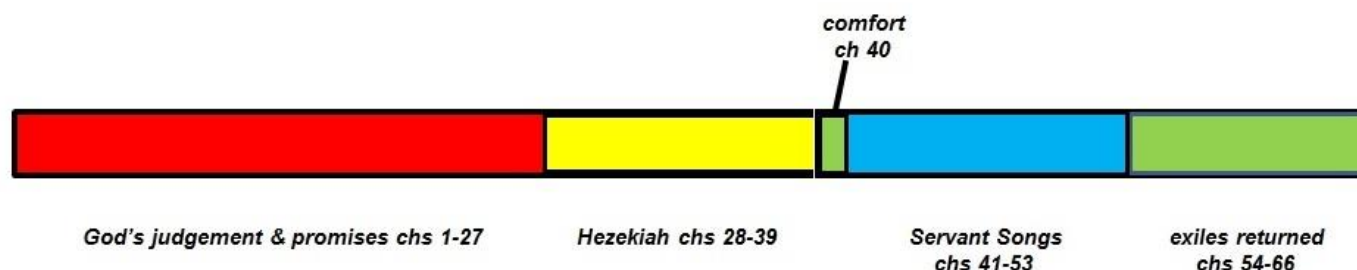
Verse 10: “recompense” means “compensation or reward given for loss or harm suffered or effort made”.

It can be most annoying. You are reading a great novel, ploughing through chapter after chapter, when suddenly you hit one that doesn't seem to make sense. The tone is all wrong and the storyline seems to have changed. You read the page again, but still it won't fit into place. Then you realize that something is missing; something important has been left out. Part of the plot has been skipped. And it can drive you crazy. You become desperate to know what has happened in the meantime.

This is exactly how we feel when we reach Isaiah 40. The mood of its opening verses contrasts so starkly with the judgement and hardship of the preceding section that we feel like we have entered a different world.

Well, we have. Chapters 40-55 are addressed to an exiled nation. There is considerable debate among Old Testament scholars as to whether these chapters were written many years later after the Exile had actually happened, or whether Isaiah foresaw the Exile and spoke prophetically to that future situation. In the end, it doesn't make very much difference to the meaning of the text.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 43.



The Exile

Jehoiachin reigned a month or two until the city [Jerusalem] fell and he was taken into exile in Babylon (597 BC). . . . The throne of Judah was given to Zedekiah, yet he failed to learn the lesson, falling prey to Egypt's lures as his predecessors had done.

Judah's fate was inevitable. Babylonian forces attacked again, took Jerusalem and sacked it (587/6 BC). Large numbers of surviving citizens were settled in Babylonia, and the territory of Judah was placed under a governor.

The exiles seem to have been moved to Babylonia itself, living in various towns and villages as well as in the capital city. They were free to establish themselves as part of the community, so far as can be discovered, to maintain their own traditions and to practise their own religion as they wanted. No doubt the new surroundings and the refurbished splendour of ancient Babylon (justifying Nebuchadnezzar's boast, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built'; Daniel 4:30) awed the men of Judah. . . . Others certainly found a profitable way of life in their new surroundings. Others longed to return to the promised land (see Psalm 137). . . .

Yet the empire of the Chaldean [Babylonian] kings was not to last. As Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel foresaw, the hill-men of the east and north would overcome it. The picture, vague in Isaiah and Jeremiah, is clear in Daniel. Media grew ever more powerful after ridding herself of Scythian rule. By 585 BC the Median yoke extended half-way across Anatolia. And Media was clearly a rival to Babylon when, in 550 BC, her vassal, Cyrus the Persian, seized the throne.

In Babylon, Belshazzar governed while his father Nabonidus lived in northern Arabia. The king returned only to see his realm fall to Cyrus in 539 BC. The new king's policies were generally peaceable, and he liberally allowed Jews to return and restore Jerusalem's temple as he restored many other shrines.

From the Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition p 413.

4. Read Psalm 137.
How would God's people have felt during the exile judging from (a) 2 Chr 36:15-19

(a) Psalm 137?

(b) Isaiah 40:27?

5. Read again Isaiah 40:1-5.
(a) If v 2 refers to Jerusalem (a city), why does v 3 refer to the desert/wilderness?

(b) Why would God need a straight highway? (What's the highway?)

6. How would the exiles have felt when they heard (a) Isaiah 40:1-2?

(b) Isaiah 40:3-5?

(c) What is at the heart of these reasons for hope?

In Isaiah 40, the prophet is told to proclaim that God is about to prepare a way out of exile. God himself will dramatically and publicly intervene in history and lead his people through the desert to Palestine.

Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 45.

7. Compare Isaiah 40:3-5 with Luke 3:1-6.

Context for Luke ch 3: The first 2 chapters of Luke are about the miraculous births of Jesus and John the Baptist, and some events in Jesus' early life. In chapter 3 Jesus and John are now grown up and ready to begin their separate ministries.

(a) What is the difference between the two prophecies?

(b) How does John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3) relate to Isaiah 40:3-5?

(c) How was Isaiah 40 fulfilled in the time of John the Baptist?

(d) Read Mark 1:1-8. Mark's account is very similar to Luke's except for vv 7-8. Why does Mark introduce a baptism with the Holy Spirit?

The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . .

Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand.

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, p 11.

8. Read again Isaiah 40:6-11. On being commanded to cry out (Isaiah 40:6) Isaiah sums up the depression of the people in these verses. "In other words, Isaiah is asking God: "What on earth can I say to a people who are so desperate and depressed and who feel that their situation is hopeless?".

Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 45.

(a) What is God's response in v 9?

(b) How would this have heartened God's people?

9. What would have been the people's emotional and intellectual responses to Isaiah 40:9-11?

10. Read again Isaiah 40:12-31

The second half of the chapter (40:12-31) is based around the cry of 40:27. The people of God, as Isaiah indicated to him, feel deserted by God. They are tempted to abandon him, or at least charge him with unfaithfulness. Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 45.

(a) From Isaiah 40:12-31 what are 3 reasons why Israel is wrong to doubt God's faithfulness?

(b) Is verse 22 b Isaiah's way of describing the Big Bang Theory? Why/why not?

To finish

11. How would Isaiah 40:28-31 (a) have encouraged the returning exiles?

(b) encourage Christians?

12. How is this different from the way these verses were used in "Chariots of Fire" (see Question 1)?

Study 19, Gospel

Getting started

1. (a) How do you think non-Christians would define the Christian religion?



- (b) Would Christians agree with that definition? Why/why not?

We started to think about the “good news” in the last study. We will look further into that theme in this study.

Bible

By talking to different groups you may find there is some confusion amongst Christians as to what the gospel is. The gospel is a vital key to understanding the New Testament so it is important to get it right. The word “gospel” = good news/tidings has its origins in Isaiah when God's people had been defeated, their cities destroyed and all but the poorest people were taken into exile into Babylon. To that situation Isaiah speaks the following good news:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Isaiah 40:1-2

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!' See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 40:9-10

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'

Isaiah 52:7

2. (a) From the three passages above what is the good news?

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Mark 1:14-15.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

Luke 4:16-21

For Israel, the good news is as much about God's kingly rule over the world (Is 40:9-10) as it is about his forgiveness (Is 40:1-2). The gospel proclaims both a Saviour who pardons wrong and a King who puts things right. John Dickson from the 2012 sermon series, the Fifth Gospel, at St Andrews, Roseville.

(b) From Mark 1:14-15 and Luke 4:16-21 what is the good news?

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.

1 Cor 15:1-4

(c) What is the gospel = good news in the passage above?

(d) How does it fit in with the previous passages on good news?

