



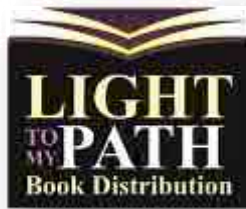
ISAIAH

A Devotional Look
at the Words and Ministry
of the Prophet Isaiah

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Isaiah

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and Ministry of the Prophet Isaiah



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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Isaiah

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PREFACE

The prophecy of Isaiah was written prior to the judgement and exile of God's people at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. This prophecy was the heart cry of a loving and intimate God who had been greatly hurt by the rebellion of His people. It was the heart cry of God as a loving husband spurned by His adulterous wife, Israel. Isaiah spoke clearly of sin and righteous judgement but also of restoration and renewal at the hands of a jealous God who would not forsake His people. It was a prophecy of hope for a nation steeped in sin and rebellion. It spoke of a coming Messiah who would be the means through which that renewal would take place.

The prophecy is not just for Israel. It has a clear word to speak to our present society. It calls for righteousness and holiness. It demonstrates the heart of God for a deep and personal relationship with those who would come to Him.

Please take the time to read the Bible portion listed at the beginning of each chapter. Compare what the Bible says to the notes on each section. Don't rush through the book. Take your time to meditate on each passage, letting the Lord speak to you through both the Bible passage and the commentary. I have designed this

series to be used by individuals in their quiet time with the Lord. My prayer and desire is that you will be given a greater understanding of the prophecy of Isaiah and see its application to your life today. May God bless each one who reads this commentary. May it be a means to renewal in your relationship with the Lord God.

F. Wayne MacLeod

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

Author:

The first verse of the book of Isaiah tells us that the book was written by Isaiah the son of Amoz. Apart from knowing the name of his father, Scripture records nothing more about the author's background. We know that Isaiah was married. His wife, whose name we do not know, is called a prophetess in Isaiah 8:3. It is uncertain if this was because she had a prophetic gifting or simply because she was married to Isaiah and thus part of his ministry. We have record in the book of two sons born to Isaiah and his wife: Shear-Jashub, whose name means "the remnant will return" (7:3), and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz whose name means "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." Obviously these names had prophetic significance in their day. Isaiah lived and prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. This means that he ministered for over sixty years as a prophet among his people.

Background

Isaiah lived at a time of spiritual compromise and evil. Uzziah the king, began his reign serving the Lord God, but would turn from Him in his later years. God afflicted him with leprosy and he lived in isolation for the remainder of his days. King Jotham served the Lord but his son

Ahaz led the nation into the worship of the pagan god Baal. Ahaz closed the doors of the temple and gave away its sacred articles to gain the support of Assyria. King Hezekiah did much to restore temple worship but, he too, in his later years, was judged by God for entering into an ungodly alliance with the nation of Egypt.

For over sixty years the prophet Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord to these kings. He was God's voice in a nation prone to wander. He was uncompromising in his message. God gave him prophecies not only for his own people but also for many other nations. During his ministry, Assyria and Egypt had already set their eyes on conquering Israel and Judah. The judgement of God was very close.

Isaiah spoke powerfully of a great King who would come to rule. His prophecies abound with words about the Lord Jesus as the Messiah who would release His people from sin and judgement and lead them into peace and victory. He looked forward to a time when God's kingdom would be established and Jesus the Messiah would reign forever over His people.

Importance of the Books for Today:

Isaiah was a man who persevered in ministry for over sixty years. He spoke the word of God to kings and ordinary people alike. His ministry was a quiet but powerful one that influenced whole nations to seek the Lord and His ways. As gifted and as bold as he was in speaking the word of the Lord, the nation of Israel ignored his warnings and would ultimately be led into captivity. Faithfulness does not always mean worldly success nor does it mean that people will always listen to what we say. Isaiah's ministry was successful, not because of the

number of people who responded to his message but because he had been obedient to preach what God gave him to preach.

The book of Isaiah shows us the missionary heart of God. Isaiah is called to speak the word of God to whole nations. God calls all nations to repent and turn to Him. His book reveals the heart of God for the restoration of all people to Himself. Through Isaiah, God pleads with His people to return to Him. You cannot read the book of Isaiah without seeing the great desire of God for His people and their reluctance to open themselves to Him.

We see ourselves and our own society in the book of Isaiah. Israel's shortcomings and failures are our own as well. Isaiah reminds us that our only hope is in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus who will restore all things to His Father.

1

RETURN TO ME

Read Isaiah 1:1–31

This is the prophecy of Isaiah. He ministered in the eighth century BC during the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It may be helpful to mention a few things about the reigns of these kings.

Uzziah reigned as king for 52 years in Judah. He was a good king and led his nation into prosperity. His fame and influence spread throughout the region. In the later years of his life, however, he was unfaithful and tried to offer forbidden sacrifices to the Lord (2 Chronicles 26:16). When confronted by the priests, Uzziah refused to listen. God struck him with leprosy, and he spent the rest of his days in isolation. His son Jotham governed for him. Jotham's reign was also a prosperous one. He feared the Lord and lived according to His law.

Jotham's son Ahaz was a wicked king. God often warned him about his evil deeds, but Ahaz refused to listen. He worshiped the pagan god Baal (2 Chronicles 28:2). He took sacred articles from the temple and gave them to the

king of Assyria, in an attempt to buy his support (2 Chronicles 28:21). He went as far as to close the temple doors (2 Chronicles 28:24). God sent many nations against Judah during his reign.

Hezekiah, his son, was a good king who sought to restore the nation to the ways of the Lord. He tried to rid the nation of the idolatry his father Ahaz had encouraged. During the latter part of his reign, Hezekiah entered a relationship with Egypt (2 Kings 18:19-21; 24). The Lord struck him with a deadly sickness. During that time he again sought the Lord and was miraculously healed. He died in peace, having brought Judah closer to the Lord and His ways.

We see from this that the spiritual condition of the land was quite fragile. Generally these were days of prosperity, but God's people had many enemies. The Assyrians were always very close and cast a longing eye at God's people. Under Uzziah and Hezekiah, God's people were led to worship and serve the Lord. Both these kings, however, wrestled in their own lives with their relationship with God. Uzziah was struck with leprosy because of his rebellion against God, and when Hezekiah turned his back on God, he too was struck with a deadly disease. Ahaz chose to live in rebellion against God all his life. While there were times when God's people did seek Him, these times did not last. Isaiah came to prophesy to a fragile nation. It was a nation that could be swayed one way or another.

Isaiah began his ministry with a word from the Lord. In verse 2 the Lord called the heavens and the earth to witness what He was going to say. God reminded His listeners how He had raised up children, but they had rebelled against Him. The ox and the donkey knew their

master, but God's people did not know their God. It was not that they had never heard of God but rather that they had rebelled against Him. Isaiah reminded his people that they were without excuse because they knew what God required of them.

