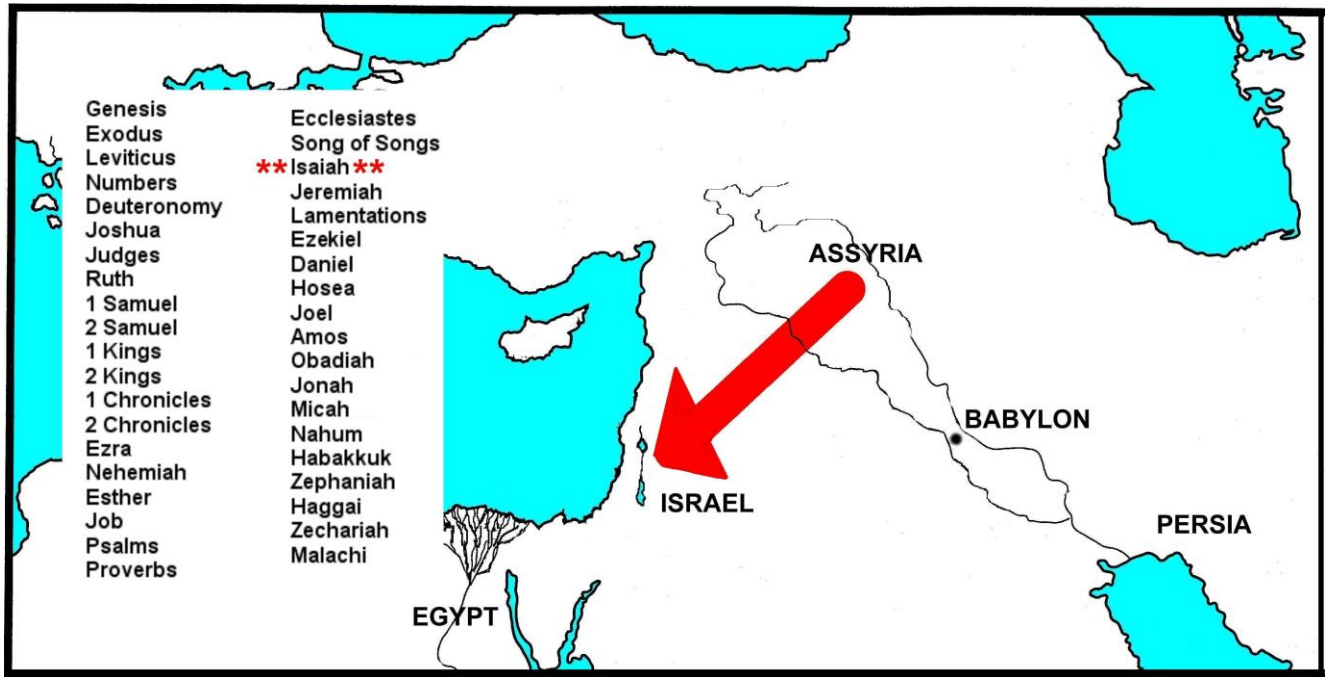


9 Studies on Isaiah



Study 1	Isaiah ch 6	Send me!	p 2
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Notes

1. In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston, The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb, the 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, The Prophecy of Isaiah by Alec Motyer, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris, Kerry Nagel's Bible study booklet on Micah, 4th term 2008; the Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition, Isaiah by Michael Christopher from the Nelson Impact Bible Study Series, The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, Promoting the Gospel by John Dickson and the 2012 sermon series, the Fifth Gospel, at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

2. Have you ever tried to read through Isaiah? 66 chapters makes it the longest book in the Bible other than Psalms. You slog through the boring bits until you get to an interesting bit and sit there for a while enjoying its wisdom and perception. Then you plough through again until you get to another interesting bit. Eventually you get to chapter 66 and congratulate yourself for making it to the end.

If that's the way you do it then John Dickson has made it a bit easier by devising a **reading plan** which roughly correlates to each study. The studies don't cover every chapter in Isaiah but the reading plan does so you will be able to read the whole of Isaiah and make 9 stops on the way to look more carefully at some of the details.

Ed O'Connor

Isaiah 1:1-31 Judah rebels, God calls for repentance

Isaiah 5:1-30 Sinfulness exposed

Isaiah 7:1-8:10 Imminent judgement and the sign of Immanuel

Getting started

- (b) How did you feel about doing it?