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Rom 1:16

The idea of '**good news**', for which an older English word is '**gospel**', had two principal meanings for first-century Jews. First, with roots in Isaiah, it meant the news of YHWH's long-awaited victory over evil and rescue of his people. Second, it was used in the Roman world for the accession, or birthday, of the Emperor. Since for Jesus and Paul the announcement of God's inbreaking kingdom was both the fulfilment of prophecy and a challenge to the world's present rulers, 'gospel' became an important shorthand for both the message of Jesus himself and the apostolic message about him. Paul saw this message as itself the vehicle of God's saving power (Romans 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The four canonical 'gospels' tell the story of Jesus in such a way as to bring out both these aspects (unlike some other so-called 'gospels' circulated in the second and subsequent centuries, which tended both to cut off the scriptural and Jewish roots of Jesus' achievement and to inculcate a private spirituality rather than confrontation with the world's rulers). Since in Isaiah this creative, life-giving good news was seen as God's own powerful word (40:8, 55:11), the early Christians could use 'word' or 'message' as another shorthand for the basic Christian proclamation.

From Paul for Everyone the Prison Letters by Tom Wright pp 215-216.

3. (a) What is grace?



(b) How could you give grace to people?

Patricia was a mother of a well-off English family living in Fiji in the 1950s. They had servants which was customary in that context. Patricia discovered that one servant had been stealing. Her first reaction was to sack her but Patricia had recently become a Christian and she wanted to think through what believing in God's grace meant to her life. She prayed about it and reasoned that her servant had stolen because she was poor and needed the money to feed her family. Patricia decided that God would not want her to sack her servant but to give her a raise which was what she did. The servant was astounded and became a devoted household maid. Patricia's act of grace was an

overflow of the grace she had received from God and it was life changing for her servant. Later Patricia led her to faith in Jesus Christ.

From a eulogy by Tony Golsby-Smith at his mother's funeral.

Grace is getting what we don't deserve. We deserve death and God's judgement but, because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection we get what we don't deserve - life, the Holy Spirit, fellowship with God, church, gifts . . . think of all the other things God gives us. But it doesn't stop there. Like Patricia, we can give grace as it overflows from the grace we have received from God. We can do grace/give grace, and it may be life changing for the people who receive it.

4. (a) How does Paul's greeting ("grace and peace" Phil 1:2) sum up the gospel?

(b) Is this more than "just a greeting"?

(c) Would "grace and peace" or "guilt and pressure" be a better description of your experience with church?

Why?

"Grace" is the free gift of God's love, extended to us, though totally undeserved on our part. It is God's grace which stands at the heart of the gospel (see Ephesians 2:8-9), and without it we would all remain condemned. "Peace" speaks of the reconciliation which we have with God in Christ - and the implication of that peace, found in the gospel, is that we then strive for peace (reconciliation) with others (see Col. 1:20, 2 Cor 5:18-21, Eph 2:14-18).

From Philippians a series of 8 Bible Studies by Roger Green 1997.

To finish

5. Wikipedia's definition of religion: Religion is a cultural system of behaviours and practices, mythologies, world views, sacred texts, holy places, ethics, and societal organisation that relate humanity to what an anthropologist has called "an order of existence".

Where would the gospel fit in with a definition of the Christian religion?

Study 20, Isaiah chs 41-42, Justice through God's Servant

Getting started

1. (a) Name someone you have "served"?
- (b) In what ways have you served him/her?



The story so far . . .

In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God's judgement and the Assyrian threat. Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God's people are taken into exile. In the following chapters Isaiah's vision leaves current affairs behind and looks further into the future.

A new phase in God's dealing with his people begins to unfold in chapter 40 – a time of comfort and forgiveness.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 41:1-7 and vv 21-29.
Why does God call for a meeting with the nations/islands?
3. How does God show how useless their idols are?
4. How does God explain his control of events?
5. Read Isaiah 41:8-20 and 42:1-9.
How are the two servants different in these two passages?
6. Who are the two servants?

A second urging to Jacob-Israel not to fear centres on how insignificant the nation felt. The image of a worm turned into a threshing sledge is quite arresting. A threshing sledge was dragged by a farm animal over cut grain. It had sharp teeth on its underside made of stone or metal that would cut through, helping to separate kernel from husk. Insignificant Israel will one day act in victory and judgment over the nations. . . .

The Lord narrates a scene [41:17-20] of poor thirsty people in a wilderness, bringing to mind the exodus. He begins to describe how he provided water for the thirsty Israelites, but the language builds in its grandeur and scope. It's not that God will provide pools of water in the desert; he will 'turn the desert into pools of water'. In verse 19 God says he will plant seven types of trees, an image of complete renewal, even new creation.

Patston p 214.

7. Read again 42:1-9.

Verse 1: **The nations**

God has called Israel to be a light to the nations and to bring his instruction to them (2:1-5; 42:1-7). The nations are in the darkness of idolatry and need to turn to Yahweh. However, Israel herself has sold out to idolatry and has become a blind prisoner in darkness (42:18-25; 43:19-24; 43:26-28; 46:8-13; 48). God must restore Israel before he can bring his salvation to the nations through them. God restores his servant-Israel via an individual who takes on the mission of the nation (49:1-13), "absorbs" the curse on the nation (52:13-53:12), and brings a remnant of the nation back to Yahweh (53:10; 50:10; 54:17; 65:8-16). God also judges Babylon and the nations (13-14; 24-26; 34, 47 etc.), thus bringing about a second exodus (27, 35, 40:3-5, 9-11; 60:4-5 etc.) and a new creation (65:17 ff. etc.). Once the nations are judged and destroyed (24-26, 34), Jerusalem is restored, and then the nations flood to Jerusalem to find Yahweh (60; 2:1-4; 66:18-23); and, at last, Israel can fulfill its mission to be a light to the nations (60:1-3). Of particular interest is the way in which all the nations are portrayed as idolaters (esp. in 40-55) and are all destroyed by Yahweh's anger (Isa 34:1-4). Edom is singled out as the nation that represents all the others in their opposition to Israel and, as such, experiences the full destructive power of God (Isa 34:5-17; 63:1-6.) The "destruction of Edom" oracles represent the destruction of *all* the nations—the enemies of Israel. But in the Isaiah plotline this decimation opens the way to the return of Israel to Jerusalem (Isaiah 35) and the restoration of the holy city portrayed in terms of a new creation (Isaiah 35; 65:17-66:24). Then we read that the nations come to Jerusalem to bring the exiles back and rebuild the city. They join with Israel in worshipping Yahweh. Several things need to be made dear at this point. First, these nations that come to Jerusalem have earlier been said to have been destroyed in the eschatological fire of God's anger. Second, the oath of Yahweh is that all people will enter into a saving relationship with him (Isa 45:22-25). Third, it is clear that this universal salvation does not happen in one instant. The picture of new creation in Isaiah portrays some of the nations coming out of destruction to the New Jerusalem (60:1--11, 13ff.) whilst others remain in rebellion and under destructive wrath (60:12; 66:24). However, it is also clear that they cannot remain *forever* in the state of rebellion portrayed in 60:12 if Yahweh is to fulfill his oath of 45:22-25. Either they are annihilated or they are allowed to turn from their rebellion and join the others in Jerusalem. The book of Isaiah does not tell us which but leaves a blank space for the interpreter to fill in.

From The Evangelical Universalist 2nd edition by Gregory MacDonald pp 122-123.

What do you notice in 42:1-9 that is like Jesus?

8. (a) What is the mission of the servant?

(b) What methods does he use to achieve it (vv 2-4)?

(c) What will guarantee this servant's success in contrast to other servants?

9. Read Isaiah 42:10-17.

(a) What is the "new song"?

(b) What are the different ways it is described?

10. (a) What are the reasons given for praising God?

(b) (i) What does this teach us about God's ongoing purpose in sending his Servant?

(ii) How can we join in this praise?

When God has won his victory (42:13) opening up relationship and truth, or covenant and light, it makes sense that the inhabitants of the creation should gladly celebrate what he has done. So it is no surprise that we find a command to sing in 42:10-12. The book of Isaiah never thinks of relationship with God in terms of intellectual assent to beliefs about him. There is always life-risking trust and then wonderful abandonment to song.

Patston pp 218-219.

11. Read Isaiah 42:18-25.

(a) What is wrong with this servant?

(b) Who is this servant?

(c) Why do you think that Israel was described as God's servant?

(d) What responsibilities did they have?

(e) Why do you think God describes his servant people as blind and deaf?

(f) In what ways are people blind and deaf today?

(g) What are the risks to our spiritual vision and hearing?