There are many people who know that God exists but do not live in light of that reality. The knowledge that God exists ought to affect everything we do and say each day. The sin of the people of Isaiah's day was that they knew about God and His ways but turned away and lived like those who had no God. Israel was a sinful nation loaded with guilt (verse 4). God compared His people to a brood of evildoers and children given to corruption.

In verse 5 we see the Lord disciplining His children because of their rebellion, though He did not delight in punishing them. "Why should you be beaten anymore?" He asked. God's discipline seemed to have no effect on their rebellion. From the sole of their feet to the top of their head, they were corrupt. They were pictured as being full of welts, wounds, and open sores. None of these wounds had been cleaned or bandaged (verse 6).

God's judgement of their sin would be seen in what happened to their land. Their cities would be burned with fire. Their fields would be stripped by foreigners and laid waste by strangers. God's people would be left in ruins, like a shelter in a vineyard, a hut in a field of melons, and a city under siege (verses 7-8). The reference to a shelter in a vineyard or a hut in a melon field refers to a very crudely made shelter with no comforts. This shelter or hut was made by workers to protect them from the weather. This is what God's people would live in after foreigners invaded their land. They would lack the essentials necessary for survival. Isaiah reminded his people in

verse 9 that the Lord would be gracious by leaving a few survivors, instead of completely destroying Israel as he had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).

In verse 10 the Lord called them to listen to His law. He refers to His people here as leaders of Sodom and Gomorrah to emphasize that they were living in stubborn sin that deserved complete judgement. They needed to return to God's law.

God reminded His people that He was not interested in their sacrifices—He had enough burnt offerings. While God's law commanded the sacrifice of bulls and goats, God was certainly not interested in the heartless rituals of His people. In verse 13 God reminded them that they had been bringing meaningless sacrifices. Their sacrifices and outward show of faith meant nothing to Him because he knew them to be a rebellious people who had rejected Him. God hated their hypocrisy, and He could not bear what they were doing.

In verse 14 the Lord clearly told His people that He was weary of their worship services and festivals. When they spread out their hands to pray, God turned His eyes from them because their hands were full of blood. They were unclean before God, and He called them to wash themselves clean (verse 16). He challenged them to turn from their evil deeds and do right. They were to seek justice and defend the cause of the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widows. God promised that if they would come to Him and seek His face, He would cleanse them of their sin. Though their sins were as scarlet, they would be as white as snow and as pure white wool. The word, scarlet is used here to refer to the colour of blood. God's people were coming to Him with blood on their hands. They were guilty of oppression and violence. While this was the

case, God promises to make them clean again. He would make them white and pure, forgiven of all their sin. Despite their terrible sin, God still loved them and longed to forgive. God's heart of compassion cried out to His people. He longed to cleanse and renew them. They did not have to suffer and remain under His strict discipline. They could be clean if they were willing to let God cleanse them. Isaiah reminded them that they could eat the best of the land if they turned to the Lord (verse 19). If, on the other hand, they resisted God and His word, they would be devoured. God's people had an important choice to make.

In verse 21 Isaiah reminds His people of past glory. Jerusalem, at one point, had been a faithful city. She had loved the Lord her God and He had poured out His blessing on her and manifested His presence in her midst. But she had fallen from righteousness and become a prostitute. She had abandoned God, her husband, and sought other gods. The streets of the city had become filled with crime and injustice. The law of God was ignored and murderers walked the streets.

The blessing of the Lord God was gone. Jerusalem's silver had become like the chaff of wheat, containing only impurities. Their choice wine was diluted with water, either because it was scarce or because it was of an inferior quality. In either case it was an indication of the removal of the blessing of the Lord.

The injustice spoken of in verse 21 could be seen in all levels of society. In particular, the rulers of the land were accused of being rebels and companions of thieves. In other words, they abused their position by taking bribes and chasing after gifts. These rulers were chastised in verse 23 because they did not defend the cause of the

fatherless and widows. They padded their pockets with money while the orphan and widow suffered terrible injustice and lack of resources. Their only concern was for themselves.

The Lord would not let this injustice continue in the land. In verse 24 Isaiah told his people that God would get relief and avenge Himself on His enemies. We are so used to seeing God's unending patience and love that we fail to see the grief that our sin causes a holy and just God. Israel's sins were piling up like molten rock in a volcano. The day was coming when God would unleash His anger and judge them. In so doing He would find relief for His justice. While His patience is great and His love is infinite, we need to see these characteristics of God in light of His justice and holiness as well. Love does not cancel out justice. Patience will not annul His holiness. All these characteristics of God work together in balance. His wrath is real. He will punish sin. God vowed through Isaiah that He would avenge evil and Israel would suffer for it.

The day was coming when God would turn His hand against His people. Notice, however, that His justice would be tempered with love and compassion. God would turn His hand against them in order to purge them of the impurities in their lives. It was God's intention to cleanse His people. His justice and anger were unleashed on them but not without purpose. God's anger would be constructive and accomplish a greater purpose. Many times our anger is out of control. We vent our frustrations simply to get relief. God is in control of His anger. He releases it with a very particular purpose. His anger is a tool to purge and cleanse His people of their sin.

In verse 26 the Lord reminded His people that He would restore their judges and counsellors as they were in the beginning. They would again judge with fairness and justice and offer wise and righteous counsel in the land. The day was coming when Jerusalem would again be called a city of righteousness and faithfulness.

The Lord reached out in holy jealousy to purge the city of her evil. She had sold herself to sin and rebellion. God would buy her back and restore her to Himself. Notice that it is the work of God to redeem His people. Admittedly, this process of redemption is not always an easy one. Jerusalem would have to face the anger of the Lord. They would be purged by His holy and just hand.

Among those disciplined were those who would be broken and humbled. These individuals would return with a penitent heart to the Lord. Those who accepted the redeeming discipline of the Lord would be restored to fellowship with Him. On the other hand, verse 28 reminds us that there would also be those who refused to accept the discipline of the Lord. These individuals would be broken in a very different way.

The day was coming when the people of God would be ashamed of their evil and sinful ways. They would be ashamed because of how they had offered their sacrifices to foreign gods under the sacred oak trees and in the gardens of the land. These individuals would become like a dying oak tree whose leaves were fading and falling. They were also compared to an unwatered garden that was unproductive and unfruitful (verse 30). The greatest and most powerful among them would become as kindling prepared for the fire. God's work of justice would be like the spark that would start that fire. There was no

one who could stop God from exercising His justice. Evil would be consumed and justice restored.

This passage challenges us in our own relationship with the Lord. We all know people who have fallen in their relationship with the Lord. Their relationship with Him is not what it once was. Could that describe your life? To remedy this, the Lord disciplined His people. He disciplined them because He loved them and wants them to return to Him. Those who accept that discipline will be restored. Through discipline the Lord purges His people of their sin and evil. Are you experiencing that discipline? Let God accomplish His perfect will through it so that you can be restored to Him.