When you volunteer for something it can be a case of jumping in and seeing how it goes. That's what we are doing as we begin to study Isaiah, the book, and that's what Isaiah, the man, did when God asked for a volunteer (see Isaiah 6:8).

2. What do we learn about God

- (b) Why does he feel this way?

- Read Isaiah 6:8-13

5. How does the vision of verses 1–7 imply the need for God to send someone (v8)?

6:1 The Temple.

The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. The Temple was not only the place of sacrifice; it was believed to be the unique dwelling of God on earth, the place where heaven and earth met. Well after the time of Isaiah it was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC. Rebuilding by the returned exiles began in 538 BC, and was completed in 516. Judas Maccabeus cleansed it in 164 BC after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes (167). Herod the Great began to rebuild and beautify it in 19 BC; the work was completed in AD 63. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

6:2 Seraphs.

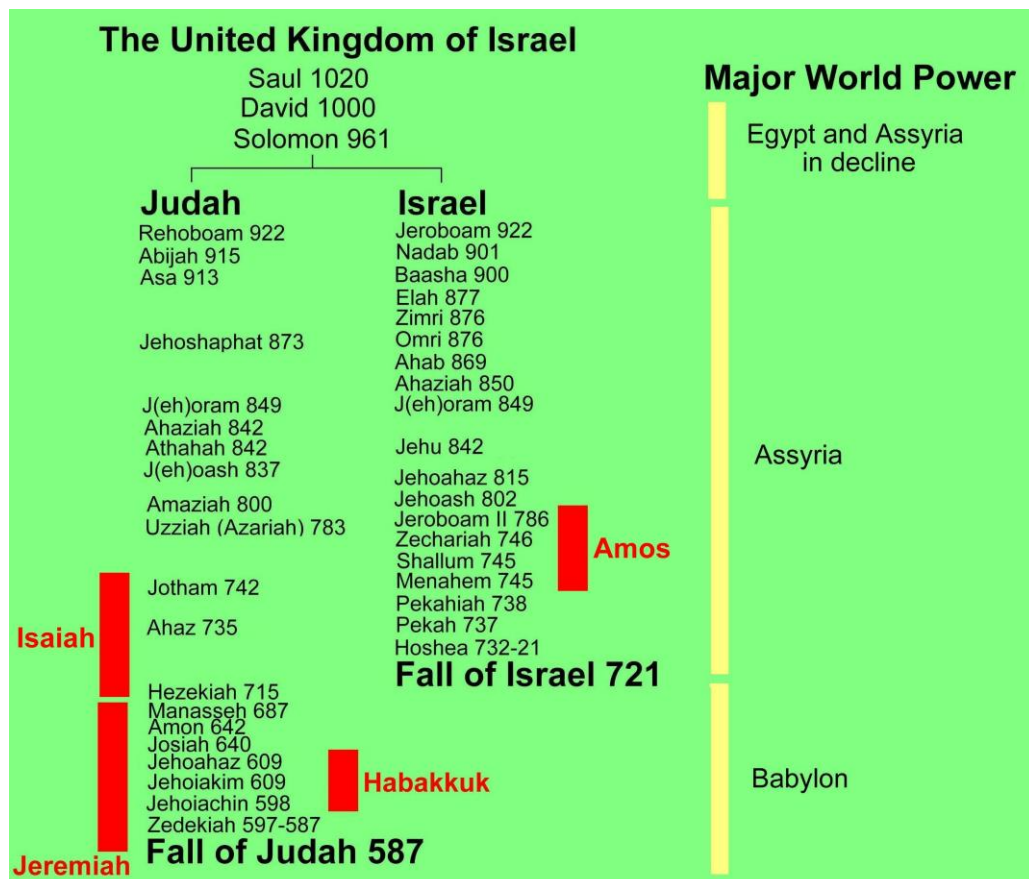
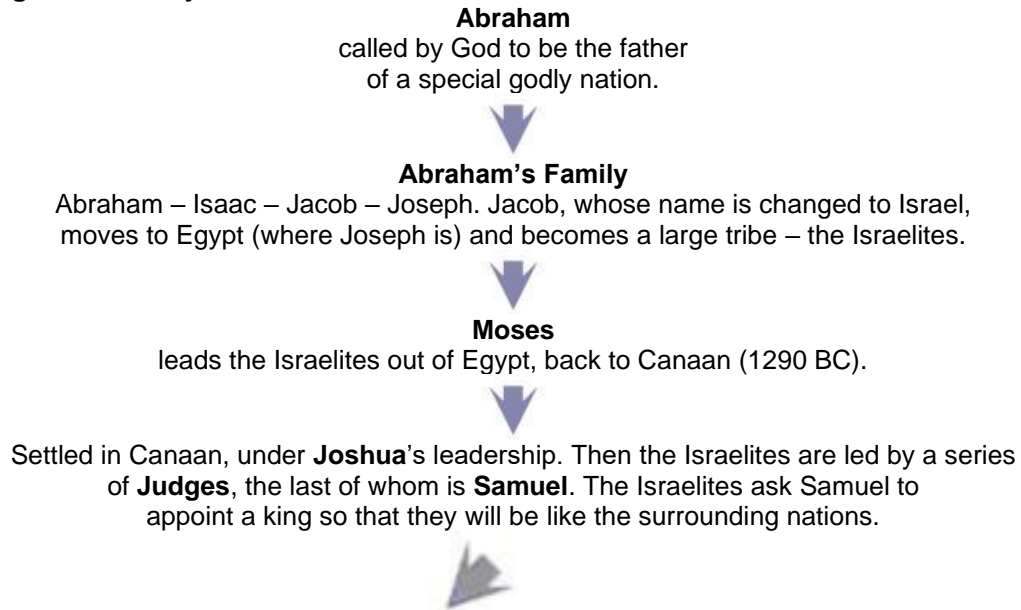
"Seraphs" literally mean "burning ones". This is the only mention in Scripture of these celestial beings.