The identity of the servant is confusing. Is he Israel or an individual? Is there more than one servant? Ultimately, Israel is God's faithful servant. Yet from Israel, a faithful remnant will emerge and, finally, an individual – Jesus the Christ, the true Israel – who will do the work described in Isaiah 40-66.

From the Bible Brief on Isaiah p 28 Reading 3 from The Briefing magazine # 380.

12. Read Matt 11:1-5, 12:15-21.

Context: In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed and relationships restored.

The New Testament declares Jesus to be the servant prophesied in Isaiah.
From Matt 11:1-5 and 12:15-21. How does Jesus fulfill the promises of Isaiah 42?

To finish

13. What is the connection between what we deserve and the how and why we serve?

14. What is new (see Isaiah 42:10-16) about a Christian's life?

In a passage full of idols and powerful political kings, the servant is a radical picture of another way of being in the world. His is a way of gentle strength, quiet purposefulness and assured conviction. For Christians to live like that would be very attractive indeed.

Patston p 222.

Study 21, Isaiah chs 43-48, Promises fulfilled through God's Servant 1

Getting started

1. Have you ever got someone out of a tight spot? OR has anyone ever gotten you out of a tight spot?
How did you feel? How did they feel?



The story so far . . .

In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God's judgement and the Assyrian threat. Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God's people are taken into exile. In the following chapters Isaiah's vision leaves current affairs behind and looks further into the future.

A new phase in God's dealing with his people begins to unfold in chapter 40 – a time of comfort and forgiveness.

Chapters 41 and 42 - God is ruler of the nations. He will bring justice to the nations through his Servant.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 43:1-13.
Why has God been so good to his people, Israel (see v4)?
3. Read Isaiah 43:1-28.
What does God promise to do for his people?
4. What have the people done for God (vv22-28)?
5. Read Isaiah 44:1-5.
Israel has been ignoring God (43:22-28) but God makes still more promises in 44:1-5.
(a) What further promises does God make?

The language of immense privilege yet again falls upon this stubborn, difficult nation: servant, chosen, formed, helped. Jacob, a word associated with deceptive scheming is replaced by Jeshurun, a word that sounds like 'upright one'. This name for Israel is only used in Deuteronomy 32 and 33, in another passage heavy with the tragedy of God's gracious love being met with wilful human pride.

Patston p 229.

- (b) How are these promises fulfilled by Jesus (see John 4:10-14)?

6. Read Isaiah 44:6-20, 45:1-21, 46:1-7.
How does God compare with idols?

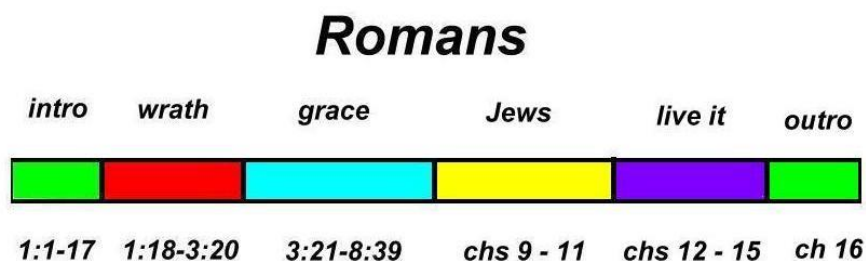
7. Read Isaiah 44:6-20 again.
(a) Make a list of the characteristics of those who make idols.

(b) How do these characteristics highlight the blindness and futility of idolatry?

(c) What are the idols of our culture?

(d) Why do people choose these idols?

(e) Read Romans 1:18-25.



What does this reveal about the state of hearts and attitudes towards God?

8. Read Isaiah 44:21-23
(a) What does it mean to 'remember' and 'return'?

(b) How are we to respond to this call in the light of God's grace towards us in Jesus?

(c) How is this cause for praise?

(d) How would overcome idolatry?

Babylon's idols (46:1-2)

Here we have an imaginative picture of Bel (Marduk, the head of the Babylonian pantheon) and Nebo (Nabu, Marduk's son, god of writing and wisdom) being carried on the backs of animals, led off into captivity. . . The contrast with the portrait of the Lord in 40:28-31 is clear: the Lord strengthens the weary but the Babylonian gods simply burden people in a time of distress.

Patston p 242.

9. Read Isaiah 44:21-28, 45:22-25, 46:8-13. How are these themes fulfilled in Jesus?

(a) forgiveness (Isaiah 44:22, Matt 26:28)

(b) redemption (Isaiah 44:22-23, Luke 24:21-27)

(c) wisdom (Isaiah 44:25, 1 Cor 1:18-25)

(d) salvation (Isaiah 45:22, 46:13, Acts 4:8-12)

(e) lordship (Isaiah 45:23, Phil 2:6-11)

(f) righteousness (Isaiah 45:24-25, 46:13, Rom 3:21-26)

(g) God's purpose (Isaiah 46:11, John 6:38)

10. Read Isaiah 43:14-15, ch 47 and ch 48.

How were these themes fulfilled in Isaiah's day?

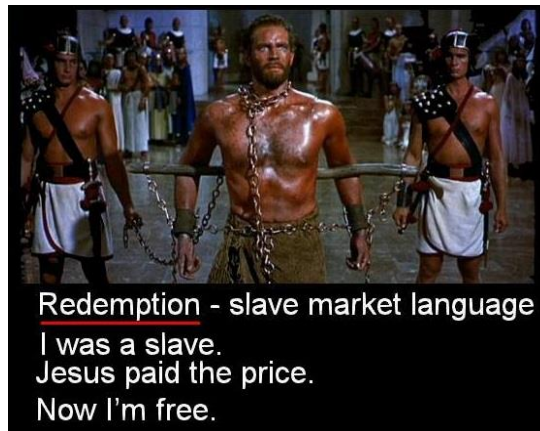
Out of nowhere, a first person voice speaks at the end of [ch 48] verse 16: 'And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me, with his Spirit.' The change of voice is certainly attention grabbing. We know that sent characters - like Isaiah and Israel - are important in the book and we wonder who this is. Within the flow of 48:14-16 it seems to be Cyrus. But Cyrus is not sent equipped with the Spirit. The text has created an engaging mystery for us to solve.

One clue to who this may be is in 40:3 and 40:6, when an individual takes the commissioning from Isaiah seriously and wants to become a proclaimer of comfort. Another clue is in Isaiah 49 where a first person singular voice (I, me, my) suddenly speaks to us again. In 49:3, this figure is called the servant. He will be the major character in the next section of the book.

The sent one in Isaiah 48 is important because he is proof that the Lord has not given up on Israel and there is hope. Everyone else in Israel may be false (48:1), stubborn (48:4) and rebellious (48:8) but this one is not. He has God's Spirit, suggesting that deep inside he is truly God's person. He is a sent one, suggesting that he listens and obeys. We yearn to see what he will achieve when he takes the stage again in the book of Isaiah.

Patston p 247-248.

11. (a) What does “redemption” mean?



- (b) What have God's people done to deserve redemption (see Isaiah 43:22-28, 48:1-4, 18-19)?

To finish

12. (a) What does it mean when someone is “bought”?
- (b) How is this similar to redemption?
- (c) How is being ‘bought’ by someone different to redemption?
- (d) What can we do to earn our redemption?
- (e) How do you feel about being “bought”?

Study 22, Isaiah chs 49-55, Promises fulfilled through God's Servant 2

Getting started

1. Think of a statement that you or someone else made, that deliberately or unintentionally had two meanings. What was it?