For Consideration:

- How important is sincerity in the worship of God?
- What encouragement do you receive from this passage regarding the compassion and desire of God to forgive our sins?
- What has been the effect of sin in your land?
- Do our churches today teach a balanced view of God's love and justice?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His tremendous justice and holiness as well as His love and forgiveness.
- Ask the Lord to search you and to cleanse you of anything that is not right in your life.

- Take a moment to pray for someone who has a hardened heart to the things of God. Pray for the restoration of this individual to the Lord.
- Ask the Lord to soften your heart to Him and His Word.

2

THEY WILL BE HUMBLLED

Read Isaiah 2:1–22

In this chapter Isaiah speaks about the glorious future of Israel in the “last days” in contrast to the sinful condition of the nation described in chapter 1. In the Old Testament the term “last days” designated a period of time when Messiah would come (Micah 4).

One of the key features of the last days according to Isaiah would be that the mountain of the Lord’s temple would be established as the chief mountain. It would be raised above the other mountains and all the nations would stream to it. This mountain of the Lord’s temple referred to the region of Jerusalem. The temple was the spiritual centre of Judaism. From this mountain and temple, tremendous blessings would be poured out on the world.

Verse 3 reminds us that many people would come to Jerusalem (that is to the God of Jerusalem). They would come to His holy mountain for the purpose of learning His ways and walking in His paths. From this city the word of

God would spread to the nations and change how they responded to each other. God's word would bring peace to the world. The once-warring nations would beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. There would be no cause for training soldiers as peace would be established on the earth. The word of God would reign supreme and settle disputes.

We have already seen the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah in our day. We have seen the nations steaming to the God of Jerusalem from every nation. As never before in the history of the world we are seeing the spread of the message of the gospel. Each day men, women, boys and girls are putting their trust in the Lord Jesus and bowing the knee to Him. We are also seeing the tremendous peace that knowing we are in a right relationship with God brings.

While there is a tremendous spiritual fulfilment of this prophecy in the hearts and lives of those who belong to the Lord Jesus, we still see war all around us. Our world is in chaos as a result of sin and rebellion against God. Nations rise up against each other. Moral confusion abounds. What we need to understand is that the complete fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy is yet to come. We can be assured that when the Lord returns, peace and harmony will be established. The Lord Jesus will deal with sin and rebellion will be abolished, and Satan will be bound and kept from deceiving the nations (Revelation 20:2–3). What a glorious day that will be.

Realizing that one day all the nations would walk in the light of the Lord and his word, Isaiah called God's chosen nation to do the same thing immediately. God's people were called to follow the Lord's ways. How easy it is for us to be discouraged by the difficulties that surround us in

our day. We see the evil that abounds, and we are tempted to turn from the Lord and lose hope. Isaiah reminds us of our hope. The Lord will reign and His peace will fill the earth. In light of this promise, we should turn to Him with all our hearts and walk in His light. He will overcome, we can be sure of that.

In verse 6-9 Isaiah stated the Lord's charges against His people. They were full of superstitions from the East. The East was where the powerful nations lived at that time (Assyria and Babylonia). God's people had been caught up in the foreign practices of the nations around them. In so doing they had abandoned their God and His ways in favour of paganism. God's people were no longer distinct from the world. They had adopted the world's thoughts and practices. How much difference is there between the church and the world in our day? Have we accepted the world's way of thinking and its practices? Are we in the same situation as the people of God in Isaiah's day? Notice that the Lord, as a holy God, had to turn His back on His people because they were filled with sin and rebellion.

At this time in their history, God's people lacked no physical blessing. Their land was filled with silver and gold. They had been richly blessed by the Lord their God. They were a powerful people with numerous horses and chariots. Verse 8, however, reminds us that their land was also filled with idols, and the people bowed the knee to pagan deities. There is a strange inconsistency in this passage: God was blessing in abundance, and the people were cursing God by worshiping idols.

God would punish His people for what they were doing. He had blessed them and offered them hope, but they wandered from Him. Isaiah tells us that these individuals

would be humbled. Their sin was so terrible that Isaiah asked the Lord not to forgive them (verse 9). Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when the Lord would visit His people to punish them for their sin and evil. He feared that day of judgement. He cried out to his people to go to the rocks and hide in the ground. The Lord was going to come in His splendour and majesty. The day that He appeared would be a dreadful day. It would send terror into the hearts of those who had turned their backs on God. The arrogant would be humbled (verse 11). They would be brought low because of their pride. The Lord would not share His honour with an idol nor would he share it with proud people. He alone would be exalted.

On that day of judgement, the Lord would lash out against all who were proud. The cedars of Lebanon, the tall mountains, the trading ships, and the pride of mankind would be brought low. People would flee to the caves and the rocks. They would hide in the holes of the ground trying to avoid the terror of the Lord God and the splendour of His majesty (see Revelation 6:15-17). Nothing could help those fleeing from God's wrath. On that day God would rise, and the whole earth would shake. In verse 22 Isaiah called his people to stop trusting themselves to bring about Israel's glorious destiny—only the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel could accomplish that.

As we look at this passage, we are struck with how God's people had turned their hearts against God, their Creator. They had been trusting in their own resources, wisdom, and strength and not in God. How easy it is for us to fall into the same trap. How easy it is for us to trust in our own understanding and ability. In our technological age, it is so easy to put our trust in our own creations and forget that all our abilities come from God. We can

become a proud people who believe that we can live without God. Isaiah spoke out against this mentality in his day.

Isaiah prophesied of the majesty and splendour of God that would one day come to earth to strip away mankind's pride and rebellion. Then great blessing would flow from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. God promised wonderful things to His people, but first there would be a great cleansing. Only then would the outpouring of His wonderful blessing come to the world. Sin is an obstacle that must be dealt with if we are to know the fullness of God's blessing. Only by turning from sin and rebellion can we know the fullness of God's purpose in our lives.

For Consideration:

- Have you been going through a period of humbling in your life? What encouragement do you take from this passage?
- One of the greatest sins described for us in this chapter is the sin of God's people turning their back on their Creator to follow their own ideas. How is this evident in our day?
- Why is it so easy to trust in our own strength and wisdom? How difficult is it to turn from these to seeking the Lord?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of tremendous holiness and majesty.

- Ask the Lord to search you to see if you are trusting in your strength and wisdom rather than in Him.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has not yet come to know the Lord and His forgiveness.

3

DESPISING HIS GLORIOUS PRESENCE

Read Isaiah 3:1–4:6

In chapter 3 the Lord continues to bring His case against His people. They had turned from trusting in Him to trusting in themselves. He revealed to them what was going to happen to them because of their sin. He would take away all they trusted in.

Isaiah reminded Judah and Jerusalem that the Lord was going to take from them both their supply and their support. All supplies of food and water would be taken away. The leadership would also be removed. The heroes, the warriors, the judges, the prophets, and the skilled workers were the people the Israelites depended on to make their nation great, instead of depending on the Lord. Because all their capable leaders would fall under the judgement of God, only inexperienced people would be left to govern the land (verse 4). When the Lord used the Babylonians to conquer Judah many years later,

all the leaders were taken into captivity, leaving only the poor and uneducated in the land (see 2 Kings 24:14).