6:5 "Woe" means "disaster".

First 5 chapters of Isaiah?

Read it yourself but in short, the people of Judah are headed for God's judgement.

Background history:



Study 2, Isaiah ch 11, The shoot of Jesse

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 2 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 9:8-10:19 The coming Assyrian invasion, followed by God's judgment on Assyria

Isaiah 10:20-34 The remnant will return in penitence and faith

Isaiah 11:1-16 The hope of God's King who will come from the house of David

Isaiah 12:1-6 A song of praise and a call to missions

Isaiah 13:1-14:2 A prophecy against Babylon and salvation for God's people

Isaiah 14:3-27 The humiliation of Babylon

Getting started

1. Think of leaders in sport, politics, business, religion etc.
 - (a) Name one person (besides Jesus) who you think is or was a great leader?

 - (b) What qualities made him/her so good?

In the book of Isaiah 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.

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 84.

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 (the southern kingdom) is also under threat of invasion but Isaiah tells King Ahaz and his people to trust in God. (See maps at the end of this study.)

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

Read Isaiah chapter 11.

2. Who is the shoot who will come from "stump of Jesse" (see Matt 1:6-17)?

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 [King] 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.

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 116.

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

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

5. 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)?
6. How will creation be transformed by his rule (vv 6-9)?
7. Who will he rule over (vv 10-16)?
8. 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 [Isaiah 10:33-34] 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.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 74.

To finish

9. Jesus rules “now” but “not yet” do we see the wolf living with the lamb and leopards lying down with goats etc. (Isaiah 11:6-9). What other things in your life under Jesus’ rule are happening “now” but “not yet” do they find their fulfilment or completion?

Some answers for the bits you may not have understood:

Verse 1: **Jesse:** King David’s father.

Verse 11: **Cush:**

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.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 92.