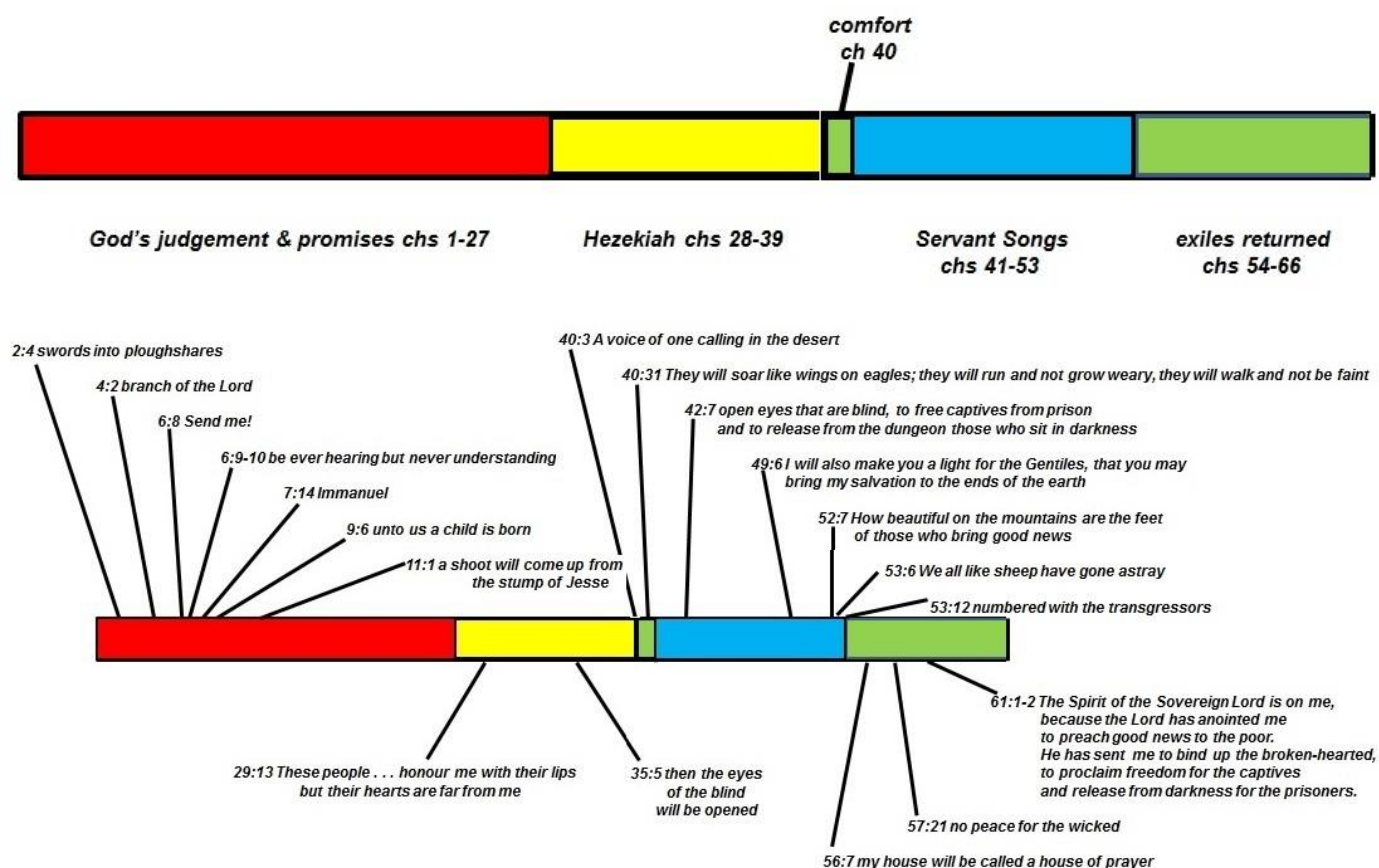
The story so far . . .

In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God's judgement and the Assyrian threat. Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God's people are taken into exile. In the following chapters Isaiah's vision leaves current affairs behind and looks further into the future.

A new phase in God's dealing with his people begins to unfold in chapter 40 – a time of comfort and forgiveness.

Chapters 41 and 42 - God is ruler of the nations. He will bring justice to the nations through his Servant.

Chapters 43 to 48 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant – Israel/Cyrus /Jesus.



Bible

Christians are so familiar with some of the verses in chapters 49 to 55 of Isaiah that we immediately relate them to Jesus. But these chapters also had immediate relevance to God's people in exile in Babylon, We will look at both the relevance of these verses to Jesus and their relevance to the Israelites in exile.

2. Read through chapters 49 to 55 of Isaiah and, as you go, add the relevant references beside each of the themes on the next page, that is, the themes of servant, judgement, return to God/the way back/return from exile, light to the Gentiles, covenant and redemption/salvation/justification. Next, read the references you've written down and explain

(a) how Jesus fulfils this theme

(b) how the theme relates to Israel's return from exile.

<u>theme</u>	<u>references</u>	<u>how Jesus fulfils theme</u>	<u>relationship with return from exile</u>
servant			
judgement			
return to God			
light to the Gentiles			
covenant			
redemption salvation justification			

3. Read Luke 2:22-38.

Context: The first 2 chapters of Luke are about the miraculous births of Jesus and John the Baptist, and some events in Jesus' early life.

Was the exile really over when the remnant of Israel returned from Babylon?

Why/why not?

To finish

4. Play "(I can't get no) satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones, 1965. YouTube <https://youtu.be/nrIPxIFzDi0>

Chorus: I can't get no satisfaction
I can't get no satisfaction
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can't get no, I can't get no

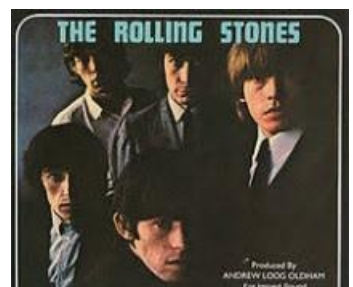
When I'm drivin' in my car
And that man comes on the radio
He's tellin' me more and more
About some useless information
Supposed to fire my imagination
I can't get no, oh no, no, no
Hey hey hey, that's what I say

Chorus

When I'm watchin' my T. V.
And that man comes on to tell me
How white my shirts can be
But he can't be a man 'cause he doesn't smoke
The same cigarettes as me
I can't get no, oh no, no, no
Hey hey hey, that's what I say
Chorus

When I'm ridin' round the world
And I'm doin' this and I'm signing that
And I'm tryin' to make some girl
Who tells me baby better come back later next week
'Cause you see I'm on a losing streak
I can't get no, oh no, no, no
Hey hey hey, that's what I say

(a) Where is the songwriter seeking satisfaction?



(b) What is the difference between people who seek satisfaction in things like materialism, knowledge, sex, money or status, and those who seek satisfaction in Christ?

Study 23, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Promises fulfilled through God's Servant 3

Getting started

1. How good are you at explaining things clearly?
Imagine you are talking to an unchurched person of your own age. Explain as clearly as you can without using any big words or Christian jargon, how Jesus can effect his/her life here and now.



The story so far . . .

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Chapters 43 to 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant – Israel/Cyrus/Jesus.

Bible

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. This is one of the most well-known and well-loved passages in the Old Testament, if not the whole Bible. The chapter divisions in this part of the Bible disguise how this passage is a well-crafted poem with five stanzas, each occupying three verses in our English translations. It follows a structure that can be summarized in the following way:

Stanza 1 52:13-15 The servant's victory through suffering

Stanza 2 53:1-3 The factual realities of the servant's suffering and death

Stanza 3 53:4-6 The meaning of the servant's suffering and death

Stanza 4 53:7-9 The factual realities of the servant's suffering and death

Stanza 5 53:10-12 The servant's victory through suffering

Arranged in this way you can see how the song climaxes in the central stanza revealing the heart of the matter as the meaning of the servant's suffering and death is explained. The focal point of the poem, at the mid-point of the mid-point is verse 5:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

One of the reasons this passage is so well-known and well-loved is because it so clearly points to the saving work of the Lord Jesus. While it was written centuries before the coming of the Christ, the precision with which Jesus fulfills this prophecy is astounding. At point after point Jesus, in his suffering, death and resurrection, makes perfect the words of this song.

From Isaiah 40 – 66 Hope in Dark Times Stromlo Christian Church.

2. Read Acts 8:26-35
Context: Persecution of the church in Jerusalem meant that all the disciples except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip went to Samaria, preached about Jesus and many were converted.

Phillip uses the very words of Isaiah 53 to explain the good news about Jesus. In this study we will begin to imagine what exactly Phillip might have said. We will look at Isaiah through the lens of the New Testament. We will get a greater handle on why Jesus taught that he *must* suffer and be rejected and be killed and rise again.