In the days of God's judgement, things would not be good in the land. People would oppress each other. Neighbour would rise up against neighbour. The young would rise up against the old. Those who were corrupt and without principle would rise up against honourable people. Isaiah described a time when principles of respect and righteousness would be ignored (verse 5). The society would be so broken that no one would accept a position of authority over the ruined nation (verses 6-7). Despair would prevail.

The glorious city of Jerusalem would stagger and be brought to her knees because her words and her deeds were against the Lord and defied His glorious presence (verses 8). Isaiah accused his people of provoking this glorious presence in their midst. They defied God's holy presence in that they did not live in holy fear, reverence, and respect. They chose to disobey the clear teaching and instruction of God, choosing instead their own ways and purposes. They did not surrender to Him or honour and worship Him. They lost their sense of fear and wonder. Their worship and adoration of God became a mere formality and no longer flowed from a heart that was in awe of Him. They no longer wept when His name was dishonoured among them. They defied Him by disregarding His will and His purpose for them as a nation. Eventually they forgot that God was in their midst. They took His blessings for granted and even complained when He did not bless them in the way they thought He should. God was reduced in their mind to a heavenly servant to meet their every whim and desire. He was no longer the awesome and glorious God who inspired fear, terror, and respect.

Notice in verse 9 that they paraded their sin like Sodom. They did not hide it but openly showed it to the world. They had no shame. It does not take too long to discover that this is happening in our day. All I have to do is sit for a moment in the coffee shop where I am writing this chapter and I can hear people openly boasting of their drunkenness and immorality. They have no shame. They openly parade their sin before all who will listen. People like this, said Isaiah, have brought disaster on themselves. Their own words testify against them.

Isaiah reminded us in verse 10 that it would go well for the righteous, and they would enjoy the fruit of their deeds. The wicked, however, would suffer disaster. They would be paid back for parading their evil deeds and for despising the glorious presence of the Lord. Frequently, the righteous suffer along with the wicked, but their ultimate ends are very different (Revelation 2:10-11).

The Lord would take His place in court against His people. He would rise up to judge them because of their sin and evil (verse 13). The leaders in particular would be judged because of how they had ruined His vineyard (a reference to the nation of Israel). The once-fruitful land was now ruined under their leadership. God particularly noticed that the plunder they had taken from the poor was in their houses crying out against them.

The women of the land had become proud and were openly flirting with their eyes and dressing provocatively to attract attention (verse 16). There was no sense of modesty in their hearts. They dressed to impress and lure. What would Isaiah have to say about the television and movies of our day that openly promote immorality and lust? These women openly defied the glorious presence of the Lord in their midst by their behaviour.

God reminded them in verse 17 that He would judge them for their evil. He would bring sores on their proud heads and make their scalps bald. In ancient times, a woman's hair was a symbol of her beauty and glory. God would strip this from the women of Judah. They would be humbled and put to shame. In the day of their judgement, God would snatch away all their fine jewellery and apparel. Instead of having a wonderful fragrance, they would stink. Instead of beauty there would be "branding" (verse 24). Some commentators see a reference to delicate skin being burned by the hot sun. The men they wanted to attract would fall by the sword in battle. The women would be left destitute, mourning on the ground.

In chapter 4 Isaiah offered hope to those who would go through this devastating judgement of the land. Although verse 1 still showed desperate conditions among the people of Israel, there were brighter days to come. Israel's future would be glorious in spite of God's judgement.

Verse 2 tells us that the day was coming when the "Branch of the LORD" would be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land would be the pride and glory of the survivors. What is the Branch in verse 2? Jeremiah 33:15 speaks about a Branch that would come to his people:

In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

This Branch is none other than the Messiah who was to come. The promise is that the Messiah would come and deal with their situation. They were desperate and in need of God's intervention. In time a Branch from David's

line would come. The Lord Jesus took on a human body and came to live among us. He became one of us. Isaiah told his people that the day was coming when that Branch would restore Israel. Once again, they would be again proud of the fruit that came from their land. The fruit here seems to be related to the work of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus whose death and resurrection would impact both Israel and the entire world.

Isaiah tells us that those who were left in Zion would be called holy. The Lord would do a powerful work in their lives. He would wash them of their sins by a spirit of judgement and fire (verse 4). Even as fire purges metal, so God would purge His people of their sin of despising His glorious presence. Notice that this judgement would be through fire. This would not be a comfortable experience for the people of God. The fire would burn them. This was not a judgement to take lightly. While the discipline of the Lord would not be easy, it would be for their good.

The day was coming, said Isaiah, when the Lord would create over all Mount Zion and over all who assembled there a great cloud of smoke by day and a flaming fire by night. He would spread His glory over them like a canopy (verse 5).

The reference to the cloud and the fire was really a reference to how the Lord led His people through the wilderness. The cloud and the pillar of fire was a manifestation of the glory of the Lord God in their midst. Isaiah reminded them that the day was coming when they would again see a return of the wonderful and glorious presence of the Lord among them. In that presence they would find a refuge (verse 6).

It is important to notice that before the revelation of that glorious presence, God needed to send His spirit of judgement and fire. His people were not ready for this wonderful manifestation. They needed to be purged and cleansed of their sin. While that process was not an easy process, it was a necessary preparation for the revelation of His glory in their midst. The Lord must first purge and cleanse us of our sin and rebellion before revealing Himself to us in a deeper way.

Isaiah promised that the Lord would come and renew His people. That renewal would come in the presence of the glory of the Lord returning to them. That glory would return through the Branch who would become one of them and restore them to the presence of God. Before that renewal and restoration could take place, God's people needed to be cleansed and purged of their sin. Sin was what kept them from the glorious presence of God. With their sins forgiven and covered, they would again be able to return to the Lord and be sheltered under the shadow of His wing.

There was a glorious future for God's people through the Messiah who was to come. He would be the One to restore their glory and return them to the Father. The Lord Jesus came to Israel as a child. He lived and died in their midst. He offered them hope and renewal but for the most part His people refused Him. That glory has been seen among the nations. From Jerusalem the message of salvation through Christ has spread to the ends of the earth and many have come to know the Saviour. It seems, however, that there is yet a greater fulfilment of this prophecy for the Jewish nation. May we see the day when Christ shall reign in the hearts of His chosen people.

For Consideration:

- Are you aware of the glorious presence of the Lord in your life? What are the evidences of this?
- Do you still have a holy reverence and fear for that glorious presence in your life? How is it possible to despise that presence?
- Do you know the Lord Jesus, the Branch? How did He bring renewal to your life?
- Take a moment to consider some of the wilderness experiences you have been through in your life. How did they draw you closer to the Lord? What did the Lord accomplish in your life through them?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to renew the sense of His glorious presence in your life.
- Thank the Lord for His patience. Thank Him that He does forgive us for the many times we have despised His presence.
- Thank the Lord that He is a shelter for all who will come to Him and seek His forgiveness.
- Are you experiencing the discipline of the Lord today? Ask the Lord to teach you what you need to learn through this time in your life.