Verse 13: **Ephraim and Judah:**

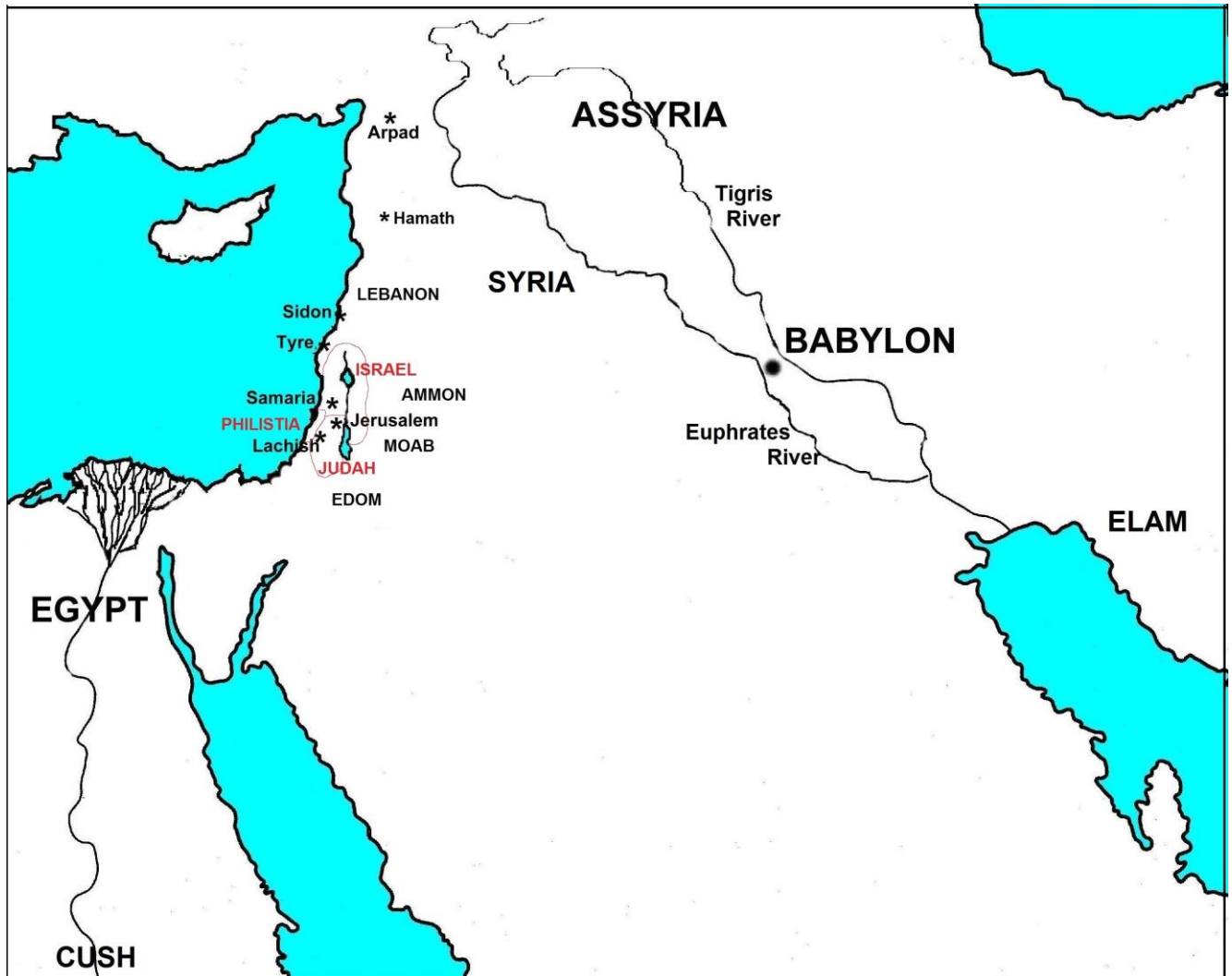
Abraham – Isaac – Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter (Gen chs 29 – 35). Judah was Jacob’s 4th son and Joseph was Jacob’s 11th son. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel (Gen 32:28) and all of Jacob’s sons had families that become the tribes of Israel. Instead of a tribe of Joseph, Joseph’s 2 sons,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

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.



Study 3, Isaiah chs 13–27, Judgement and promise

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 3 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 14:28-16:14 Doom and despair for Philistia and Moab

Isaiah 17:1-14 Ruin for Damascus

Isaiah 18:1-7 The Lord speaks to the nations and God's scattered people come to Him

Isaiah 19:1-20:6 Judgement on Egypt with a fierce ruler, and economic strife. A special role for Judah

Isaiah 20:7-21:17 Babylon appears strong, but will be shattered; Edom and Arabia should not be complacent

Isaiah 22:1-25 A message for Judah that brings Isaiah to tears

Getting started

1. (a) Have you ever been criticised?

- (b) What was it for and how did you feel?

- (c) Is this different from being *judged* by someone? If so, how is it different?
If not, what does it mean to be judged by someone?

In the book of Isaiah so far . . .

Isaiah 1-12 focuses on the sin and judgment of *Israel*, with clear promises of the nation's full redemption. Chapters 13-27 shift to discuss the pagan nations, specifically Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre. One by one they are denounced as unjust, proud and greedy. However, chapter 25 breaks into a glorious promise of a 'banquet' of mercy for all nations. The God of justice is also incurably merciful.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 13:1-8
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.
From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 129.