From Isaiah 40 – 66 Hope in Dark Times Stromlo Christian Church.

For each of the five stanzas below research the links to the New Testament. Examine quotations and allusions to discover how Jesus fulfils these promises. If you have a cross-reference or study Bible you can follow the links.

Isaiah 52:13-15

Isaiah 53:1-3

Isaiah 53:4-6

Isaiah 53:7-9

Isaiah 53:10-12

3. Apply Isaiah 52:13-53:12 to answer the following questions:
(a) Why did Jesus have to suffer?

(b) How does Jesus make people righteous?

(c) How should we respond to what Jesus went through?

(d) How does the suffering of Jesus give us hope in dark times?

There is an intriguing connection between the account of Hezekiah's sickness in the book's core narratives and this [Is 52:13-53:12] profound poem about the servant. Both use the language of 'servant' (37:35; 52:13) and the same verb for being sick or weak (38:1; 53:10). In both cases the suffering of an individual eventually leads to life for

many. In the Hezekiah story it is life for the city (38:6), but not the Assyrians. In the servant poem it is life for the remnant and the nations.

Both stories involve a misunderstanding by faithful people: Isaiah announces Hezekiah's death prematurely (38:1-2) and the remnant dismisses the servant too readily (53:1-3). I find myself wondering if Isaiah's first experience of a suffering servant was Hezekiah. And I wonder if God then directed Isaiah's meditation on the day the king saved the city and this poem began to take shape. . .

In the last couple of hundred years Old Testament scholars have wondered if an event in the exile might have generated this poem. One possibility worthy of attention is that it could be describing what was happening to the prophets during the period of the exile. The book of Jeremiah shows how his life became one experience of undeserved persecution after another, because of the sins of the people he was preaching to. He suffered because of their sin, but pressed on to bring them news of forgiveness and restoration. Ezekiel had to act out the years and years of sin in the life of the nation. He had to lie still on his side and eat war rations for hundreds of days. He suffered to represent the sins of the people. But he pressed on to bring them news of forgiveness and restoration. It may be that there was another prophet in the exilic period who tried to convince the exiles that Cyrus would be their saviour. And maybe he suffered because they did not like his message. This prophet may have written those servant poems that use 'I' (49:1; 50:4) and this poem may have been written about him.

Patston pp 278-279.

To finish

4. Based on your discoveries of the links between Jesus and Isaiah 52:13-53:12, discuss how you might use this part of the Bible to explain to a modern Jew why you believe that Jesus is the promised Servant of Isaiah.

Study 24, Isaiah ch 55, Promises fulfilled through God's Servant 4

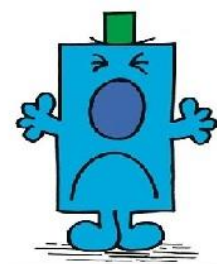
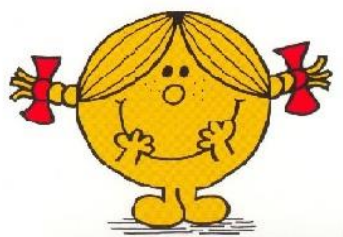
Getting started

1. (a) What things do people look to in order to find happiness and satisfaction in their lives?
Make a list of these things and then evaluate together how effective you think they are in making people content, and where they are prone to fail.

Source of happiness/contentment

effectiveness

where they are prone to fail



- (b) Where you have found yourself tempted to look for happiness and satisfaction, and where has this search let you down or failed?

The story so far . . .

In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God's judgement and the Assyrian threat. Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God's people are taken into exile. In the following chapters Isaiah's vision leaves current affairs behind and looks further into the future.

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Chapters 43 to 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant – Israel/Cyrus/Jesus.

Bible

Isaiah 54 and 55 are important in understanding the outcome of the Servant's suffering in chapter 53. The Servant's death has won a glorious redemption and Isaiah calls the people to respond to God's offer of forgiveness. This offer of salvation to all peoples is the climax of the chapters 40-55.

While chapter 54 is more descriptive, setting forth the abundant blessings the Servant has obtained for his people, chapter 55, with its many imperatives, calls the people to action. It's an invitation to come and accept God's salvation and to participate in its blessings.

From Isaiah 40 – 66 Hope in Dark Times Stromlo Christian Church.

2. Read Isaiah ch 55.

(a) Verses 1-2.

(i) Why is this such a wonderful description of God's grace?

(ii) And how is it made possible?

(b) Verses 3-5. These verses are firmly grounded in the covenant God made with David.

(i) What did God promise?

(ii) How is it fulfilled in the Servant's work and the results that flow from it?

(c) Verses 6-7. What do these verses tell us about the way our lives should be if we genuinely respond to God's grace?

(d) Verses 8-11.

(i) Why do we need verse 8?

(ii) How can we find encouragement to persevere in telling others the gospel?

(e) Verses 12-13.

(i) What was the immediate relevance of these promises to the exiles?

(ii) How are they fulfilled in Jesus?

(iii) How can they encourage us today?

To finish

3. (a) In the light of Isaiah 55 where will our hearts find true satisfaction?

(b) How can we learn to seek contentment in God rather than the things God has made or the experiences we make for ourselves?

(c) How can we encourage one another in these matters?

Study 25, Isaiah chs 56-59, The Sabbath and Fasting

Getting started

1. Are Christians any better than non-Christians? Give reasons for your answer.



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Bible

The final section of Isaiah, chs 56-66, "relates to the period following the arrival of the first returnees from Babylon. Isaiah saw that time in prophetic vision." (Webb p 219).

2. Read Isaiah 56:1-8.
 - (a) The exiles are returning (v8) but who else, mentioned in these verses, will be included with God's people?
 - (b) What hints do we get about the timing of the prophecy being fulfilled?
 - (c) What do you think the Jews would have expected the fulfillment to be like?
 - (d) Who would be a modern day 'eunuch', i.e. outcast?
 - (e) What would you say is most pleasing to God about the eunuch approach?
 - (f) Which covenant is Isaiah referring to (see Jeremiah 7:22-23)?
 - (g) What is the significance of Isaiah calling the temple a house of prayer 'for all nations'?

3. (a) Why is the Sabbath so important (v 2, v 4, v 6, see also Heb 4:1-11)?

(b) The 10 Commandments are described in two passages in the first five books of the Bible and two different reasons are given for keeping the Sabbath. What are the reasons in each of these passages?

(i) Exodus 20:8-11

Context: God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. Under Moses leadership they wandered through the dessert until they reached Mt Sinai. Here God met with Moses to give them his Law.

(ii) Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Context: Deuteronomy is a record of Moses' addresses to Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land. In ch 5 Moses restates the 10 Commandments modified so that it relates more closely to a settled life.

(iii) Comparing these two passages, how might we apply teaching on the Sabbath to God's call to love and trust him above all, and to love our neighbour as ourselves?

4. The New Testament reveals how the Law is fulfilled in Jesus and how law-keeping is not the means to acceptance by God. Jesus completely transforms how Christians are to relate to the laws given to Israel. Given that the Sabbath is anchored both in creation and redemption, Christians differ in their understanding of how God wants us to treat the Sabbath today.
From Isaiah 40 – 66 Hope in Dark Times Stromlo Christian Church.

(a) What light do the following New Testament passages shed on the place of the Sabbath today?