4

THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD

Read Isaiah 5:1–30

In this chapter the Lord compared His people with a vineyard. Isaiah told the story of a vineyard planted on a fertile hill. This hill had everything it needed to produce a great vineyard. The master of the field had tilled the soil, cleared it of all its stones, and planted it with the very best vines. To protect the vineyard from predators, he built a watch tower in it and added a winepress in anticipation of the tremendous fruit that he expected from it. Everything was in place for this vineyard to be productive and fruitful.

We understand that the vineyard was a symbol of the people of God. These people had everything they needed to become prosperous and fruitful. The blessing of God was on them. His favour rested in their presence, and He expected much from them as a people. If you belong to the Lord Jesus today, then everything is in place for you to be a fruitful Christian. It is the will and purpose of the Father that you bear fruit. He has empowered you with His Holy Spirit and His gifts, and He awaits the harvest from your life.

The master in Isaiah's parable came to his vineyard looking for a crop in its due season. He expected good grapes because all the conditions were favourable. Instead, however, he found only bad grapes that could not be used. The master called the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah to judge between him and his vineyard. He asked them if there was anything more that he could have done for his vineyard to make it more productive (verse 4).

In this parable the master of the vineyard decided that because the vineyard was not producing good fruit, he was going to take down its protective hedge and let it be destroyed. The wall he had built around it would be taken down, resulting in the vineyard being trampled. It would become a wasteland, not pruned or cultivated. The master would let briars and thorns overtake it. He would command the clouds not to rain on it anymore. The blessing of the Lord would be removed from the land.

In the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus told a parable of a master who went away on a trip and left his possessions with three of his servants. Two of them invested this money and made more money for him at his return. One servant hid his talent and returned it to his master without any interest. Listen to the response of the master on his return in Matthew 25:28–29:

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

The reality of the matter is that if we do not use what God has so graciously given us, He may very well take it back

and give it to someone who will use it. Would you entrust your resources to someone who would misuse them?

Verse 7 informs us that the vineyard represented the house of Israel and the inhabitants of Judah. These people were the delight of the Lord. He poured out His blessing on them and expected great things. He expected justice from them, but instead He only found bloodshed. He expected righteousness, but instead He only heard cries of distress from those who were being mistreated and abused.

In verses 8-25 the Lord revealed through Isaiah the nature of the fruit He found in Israel. Let's examine these verses.

Materialism (verses 8–10)

The Lord spoke against the fruit of materialism in His vineyard. Notice how His people had been caught up in “adding house to house and join field to field.” They never seemed to have enough. They kept adding to what they had and were never content. There was no space left in the land because the greedy had taken it all for themselves. God reminded them that He saw what they were doing and would judge them.

Drunkenness and Partying (verses 11–17)

God's people were also producing fruit of drunkenness. Isaiah spoke out against those who rose up early in the morning to chase after their drinks and stayed up late until they were completely inflamed with their wine. These individuals had their harps and lyres and banquets. They

enjoyed the party lifestyle but had no regard for God and His ways.

God saw the lifestyle of this people. They were a foolish people who did not understand what life was all about. They would not prosper. Their greatest men would die of hunger, and masses of people would be parched with thirst (verse 13). The grave would feast on them. Even as they had opened their mouths to swallow huge quantities of wine, so the grave would open its mouth until it was drunk with their bodies.

God would bring these drunkard low. He would humble them. In that day the Lord would be exalted and show Himself to be a God of holiness and justice on the earth. Those who disregarded His law in materialism and drunken partying would perish. Sheep would graze among the ruins of the rich.

Mockers (verse 18–19)

Isaiah spoke next to those who openly mocked the name and work of the Lord. These people were an evil people who dragged their sin with them wherever they went. They openly mocked the Lord and His ways, saying they would not believe the judgement of God unless they saw it. They felt that they were above the law of God and could do as they pleased.

Those Who Call Good Evil (verse 20)

There were also those in the land who openly defied the law of the Lord. They denied what the Lord said and openly challenged His word. They taught others that evil deeds were acceptable and confused moral principles.

The Proud (verse 21)

In verse 21 Isaiah tells us that the people of God were also producing the fruit of pride. There were those who were wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. These people really did not see their need of God, His strength or wisdom. They depended on their own wisdom and strength and not on the Lord's.

Injustice (verse 22–23)

Also produced in this vineyard was the fruit of injustice. The judges of the land were experts in drinking and mixing drinks. They acquitted the guilty for a bribe and denied justice to the innocent.

The Lord would judge these sins. As fire consumes straw, so God would judge His people. Their roots would decay and their flower blow away like the dust. They would be rejected because they had turned their backs on the Lord and disregarded His Word (verse 24). As God looked at His vineyard, He was very angry with His people. He would strike them down. The mountains would shake with His anger. Dead bodies would fill the streets like refuse. Despite this, His anger would not be subsided (verse 25).

In righteous anger, the Lord would bring enemy nations against His people. Hearing God's whistle, the armies of the earth would come with great speed. They were a powerful, untiring force. They would fight to win. Their arrows were sharp. Their chariots moved like a whirlwind. This great army would roar like a lion ready to seize its prey and carry it away. There would be no one to rescue Israel in that day. The vineyard of Israel and Judah would be left in darkness and distress. The clouds would cover

the land and keep the sun of God's light and blessing from them.

What was the reason for this great judgement? Israel and Judah were judged because, instead of producing good crops, they produced evil crops. God had done everything necessary for them but they had turned their backs on Him. He had expected much from them, but they had produced little. Because He has invested much in us, He expects much of us as well. May we produce fruit that is worthy of what God has invested in our lives.

For Consideration:

- What has God invested in your life? What has He done for you?
- Does your life reflect what God has invested in you? Explain.
- Do you agree that God has already done everything He needs to do in order for us to be productive and fruitful? What keeps us from experiencing that fruit?
- Why do you suppose God would be so angry that His vineyard did not produce the fruit He wanted it to produce?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for what He has invested in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you see what He had done for you to make you productive and fruitful. Ask Him to help you to use the gifts He has given you.

- Ask the Lord to show you if there are any obstacles that hinder productivity and fruitfulness in your life.

5

ISAIAH'S CALL

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

The events of this chapter took place in the year that King Uzziah died. King Uzziah was generally a good king but in the later part of his reign, he became proud. God struck him with leprosy and he had to live the rest of his life in isolation while his son took care of the administrative duties of the kingdom.

It was in that year the Lord met Isaiah in a very special way. Isaiah describes this encounter. In a vision, he saw the Lord seated on a throne. Notice the Lord was high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. This was a picture of great majesty.