3. Read Isaiah 13:9-15.
How is the Day of the Lord described?

4. Why is God punishing the world?

5. (a) Why are the people "like sheep without a shepherd"?

(b) What does Jesus do for the “sheep without a shepherd” (see Matt 9:35-36, John 10:11-18)?

6. God is not an angry schoolmaster looking for naughty children to punish; he is the heroic justice commissioner promising to root out corruption and overthrow tyranny. God’s judgment is fundamentally about putting things right in the world.

From the 2012 sermon series on Isaiah at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

Read Isaiah 1:16-24; 11:4; 14:3-7; 23:7-8.

Does this description help or complicate your view of God’s judgment? How so?

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

[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.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 83.

8. Read Isaiah 20:1-6.
Why does Isaiah get naked?

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

(b) What is the answer to their question?

10. It seems that the purpose of all these judgment oracles against the nations isn’t to warn pagans about divine punishment—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 2012 sermon series on Isaiah at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

In what ways are we (or you) tempted to find security in the things of the world instead of in the Lord?

11. Read Isaiah ch 25.
(a) What is God going to do (vv 5-10a)?

(b) What is so good about it?

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).

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 108.

12. Every trained reader of the Old Testament knows that no matter how dire God's warnings of judgment become, there will always be a spectacular promise of mercy nearby.

From the 2012 sermon series on Isaiah at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

Is this your experience of reading the Bible? Explain.

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

(b) What does Jesus have to do with God's way of dealing with death (see 1 Cor 15:20-26)?

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.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 105.

To finish

14. 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)?

Study 4, Isaiah chs 36-37, King Hezekiah

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 4 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 23:1-18 Tyre will fall for putting trust in human wealth instead of God

Isaiah 24:1-25:8 Judgement will come to an end, and the Lord will be praised

Isaiah 25:9-26:21 The Lord will be praised for His mighty deeds, His provision and blessing

Isaiah 27:1-13 Israel will be renewed by the Lord and drawn to Him

Isaiah 28:1- 29:24 Warnings and promises

Isaiah 30:1-33 Hezekiah has been unwisely pursuing alliance with Egypt

Getting started

1. (a) Think of one calamity 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?

In the book of Isaiah so far . . .

Isaiah 1-12 focuses on the sin and judgment of *Israel*, with clear promises of the nation's full redemption. Chapters 13-27 shift to discuss the pagan nations, specifically Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre. One by one they are denounced as unjust, proud and greedy. However, chapter 25 breaks into a glorious promise of a 'banquet' of mercy for all nations. 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.

Chapters 36-39 form a historical interlude in the book of Isaiah. The King of Judah during this time was Hezekiah, and he had implemented serious religious reform including re-establishing the worship of Yahweh in the purified and renovated Temple, reaffirming the covenant between God and his people, and reinstituting the Passover on a grand scale. Sennacherib the king of Assyria, having decimated 46 cities of Judah, was now on the doorstep of Jerusalem. Through the taunts of his field commander and a threatening letter, Sennacherib ridicules God and his people, arguing that Yahweh is no different from the gods of the other nations.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 36.
(a) What is the field commander trying to do with his speech?

(b) Which bits of the speech are true?

3. 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.

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 28.

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

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

6. (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.

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston pp 30-31.

7. (a) What happens to the Assyrians (vv 21-38 and 10:12-16)?

- (b) Why?

To finish

8. Sam is a long-term Christian. Over the years she has come to feel that prayer doesn't 'work'. It's not that she doesn't believe in God; it's just that she thinks God will have his way in the world regardless of what she does. From our passage, how would you encourage such a person?

9. 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?

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 show down 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.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb pp 22-25.

Study 5, Isaiah ch 40, Comfort and forgiveness

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 5 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 31:1-32:20 Foolish diplomacy of Hezekiah, and a warning to heed Isaiah's message

Isaiah 33:1-24 God destroys His enemies and His fire consumes all evil, so His people should trust in Him and wait for Him

Isaiah 34:1-35:10 God's wrath is revealed and His grace is declared

Isaiah 36:1-37:38 The threat of Assyria and the prayer of Hezekiah

Isaiah 38:1-39:8 Hezekiah's illness and deliverance in His recovery

Isaiah 40:1-31 The proclamation of the coming of the Lord

Getting started

1. (a) 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.

- (b) Why do you think this Isaiah passage was used?