(i) Matthew 12:1-14

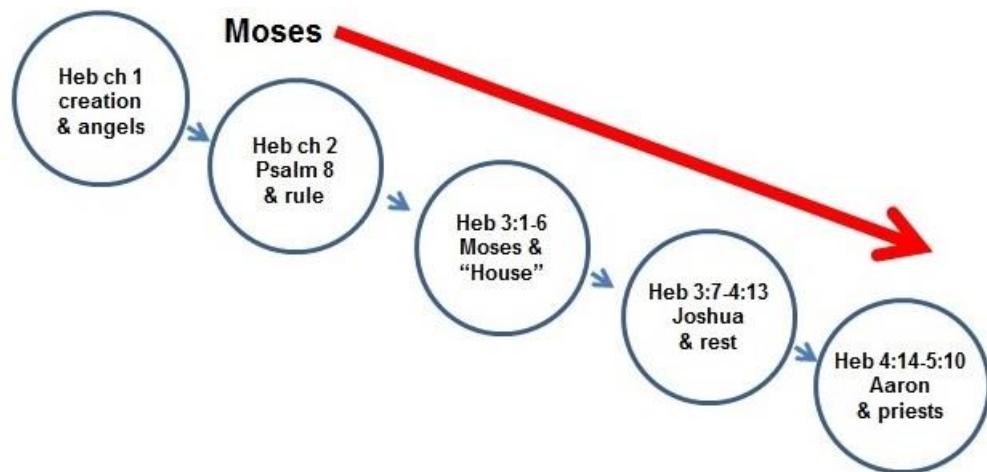
Context: In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed and relationships restored.

(ii) Colossians 2:13-23

Context: Paul writes about the importance of Jesus and warns against false teachers. Paul tells the Colossians to put away their old selves and put on their new lives/their new identity.

(iii) Hebrews 4:1-11

Context: The first 5 chapters look at the religious system of Judaism with an undercurrent of how Jesus changes everything. Hebrews begins with creation and Jesus' role even back then. Great are the angels but Jesus is superior. Chapter 2 quotes from Psalm 8 and introduces the idea of humanity's rule over the earth. But humanity does not rule, instead Jesus is the world's ruler and Jesus shares our humanity as brothers. Chapter 3 introduces Moses, his "house" and the Exodus but Jesus is greater than Moses. Joshua and the theme of rest is introduced in chapter 4.



(b) How do you think Christians today should behave on their “day of rest”? Why?

5. Read Isaiah 56:9-57:13. Both sinful and righteous people are amongst the returnees.
(a) What sins are outlined here?

(b) Which sins are still common in our society?

It seems the leaders of Israel have let the exile happen to them without any reflection or repentance. So they are still the scandalous beasts, deaf to the word of God that they were in Isaiah 1-12.
Patston p 298.

6. Read Isaiah 57:14-21.
(a) Describe the “lowly in spirit” (v15).

(b) How will God help them?

(c) How does Jesus help the “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3)?

7. Read Isaiah 58.
What is the purpose of fasting?
8. Is there a connection between fasting and the Sabbath (vv 13-14)?

Fasting and Sabbath-keeping are about putting one's own immediate needs in second place. They acknowledge that there is an 'other' who is worthy of attention. They acknowledge that God is worth listening to and obeying. And that he can be trusted to provide for them, even when they are not hard at work for themselves. God is also saying that the dynamic of denying one's own immediate needs and noticing an 'other' has to happen in people's relationships with one another as much as in one's relationship with God. True fasting and Sabbath-keeping should have helped God's people to stop and notice the needy among them. And then to do something about it.

Patston p 300.

9. Read Isaiah 59.
Who are (a) “they” vv 2-8?
(b) “we” vv 9-15?

10. What is God going to do about “their” sins and “our” sins (vv 15b-21)?

To finish

11. When Christians commit the same sins as non-Christians is there much difference in the consequences? Discuss.

Study 26, Isaiah chs 60-61, Good news

Getting started

1. (a) What is hope?
- (b) What do you hope for tomorrow?
- (c) What do you hope for with your children?
- (d) What do non-Christians hope for?
 - (i) Can you identify with their hopes?
 - (ii) What are they missing?
- (e) "Maybe This Time" by Fred Ebb and John Kander is sung by Liza Minnelli in the movie "Cabaret" (1972)
<https://youtu.be/yMpSQV1-bsA>
 - (i) What is hope in this song?



Maybe this time I'll be lucky
 Maybe this time he'll stay
 Maybe this time for the first time
 Love won't hurry away
 He will hold me fast
 I'll be home at last
 Not a loser anymore
 Like the last time and the time before

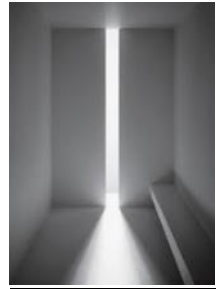
Everybody loves a winner
 So nobody loved me
 Lady peaceful
 Lady happy
 That's what I long to be
 Well, all the odds are, they're in my favour
 Something's bound to begin
 It's gotta happen
 Happen sometime
 Maybe this time I'll win.

(repeat second verse)

(ii) What is sad about this song?

(iii) What is sad about hope?

(c) What do you hope to see happen in the future?



The story so far . . .

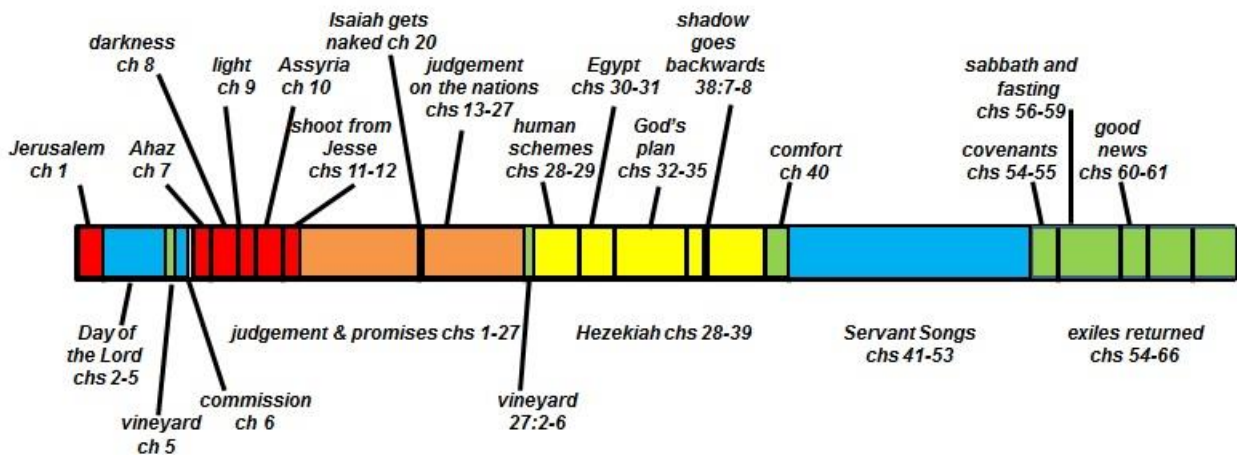
In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God's judgement and the Assyrian threat. Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God's people are taken into exile. In the following chapters Isaiah's vision leaves current affairs behind and looks further into the future.

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Chapters 41 and 42 - God is ruler of the nations. He will bring justice to the nations through his Servant.

Chapters 43 to 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant – Israel/Cyrus/Jesus.

Chapters 56 to 59 – Although God will bring his people back from their punishment in exile, they will continue to sin. God will deal with their sins and redeem those who repent.



Bible

2. Read Isaiah 60.
 - (a) Is this chapter literal or figurative? Why/why not?

(b) What is going to happen?

(c) Comment on the connections between

(i) Isaiah 60:1-2 and Gen 1:1-4.

(ii) Isaiah 60:5b-16 and Gen 1:28.

(iii) Isaiah 60:11, 19-20 and Rev 21:23-25.

(d) Is this chapter saying all people will be saved? Why/why not?

3. Read Isaiah 61:1-3.

(a) Who is speaking/writing these words?

(b) What are the claims that the speaker makes about himself in the first part of verse 1?

(c) How do Isa 11:1-2 and in Isa 42:1 help us piece together his identity?

(d) Who are the original hearers of these words?

(e) Isaiah does not always have historical events following each other in time.
Do you think Isaiah 61:1-3 comes before or after they have returned from exile? Give reason(s).

(f) How would the original hearers have felt when they heard these words?