As Isaiah examined the scene before him, he saw some seraphs. A seraph is a type of angel. In Hebrew the word *seraph* comes from a word that means "fiery." It is likely that they are named for their appearance. Isaiah described them as having six wings. Two of those wings were used to cover their faces, two were used to cover their feet, and the final two wings were used to fly. Why

did these seraphs cover their bodies? They did so very likely out of a sense of humility. They were unworthy to look on the glory of the Lord their God.

Notice what these seraphs were doing in the presence of God. Isaiah heard them cry out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory" (verse 3). The focus of their activity was the proclamation that the Lord Almighty was a holy and glorious God whose attributes were revealed through creation (see Psalm 19:1-3). It would seem to me that that the great problem of our day is that we have failed to recognize this glory. The glory of God is still revealed in the creation that surrounds us but we have failed to see it as a manifestation of the character of our wonderful Creator.

We see the glory of God in the power of the storms or in the vastness of this universe. We see it in the complexity of our own human bodies. If we open our eyes we will see the way in which the Lord orchestrates all the events of history and even our own personal lives to reveal His character. If we do not see this glory, it is because we are not open to see it. If we would open our eyes like these seraphs, we would see the glory of God we too would find our hearts overflowing in praise and worship for the God of all glory.

At the sound of the praise from these seraphs, the doorposts of the temple shook and the whole temple was filled with smoke (verse 4). In the days of Moses, the Lord descended on Mount Sanai in thick smoke (Exodus 19:18). The smoke was a manifestation of the incredible glory of God. Seeing it, the prophet Isaiah cried out: "Woe is me!" It is impossible to describe what the prophet was experiencing that day. Verse 5 tells us that he felt the reality of his sinful nature in the presence of God's

glory. Standing in front of a holy God, he was broken. He was keenly aware of His sin –he saw himself as a man of unclean lips living among an unclean people. He knew he did not deserve to be in the presence of such holiness.

What seemed to amaze Isaiah more than anything else was that he could actually be in the presence of such an awesome and holy God and still live. As Isaiah marvelled over the presence of the Lord, one of the seraphs flew over to him with a live coal from the altar. In the Old Testament context, the altar was where the sacrifices were offered. It was a sacred place. It had been blessed by God for the purpose of bringing reconciliation between Himself and His people. It was a place of forgiveness. The coal the angel brought from the altar would bring cleansing and forgiveness. The seraph touched Isaiah's mouth with that coal and declared that his guilt had been taken away. The price had been paid for his sin. Isaiah could stand in the presence of God because atonement had been made for him. This same reality can be ours as well. Because of the blood that was shed for us on the cross of Calvary, we too can stand in the presence of this holy and awesome God without fear.

It is important for us to notice that the touching of the mouth of Isaiah indicated not only that he had been cleansed but also that he had been specifically anointed by God for a prophetic task. As he contemplated the cleansing and anointing of his lips, he heard a voice speaking: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

Notice that while there were seraphs present, none of them responded to that call. It was as if that call was only for Isaiah. Isaiah heard that call but God expected that He accept it personally. That day the prophet responded:

"Here I am. Send me!" Isaiah was available to the Lord Almighty.

Not everyone responds in a similar way to the call of God. There are those who go through life fighting the will of God for their lives. It is important that we see how God expected Isaiah to accept the call He had placed on his life. Have we heard that call of God to a particular task? Will we be obedient and respond like Isaiah: "Here I am. Send me"?

After Isaiah accepted his call, the Lord spoke to him saying: "Go, and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'" Isaiah's ministry would not be an easy one. God sent His prophets so that His people would turn from their sin and be healed. God knew, from the beginning what the response of His people would be to the message He gave Isaiah. They would block their ears and harden their hearts. Isaiah was to preach to these people anyway. The Lord calls us to preach His word whether people listen or not. It is not for us to determine the results. We are called simply to speak.

Isaiah listened to what the Lord said and was struck by the difficulty of the task. He asked how long he was to speak to a people who would not listen (verse 11). God told him that he was to speak this word until the cities lay ruined without inhabitant. He was to persevere until the houses of the land were deserted and the fields lay ruined and abandoned. He was to continue speaking until the Lord sent everyone away from the land and there was no one left to listen to his message.

Isaiah's message was to be a message of judgement. It was not without purpose that the Lord revealed Himself to

the prophet as a holy and glorious God. It was not without reason that Isaiah was first broken by his own sinfulness in this encounter. Until Isaiah had seen the glory and holiness of God, he could not speak with any real conviction. Until he had been broken by the state of his own sinfulness, he could not speak with any authority. God chose first to break Isaiah. Only when he was broken could he be effectively used. The vision of the holy and glorious God would be Isaiah's motivation in ministry.

God reminded the prophet, in conclusion, that the day was coming when out of the ruined stump that was Israel, a holy shoot would spring up. There was hope for the people of Israel. In the person of the Messiah who was to come from their midst, God would restore their hope. Like Isaiah, however, God's people would also need to be broken. Only through this brokenness, and the repentance that accompanied it, would they be able to experience renewal and healing in their land. Notice in verse 13 that through this time of humbling, God would keep a faithful remnant among His people. He would not abandon them.

We catch a glimpse of the incredible glory and holiness of the Lord God in this chapter. The vision of His holiness was powerfully impressed in the mind and heart of the prophet. This vision had a lifelong impact on Isaiah. It strengthened him in his resolve to speak the word God gave him. The Lord told Isaiah that he would not see great fruit for his ministry. He had not been called to be a harvester. God has called him, however, to announce His judgement. Would you be faithful under those terms?

For Consideration:

- Do you think we are blinded to the glory and holiness of God in these days? Explain.
- How is the glory of God revealed in our day?
- Have you ever been truly broken by your sinfulness? Why is it important that we understand our sinfulness?
- What is the call of God on your life? What particular vision has He given to you?
- Isaiah was told that he would not see great results in his ministry. Why do we lift up results as a sign of a "successful" ministry?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to renew your vision and calling. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to that calling even when you do not see the results you would like.
- Ask the Lord to break you and show you more of His holiness and glory.
- Ask the Lord to move in your church to reveal His holiness and glory. Ask Him to bring a spirit of brokenness and humility before His holiness and glory.

6

AHAZ, REZIN, AND PEKAH

Read Isaiah 7:1–25

The incidents of this chapter happened during the reign of Ahaz the son of Uzziah. Ahaz did not serve the Lord. Pekah, king of Israel joined forces with Rezin, king of Aram to attack Ahaz in Judah. It is unclear what the motives of Pekah and Rezin were in this attack. It is quite obvious, however, from the Lord's perspective that this particular incident was designed to turn the attention of Ahaz to the Lord.

Verse 1 tells us that the initial attempt of Pekah and Rezin to conquer Judah failed. We ought to understand from this that the Lord was giving Jerusalem an opportunity to repent and turn from evil. The Lord was speaking to Jerusalem through this incident. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were shaken like trees in the wind. Their security was threatened and they were in fear.