In the book of Isaiah so far . . .

Isaiah 1-12 focuses on the sin and judgment of *Israel*, with clear promises of the nation's full redemption. Chapters 13-27 shift to discuss the pagan nations, specifically Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Aram/Syria, Cush, Egypt, Edom and Tyre. One by one they are denounced as unjust, proud and greedy. However, chapter 25 breaks into a glorious promise of a 'banquet' of mercy for all nations. 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.

Chapter 36 brings us into the heat of the action as the Assyrians lie at the gates of Jerusalem. In chapters 37 to 39 Hezekiah prays and God defeats the Assyrians. Hezekiah gets sick and Isaiah says he will die but Hezekiah prays again and God lets him live another 15 years.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 40.

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 [chs 1-39] 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.

3. Read Psalm 137.
How would God's people have felt during the exile judging from (a) Psalm 137?

(b) Isaiah 40:27b?

4. Read Isaiah ch 40:1-5.
How would the exiles have felt when they heard (a) Isaiah 40:1-2?

(b) Isaiah 40:3-5?

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.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 45.

5. 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 40:3-5 fulfilled in the time of John the Baptist?

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.

6. Read Isaiah 40:6-11.

On being commanded to cry out (Isaiah 40:6) Isaiah sums up the depression of the people in verses 6b to 8. 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?"

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 45.

(a) What is God's response in v9?

(b) How would verses 9-11 have heartened God's people?

7. Read 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.

From Two Cities by Andrew Reid and Karen Morris p 45.

From these verses what are 3 reasons why Israel is wrong to doubt God's faithfulness?

To finish

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

(b) encourage Christians?

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

Study 6, Isaiah ch 42, God's Servant

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 6 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 41:1-29 We can have great confidence in God and trust in Him fully, for He will bring justice and righteousness

Isaiah 42:1-43:13 God will watch over and empower His servant, whose work will result in justice being brought to the nations

Isaiah 43:14-44:28 The Lord is a God who relates, redeems and rescues

Isaiah 45:1-25 The Lord is sovereign, and His people need to change their attitude to the Gentiles

Isaiah 46:1-47:15 A call to listen to the Lord and remember His covenant and flee idolatry

Isaiah 48:1-22 The problem of outward conformity and inward rebellion plagues the Lord's people, yet He affirms His faithfulness, promises and provision

Getting started

1. (a) Name someone you have "served"?

- (b) In what ways have you served him/her?

In the book of Isaiah 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.

Isaiah 42 is the first of the poetic passages that speak of the "servant", an extraordinary individual who achieves all of God's purposes for both Israel and the nations. He is chosen and upheld by God as he completes his mission. Although there has been speculation about his identity in Jewish scholarship, the New Testament writers were certain that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in his ministry, death and resurrection.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 42:1-9.
 - (a) What evidence is there in this passage that an intimate relationship exists between God and his servant?

 - (b) What is the mission of the servant?

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

 - (d) In verses 5-9, the prophecy shifts focus from the servant to his Lord. Identify the 'credentials' of the servant's God in verses 5-9.

 - (e) What do each one of these credentials reveal about the servant's mission?

Study 7, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Servant Song

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 7 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 49:1-26 The call and mission of the Servant who will be a light to the Gentiles

Isaiah 50:1-11 The psychology of the Servant

Isaiah 51:1-52:12 The remnant are encouraged to remain faithful as the Lord promises future blessing

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The suffering of the Servant brings justification to many

Isaiah 54:1-17 The implications of the Servant's work are a perfect future

Isaiah 55:1-13 The Servant's completed work provides eternal certainty and the Lord invites people to return to Him

Getting started

1. What do you get out of being a Christian?

In the book of Isaiah 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 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant – Israel / Cyrus / Jesus.

Bible

This poem, the fourth "Servant Song" in the book of Isaiah is the most explicit in regards to the nature of the servant's ministry and is the most frequently quoted Old Testament passage found in the New Testament. Here the servant of the Lord, the Messiah, is depicted as a suffering servant who accomplishes the will of God by bearing the sin of many.

2. Read Isaiah 52:12-53:13.

(a) How is the "he" described?

(b) What happens to him?

(c) How does this effect

(i) the "us", "we", "our" in these verses?

(ii) the kings (Is 52:15)?