The year of the Lord's favour (v 2) . . . is almost certainly an allusion to the Year of Jubilee as described in the law of Moses [Lev 25:8-55]. Every fiftieth year was to be proclaimed a year of release in which debts were cancelled, slaves were freed, and people who had been forced to sell their family property because of poverty received it back again. It was called the 'Year of Jubilee', literally 'Year of the Ram's Horn', because of the horn trumpet which was blown to announce its arrival. The expression 'proclaim freedom' (v 1) employs exactly the same Hebrew words as the command in Leviticus 25:10 to 'proclaim liberty' in the Year of Jubilee. The preaching of the Servant-Messiah is like the blast of the ram's horn which ushered in the Year of Jubilee; it proclaims the arrival of a time of grace, a time of release.

Webb p 234.

4. Jesus quotes this passage in Luke ch 4.

Read Luke 4:14-21 but keep your finger in Isaiah ch 61.

Context: Luke carefully detailed the accounts of Jesus' birth and childhood in chs 1 & 2. In ch 3 John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was also baptised and then went into the dessert for 40 days of temptations.

(a) What is Jesus saying about himself in relation to the beginning of Isaiah 61?

(b) How is this significant?

(c) From Isaiah 61:1-3 list the things that Jesus has come to do.

(d) How did Jesus fulfil these things in his life/death/resurrection?

(e) Compare Isaiah 61:2 with Luke 4:19. Why do you think Jesus stops mid-sentence in Luke 4:19?

5. Read Isaiah 61:4-7.

(a) The blessings promised in Isaiah 61 are all part of the 'year of the Lord's favour' (v 2). List the blessings that the Lord has promised in vv 4-7.

(b) (i) What role did Old Testament priests play?

Ezekiel was the son of a **priest**, most probably from Jerusalem itself. The whole of his education throughout childhood and youth and into his young adult years would have been thorough training for the day when he would enter on all the varied professional duties of Israel's priesthood. These included not only all the tasks involved in the sacrificial rituals (which meant skill in animal anatomy and butchery as well as familiarity with all the levitical regulations and categories), but also the responsibility to teach and administer the law - Israel's Torah.

From The Message of Ezekiel by Christopher J. H. Wright p 21.

(ii) Old Testament priests came from the tribe of Levi. What does it mean that the original hearers of these verses "will be called priests of the Lord" (v 6)?

(c) What do you think the double portion means in verse 7?

6. Read Isaiah 61:8-9.

(a) What is a covenant (v 8)?

(b) What is the everlasting covenant Isaiah is talking about (v 8)?

(c) After all their sins, the sins that resulted in God sending his people into exile, why would God reward them (v 8)?

(d) In the light God's character (v8) and by reflecting on Isa 56:1 and 59:1-9 why is this reward surprising?

(e) What is God's purpose in blessing and transforming his people (vv 3, 9)?

(f) When was verse 9 fulfilled, or is it yet to be fulfilled?

(g) Do you think today in Sydney in 2019 that "all who see [us] will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed" (v 9)?

7. Read Isaiah 61:10-11.

(a) What is the response of the recipient to these promises of God (v 10)?

(b) What do we mean when we use the word "salvation" (v 10)?

(c) If the original hearers were still in exile in Babylon what do you think they would have understood by the word "salvation"?

8. Looking back over each section that we studied in Isaiah ch 61, think up a single sentence to summarise each section.

vv 1-3

vv 4-7

vv 8-9

vv 10-11

9. (a) What is the new identity that is described for the people of God in Isaiah 61?

(b) Why does righteousness need to be a key part of this new identity?

10. We are going to compare Isaiah 61 with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7).

Context for Matt 5-7: In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule.

Listen to part of Tim Mackie's sermon on Matt 4 <https://thebibleproject.com/podcasts/exploring-my-strange-bible/> CrowdsSermonMountTimMackie.mp3 (4 mins.)

(a) (i) What is the "good news" (v 1) in Isaiah 61?

(ii) What is the “good news” in Matt 4:23?

(b) (i) Who are the poor in Isaiah 61:1?

(ii) Who are the poor in Matt 5:3?

(c) (i) Who are those who mourn in Isaiah 61:2-3?

(ii) Who are those who mourn in Matt 5:4?

To finish

11. (a) Do you think most non-Christians understand what we Christians mean by the word “salvation”?

(b) Without using any Christian jargon how would you build up, step by step, a picture that would explain to a non-Christian what salvation is?

Step 1. Where would you start?

Step 2.

Step 3.

Step 4.

.....

Where would you end?

Study 27, Isaiah chs 62-64, Exile

Getting started

1. (a) Do you ever pray for salvation?
- (b) Do you ever pray for God's judgement?
- (c) Why would you pray for God's judgement?



Judgement

But is it proper to celebrate something as terrible as what is described here? (See especially [Isaiah ch 30] verse 33 with its talk of fire and burning sulphur.) The unhesitating reply of Isaiah and of the Bible as a whole is, 'Yes!' The singing, joyful hearts which God's people will have when God overthrows their enemies will be his gift to them (29). There will be no regret or wishing that things were other than they are, for God's judgment will be seen to be the absolutely just and right thing that it is. The Lord's action as warrior is the final expression of his grace to those who have cried out to him for salvation (19). There can be no salvation, however, without judgement, and in the end the choice is ours. The Lord is the warrior, and we must all finally meet him as either deliverer or destroyer.

Webb p 131.

2. In reply to the quote above, is it loving today to celebrate God's terrible judgement? Why/why not?

The story so far . . .

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The "good news" is described in Isaiah 61 along with the blessings of the kingdom in Isaiah 60.

Bible

3. Read Isaiah 62.
What will happen to Jerusalem?
4. (a) What is "righteousness" (vv 1-2 and Isaiah 26:1-11)?

(b) Why is righteousness important?

5. Who are coming (vv 10-12)?

6. (a) How is the theme of marriage (vv 4-5) applicable to this situation?

(b) How is the theme of marriage with God developed later in the Bible
(see Eph 5:25-27, Rev 19:7-9, 21:1-3)?

7. Read Isaiah 63:1-6.

(a) What is the contrast between these 6 verses and chapter 62?

(b) What is the connection between these 6 verses and chapter 62?

We know that the day of salvation is necessarily a day of judgment (59:17-18; 61:2). There was no salvation in Hezekiah's day without many dead Assyrian bodies. There was no release from exile under Cyrus without the defeat of Babylon. And now it seems the beautiful wedding of Zion and the servant has involved a bloody end to Edom.

Edom was used as an emblem of the nations in 34:8-17 and this passage is largely a return to the imagery presented there. Edom works well in terms of poetry because the word sounds like the Hebrew words for blood and red. The capital of Edom, Bozrah, sounds like Hebrew words to do with grape gathering and vintage. This all works together to give us a picture of the angry trampling of red grapes as a way of imagining a sickening outpour of blood. Patston pp 312-313.

(c) Who is being described in these 6 verses?

In common usage, *vengeance* is a word which has connotations of deliberately harboured malice and personal vindictiveness. It is the opposite of love. And yet the Bible insists that there is a proper time and place for vengeance, for without it a host of evils would never be righted and there would be no moral government in the universe. It is the final calling to account of those who have oppressed others and apparently got away with it. . . . There is not necessarily any malice or vindictiveness involved; these are aberrations caused by human sin. But the wrongdoer is confronted in a very personal way with the wrong he has done and is made to pay for it. In vengeance the tables are finally turned.

Webb pp 239-240.

8. Read Isaiah 63:7-64:12.

(a) Who is Isaiah praying for?

(b) Why does Isaiah refer to the past?

(c) What is Isaiah praying for?

To finish

9. Would you describe yourself as righteous? Why/why not?



Study 28, Isaiah chs 65-66, Coming up next . . .