It was in this situation that the Lord spoke to the prophet Isaiah and called him to take his son Shear-Jashub and meet Ahaz on the road to the Washerman's Field at the

end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool. There are several things we need to note here.

Why was Ahaz at the Upper Pool? It is interesting to note that later on in the history of God's people, King Hezekiah would find himself in a similar situation. In Hezekiah's case, the nation of Assyria would surround Jerusalem and threaten to defeat it. In consultation with his officials, Hezekiah decided that he would cut off the supply of water to the enemy. He and his men would block the water coming from the city so that the enemy would not have any water to drink. Could it be that this was what Ahaz was doing? Was he too trying to cut off the supply of water to the enemy?

Notice as well that the Lord told Isaiah that he was to take his son with him to see Ahaz. This cannot go unnoticed. The Lord does not do anything without a cause. Isaiah's son Shear-Jashub's name is important. His name meant "a remnant will return." Was Shear-Jashub to be there because of his name? Was God trying to encourage Ahaz by reminding him that He would care for him in this situation? God would not abandon His people. His eye was on the remnant of His people. They would bring Him glory and honour.

Isaiah told Ahaz that he was to be calm and not be afraid. God challenged him not to lose heart because of the two kings who were camped outside his door. Notice that Isaiah called Rezin and Pekah smouldering stubs of firewood (verse 4). A smouldering stub of firewood was a piece of wood that was coming to the end of its time. The fact that it was a stub shows us that there was not much left. God was telling Ahaz that these individuals would not be a threat to him for very long.

God knew what Aram (Syria) and Ephraim (Israel) had plotted against Judah. They had plotted to conquer Judah and divide the land between themselves. They had even selected a replacement king to rule over the conquered territory. They had carefully planned all the details of this invasion. What they did not take into account was the will and purpose of God, who would not let Judah be conquered by this military force.

Isaiah prophesied that in sixty-five years the northern kingdom of Israel would be too shattered to even be considered a nation. In the meantime, however, Isaiah called Ahaz to stand firm in his faith and trust the Lord in this matter. This was not the time of Judah's defeat. God would protect them from the enemies at the door. Trusting in God and His word would bring Judah security because God controls the destiny of nations. If Judah's leaders did not trust in the Lord, judgement would surely come. This was true in the lives of these nations is also true in our personal lives as well. If we abandon our trust and confidence in God, we are guaranteed to fall.

There is something else that we need to note. Ahaz and the city of Jerusalem were terrified and shook like the trees of the forest in a windstorm at the sight of Rezin and Pekah. But as impressive as this enemy appeared to be, God described them as burning stubs ready to go out. The fact of the matter was that the enemy wanted Ahaz to believe that he was much stronger than he really was. Satan is a master of exaggeration and lies. He will do his best to put a magnifying glass in front of every problem you face in order to cause you to lose heart and abandon your faith and trust in God.

Notice that the Lord would give a sign to the king as a confirmation of what He had prophesied through Isaiah.

The sign would be an encouragement or proof to Ahaz that God was going to fulfil His promises regarding Judah's future.

The sign that Judah would be protected was that a virgin would become pregnant and give birth to a son whose name would be Immanuel ("God with us"). While this particular prophecy is often related to the Lord Jesus, who was born of a virgin and who was "God with us," there was also a more immediate fulfilment to this prophecy in the days of Ahaz. There are many prophecies in Scripture that have multiple fulfilments. The Hebrew word that Isaiah used for virgin can also refer simply to an unmarried woman. In the days of Ahaz, a child's mother named her baby Immanuel because she believed God would preserve the nation from the impending threat. Ahaz would learn of this child's birth and name since it was to be a sign to him of God's faithfulness.

In verses 15 and 16, Isaiah prophesied that this child would live in a time of poverty (eat curds and honey) and also that the threatening enemies, Aram and Ephraim, would cease to exist while this child was very young. While God's blessing was on Ahaz for the moment, he would be disciplined because of his sin and rebellion. Isaiah told him that the day was coming when God would bring the Assyrians against him. It is important for us to realize that this was the nation that Ahaz had been depending on for victory over Aram and Ephraim. The very people he trusted in would lash out against him.

Ahaz had neither trusted the Lord nor lived for him. While this was not the time that he would be judged, his judgement was coming. On that day, the Lord would whistle for flies from Egypt and bees from the land of Assyria. A swarming enemy would come and invade the land of

Judah and settle in every crevice rock and thorn bush. Assyria would humiliate God's people. The shaving of the head, face and legs was a sign of total humiliation (verse 20). Verses 21-25 prophesied briars replacing vineyards, people hunting for food, and abandoned city streets where cows and goats would roam freely.

We see in this section of the prophecy of Isaiah that Ahaz was protected against Pekah and Rezin despite his sin. While God protected him in this particular situation, his day of judgement was coming. God gave him an opportunity to seek him and seek a sign from Him. Ahaz's judgement would come in time but this was not the day.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the tactic of the enemy to exaggerate our problems? Has this ever happened to you?
- Isaiah reminds us that we either stand firm in our faith or fall. Take a moment to consider a situation you find yourself in today. How can you apply this principle?
- What do we learn about the plans we make without consulting the Lord? Have you ever found yourself making plans without consulting the Lord?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He continues to give us opportunities to repent and turn to Him.

- Ask the Lord to help you to stand firm in your faith even when everything around you is confusing and complicated.
- Thank the Lord that He came in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah to offer us victory.

MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ

Read Isaiah 8:1–22

We are not told what the circumstances were, but on one occasion the Lord gave some simple words to Isaiah to remember. The words were “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.” God told Isaiah to write these words down on a large scroll. Why did God want these words written on a large scroll? Obviously, the words were to be written with large characters. Clearly, the purpose was so that people could read these words at a distance. In reality, what the Lord seemed to be asking the prophet was to make a large banner with the words Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz on it. The words meant “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.”

In verse 2 the Lord called Uriah the priest and Zechariah to witness the writing down of these words on the scroll. After the prophecy’s fulfilment, these witnesses would testify that Isaiah had written them before the Assyrian invasion. This would bring honour to God’s prophetic word. After writing these words, Isaiah returned to his home. Verse 3 tells us that he had a sexual relationship with the prophetess (Isaiah’s wife), and she conceived and gave birth to a son. The Lord told Isaiah to name

their son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. In verse 4 the Lord promised Isaiah that before his son was old enough to talk, the wealth of Damascus and Israel would be carried off by the Assyrians. The name of Isaiah's son (Quick to the plunder, Swift to the spoil) was a sign to the people of his day. His name reminded them that the judgement of God was soon coming.