Study 8, Isaiah ch 58, True religion

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 8 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 56:1-8 Grace for the Gentiles

Isaiah 56:9-57:13 Verdict for the ungodly

Isaiah 57:14-21 Contrition, humility and repentance lead to restoration with God

Isaiah 58:1-14 The Lord sees through false religion

Isaiah 59:1-21 Exposure of Israel's sins which have hindered God's blessings

Isaiah 60:1-22 God's glory is revealed in the mission of the Messiah and the transformation of His people

Getting started

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

In the book of Isaiah 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 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant – Israel / Cyrus / Jesus.

Chapters 56-66 relate to the period following the arrival of the first returnees from Babylon.

Bible

2. Read Isaiah 58:1-4.
 - (a) What religious activities are the Israelites said to be performing (compare with Isaiah 1:11-17)?

(b) How does God feel about them?

(c) Why does God feel that way?

3. Read Isaiah 58:5-12.
 - (a) What are the activities of 'true religion' that pleases God?

(b) What are some modern examples of the 'true religion' that pleases God?

4. Read Isaiah 58:13-14.
 (a) What does this tell us about the Sabbath in Isaiah's day?

(b) Is the principle of keeping the Sabbath applicable today?

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.

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 300.

To finish

5. The fundamental expression of true religion isn't prayer, study, attendance, fasting, singing, or any other external religious activity; it is caring for people in need. Those who have experienced divine mercy will show human mercy toward those in practical need.

From the 2012 sermon series on Isaiah at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

How would you respond to the claim that talk like this:

(a) has the potential to trap Christians in a 'good works for God's merit' mentality;

(b) has the potential to draw believers away from the more important activity of evangelism?

Study 9, Isaiah chs 65-66, Heaven

Isaiah Reading Plan Week 9 (please do this before coming to the study)

Isaiah 61:1-11 The Messiah is anointed by the Spirit to preach, declare The Lord's righteousness and transform His people

Isaiah 62:1-12 God will delight in His people and there will be restoration

Isaiah 63:1-64:12 The Lord is a God of compassion, action, kindness and rescue

Isaiah 65:1-25 God's revelation was sovereignly given to Israel yet they sinned against Him, but the faithful should persevere as a new heaven and earth is announced

Isaiah 66:1-24 There is a clear distinction between true and false worshippers, and God's glory will be proclaimed among all nations, by people of all nations

Getting started

1. What is heaven?

In the book of Isaiah 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 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.

The "good news" is described in Isaiah chapter 61 along with the blessings of the kingdom in Isaiah chapter 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

Isaiah has been described as the fifth gospel. The entire ministry of Jesus is framed in the language and themes of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Jesus' first sermon was on Isaiah 61. He described his own calling in the language of Isaiah's calling in Isaiah 6. His use of the term "gospel" comes from Isaiah 40, 52 and 61 as does his emphasis on the Kingdom of God. His description of his and his disciples' mission as "the light of the world" comes from Isaiah 49. When Jesus went into Jerusalem and overturned the tables of the money changers he justified his actions in the words of Isaiah 56. His explanation of his death as an atoning sacrifice for sin rests on Isaiah 53. Finally, we discover that Jesus' vision of the climax of history—the 'renewal of all things' (Matt 19:28)—comes from Isaiah's glorious picture of a New Creation in Isaiah 65.

2. Read Isaiah 65:1-16.
 - (a) Who is going to suffer God's judgement and who is going to be saved from God's judgement?

"Sharon 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."

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston p 320.

(b) 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. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul declares, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”
(a) In what way has the ‘new creation’ already come into the world (1 Cor 15:20-23 may help)?

(b) In what way has the ‘new creation’ already come into the life of believers (Romans 8:22-23 and Ephesians 1:13-14 may help)?

5. Read Isaiah 66:1-6.
What has gone wrong at the temple?

6. Read Isaiah 66:7-11.
What is God going to deliver?

7. Read Isaiah 66:12-24.

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.

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 250.

(a) What will happen to Jerusalem and God's servants (v14)?

(b) What will happen to people from other nations?

"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 bursting into bloom, and the last verse challenges us never to take it lightly, but to ponder (as we shall for all eternity) the greatness of our redemption and the terrible fate from which we have been saved. What can we do but worship?"

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb pp 251-252.

To finish

8. Read Colossians 1:19-20, Romans 8:21-23 and Revelation 21:1-4.

How would you respond to a Christian friend who insisted that 'forgiveness of sins' and the 'salvation of souls' is the whole plan of God?