Getting started

1. What is heaven?



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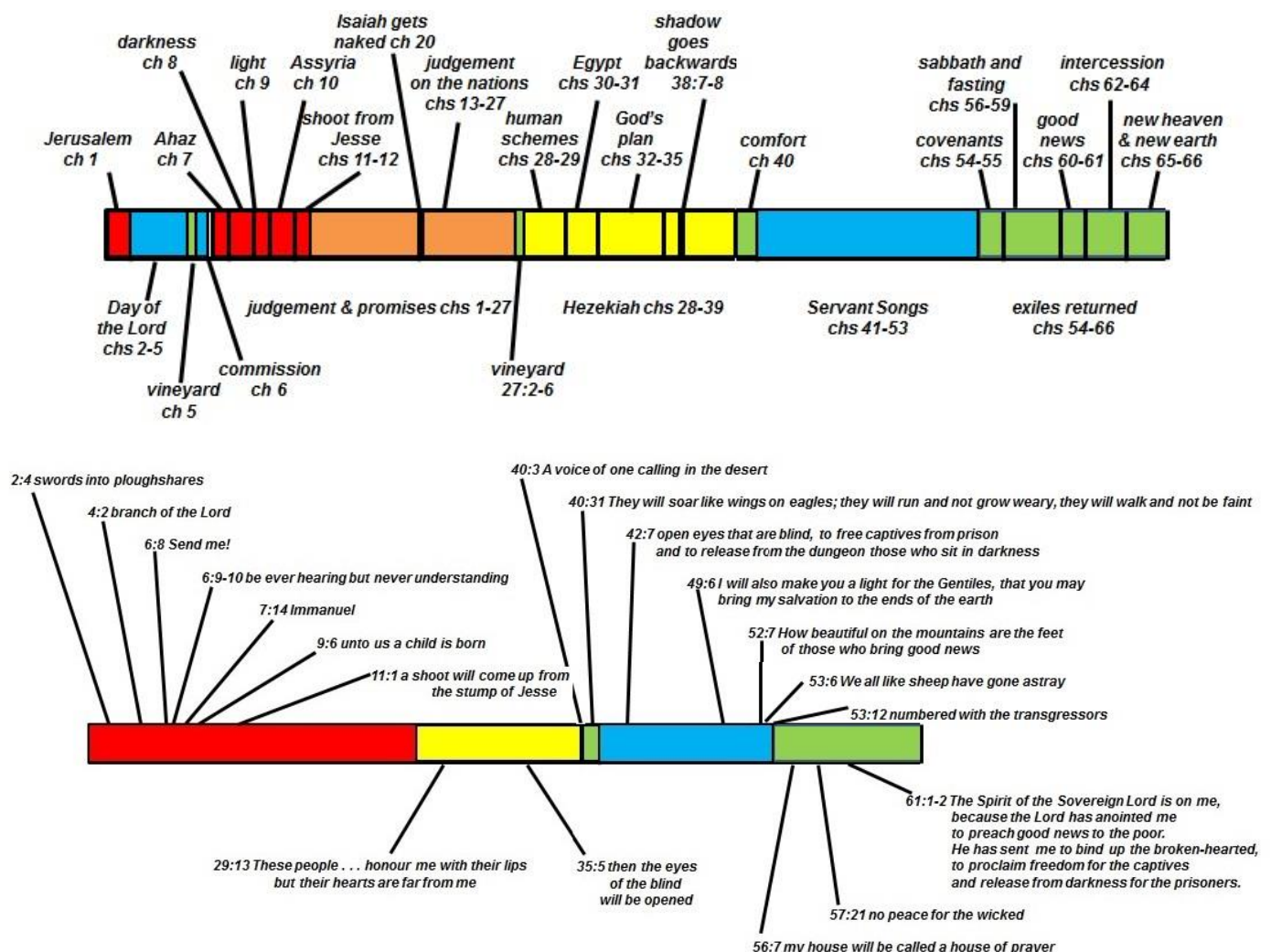
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The "good news" is described in Isaiah 61 along with the blessings of the kingdom in Isaiah 60.

Chapters 62 to 64 – Isaiah returns to the current predicament of a destroyed Jerusalem and the people in exile, and prays for judgement and salvation.



Bible

2. Read Isaiah 65:1-16.
(a) Who is speaking these words?

(b) Who is going to suffer God's judgement and who is going to be saved from God's judgement?

Sharon [v 10] is a coastal area used in Isaiah as a picture of fruitfulness (35:2, which reverses the surprise of 33:9). The **Valley of Achor** is the site of Achan's faithlessness and punishment. It seems that faithlessness and judgment are being reversed if this notorious site becomes a safe resting place. . . .

An illustration of covenant faithlessness follows, referring to the worship of the gods of Fortune and Destiny. A person who honours such forces can seem very spiritual. But centring your life on Fortune and Destiny can just be a fancy way of not taking responsibility for your own actions. And the Old Testament prophets seem to spend a lot of their energy just trying to get people to own up to their sin.

Patston p 320.

(c) How does this square with the "salvation by faith alone" idea?

3. Read Isaiah 65:17-25.
(a) What does God have in store for his people?

(b) What are the similarities between Isaiah 65:17-25 and Rev 21:1-4?

(c) Is this heaven? Why/why not? Compare this with your answer to Question 1.

4. Read Isaiah 66:1-6.
(a) Consider the 'choice' people are making (v 3) – why would that be significant?

(b) What has gone wrong at the temple?

(c) What does a right relationship with God look like?

(d) (i) Why is God as angry with the externally religious as with those who follow pagan gods?

(ii) What is God's response?

5. Read Isaiah 66:7-13.

(a) What is the significance of the birth stuff?

(b) (i) What do you make of the descriptions of judgment and their placement alongside the promises of comfort and satisfaction?

(ii) What does this reveal about the character of God?

6. Read Isaiah 66:14-21.

(a) What will happen to Jerusalem and God's servants (v14)?

(b) What does 'because of their actions and imaginations' (v 18 NIV) mean?

(c) Do we get a clue here about the timing (consider Revelation 7:9)?

The place names in the last part of verse 19 are drawn from Isaiah's own world, but as the farthest outposts they stand symbolically for the whole earth. Mission is to know no ethnic, geographical or national boundaries. It is to extend everywhere.

Webb p 250.

7. Read Isaiah 66:22-24.

(a) How is the ending of Isaiah (66:22-24) characteristic of the book as a whole?

(b) What will happen to people from other nations?

(c) What are its continuing implications for life today and for eternity?

At its most fundamental level, this closing paragraph brings us back to the basic truth that God is creator, and therefore ruler, of his world. The book of Isaiah, like the Bible itself, moves from the heavens and the earth (1:2) to the new heavens and new earth (66:22) [cf. Gen 1:1 and Rev 21:1]. God's mission is simply the outworking of the intentions he had at the beginning, expressed in the blessing he pronounced on the first pair and confirmed in the promises he made to Abraham. And Isaiah leaves us in no doubt that the key to it all is God's perfect Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ. How eloquently and simply the apostle John put it! Isaiah, he says, 'saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him' [John 12:41]. In the second half of the book the new creation unfolds from his saving work like a bud

The "destruction of Edom" oracles [Isaiah 34:5-17, 63:1-6] represent the destruction of *all* the nations—the enemies of Israel. But in the Isaiah plotline this decimation opens the way to the return of Israel to Jerusalem (Isaiah 35) and the restoration of the holy city portrayed in terms of a new creation (Isaiah 35; 65:17-66:24). Then we read that the nations come to Jerusalem to bring the exiles back and rebuild the city. They join with Israel in worshipping Yahweh [Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:10-12, 18:7, 60:1-16, 61:5-6, 66:12, 18, 23]. Several things need to be made dear at this point. First, these nations that come to Jerusalem have earlier been said to have been destroyed in the eschatological fire of God's anger. Second, the oath of Yahweh is that all people will enter into a saving relationship with him (Isa 45:22-25). Third, it is clear that this universal salvation does not happen in one instant. The picture of new creation in Isaiah portrays some of the nations coming out of destruction to the New Jerusalem (60:1--11, 13ff.) whilst others remain in rebellion and under destructive wrath (60:12; 66:24). However, it is also clear that they cannot remain *forever* in the state of rebellion portrayed in 60:12 if Yahweh is to fulfill his oath of 45:22-25. Either they are annihilated or they are allowed to turn from their rebellion and join the others in Jerusalem. The book of Isaiah does not tell us which but leaves a blank space for the interpreter to fill in.

From The Evangelical Universalist 2nd edition by Gregory MacDonald p 123.

To finish

8. (a) Look back over these studies and the book of Isaiah. What has been a particular highlight for you?
- (b) In the times ahead when the book of Isaiah is mentioned what do you think will be the first thing you think of?