God reminded Isaiah that the people of the northern ten tribes of Israel had rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and had chosen rather to rejoice in King Rezin of Aram (Syria). The northern kingdom of Israel had separated from Judah and abandoned her faith. In this particular situation, she had chosen to form an alliance with King Rezin and attack the people of God in Judah, her brothers and sisters. Because Israel had rejected the gently flowing waters of the Shiloah, originating from the region of Jerusalem, God would bring on Israel the mighty floodwaters of the great river of Assyria. Shiloah seems to have represented the work that God was doing very gently in the lives of His people. Israel had turned her back on what God was doing, and they would now suffer the mighty flood waters of His judgement.

Notice in verse 8 that the waters of God's judgement would not stop in Israel. They would also come flooding over into Judah. Israel would be judged first, but Judah would soon follow. Judah too was guilty and would also suffer the consequences of her actions. The land of Immanuel would be devastated.

In verses 9 and 10 Isaiah called out to the nations to raise the battle cry and prepare for battle. They were to devise their strategy and make their plans. The nations were to do this, but they would not succeed. They would be shattered and their plans thwarted because the Lord

God (Immanuel) was with His people. Very likely, these words were intended for Israel and Rezin who were then making plans to invade the land of Judah. Isaiah reminded them that they would not succeed in their attack against Judah (see Isaiah 7:5–6).

In verse 11 the hand of the Lord was very heavy on Isaiah. God warned him not to follow the ways of his people. Isaiah was not to fear what these people feared. He was not to call “conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy.” This warning is somewhat difficult to understand. A footnote in the NIV offers an alternative reading: “Do not call for a treaty every time these people call for a treaty.” The Lord may have been referring to the way in which Israel had called for a treaty with Aram and other nations to increase her strength instead of trusting the Lord. King Ahaz of Judah, in seeing Pekah and Rezin coming against him, decided to make a treaty with Assyria to protect himself. He chose to make a treaty with a foreign nation instead of trusting the Lord. Perhaps the Lord was warning Isaiah and His people not to fall into this trap. They were not to fear the nations that were coming against them. It was fear and lack of trust in the Lord that drove them to make treaties with pagan nations. Instead, God told them that they were to put their trust in Him. He would be their guaranteed sanctuary (verse 14).

Notice also in verse 14 that God promised to be for them a stone that caused men to stumble and a rock that made them fall. God would be a sanctuary for all who would trust in Him but a rock that crushed all who turned their backs on Him. The Lord Jesus spoke in similar terms in Matthew 21:42–44:

'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?' Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

Isaiah was to seal up or preserve the word he had received from the Lord (verse 16). The day was coming when the word would be accomplished. In the meantime he was to wait on the Lord who was hiding His face from His people. Notice in verse 18 that Isaiah realized that he and his children were signs and symbols to the nation. The names of his sons were a testimony in Israel of what God was going to do.

In verse 19 Isaiah reminded the people of their tendency to consult mediums and spiritists. A decrease in faith often results in an increase in superstition. Isaiah reminded the people of God to consult the Lord's law and the testimony of His people as recorded in their history. He warned that if anyone did not speak according to that word, they would perish and not see the light of dawn. This may be a reference to false prophets who spoke a word from their own heart and not from the Lord. These individuals would perish for turning the people away from the truth.

Those who refused to seek God and rely on Him would be distressed and hungry (verse 21). They would roam through the land famished. They would curse the Lord their God because of His judgement on them. They would see only distress, darkness, and gloom. Ultimately, they would be thrust into utter darkness because they had

rejected the Lord and His ways. The Lord would become for them a snare and a rock that crushed.

Isaiah's son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz was a warning to his people. The enemy was coming quickly to plunder and spoil them. Isaiah reminded Judah that they had a choice to make. They could run to the Lord and trust Him alone for protection and sanctuary, or they could trust in foreign powers and that same Lord would crush them. For the people of Isaiah's day this passage challenged them in their temptation to seek alliances with the pagan nations around them. The passage also challenges us in our own situations. It speaks to us about our own tendency to try to fix everything ourselves. It challenges us instead to trust in the Lord and what He is doing. In our modern age, how often have we turned to our programmes and agendas instead of to the Lord? The passage challenges us to remember that our only hope is in the Lord. Outside of Him, there is no hope. To seek Him is to live. To reject Him is to perish.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself trusting in your own plans and agendas and not in the Lord?
- What do you fear today? Are you willing to trust the Lord in these areas?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you the grace to wait on His timing and trust in His control.

- The Lord is either a shelter for us or a rock that will crush us. If you know that He is your shelter today, thank Him.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has not turned to the Lord for shelter.

8

A CHILD IS BORN

Read Isaiah 9:1–7

In the last couple of chapters, we have read prophecies that involved a child being a sign to the people of Judah that God would give them victory over their enemies. In chapter 7 a child would be named Immanuel, signifying that God was with Judah. In chapter 8 God told Isaiah to call his new-born son by a name signifying that Judah's enemies would be destroyed very soon. Again in chapter 9, a child is the centrepiece of the prophecy and provided hope for the future of Judah. This child would be the Lord Jesus.

In verse 1 Isaiah reminded his people that the day was coming when there would be no more gloom for those in distress. Because of their location in Israel, the land of Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee were the first to be invaded by the Assyrian king (2 Kings 15:29). A day was coming, however, when God would honour the land of Galilee. The inhabitants of Galilee would see a great light. The New Testament applied this prophecy to Christ's first coming (Matthew 4:12-16). A great light would dawn on those living in the land of the shadow of

death. God was going to enlarge the nation and increase its joy. God's people would rejoice like those who had brought in an abundant harvest or like soldiers dividing the plunder. The day was coming when the Lord God would remove the yoke that burdened His people and take the bar from their shoulders. God's people would pass through a time of difficulty, but the day was coming when a light would shine on them and set them free. Their enemies would be defeated.

Notice in verse 5 that the warrior's boots and garments would all be destined for the fire. These items would no longer be needed after the enemy was defeated. God's people would live free of war. They would live in His peace and security. All this would take place because of a child that would be born in their midst (verse 6).

Notice what verse 6 tells us about this child who was to be born. The government would be on his shoulders, and He would lead His people as king and Lord. Isaiah tells us His name in verse 6. It is important that we take a moment to consider this. Names in the Bible represented the character of the individual who carried them. These names tell us something about the child who was to be born.

Wonderful Counsellor

His name would be called Wonderful Counsellor. As a counsellor He would lead and guide His people into truth. Notice, however, that He would not be just a counsellor but a wonderful counsellor. There could be none better. His truth would set people free from the bondage of sin and the strongholds of the enemy. His truth would reach into the very core of His people and bring comfort and

fulfilment that no other truth could ever bring. His truth would satisfy completely.

Mighty God

This child would be no ordinary child. His name would be "Mighty God." As the mighty God, He would be all powerful. Nothing would be impossible for Him. He would be able to deal with every problem His children encountered. His government would be like no other government. He would rule in power and authority. Who would dare to stand against this mighty God?

Everlasting Father

This child would also be called "Everlasting Father." He would provide and care for His children. What a wonderful thing it is to have the Mighty God as our Everlasting Father. Other religions worship gods that are distant and unconcerned. The concept of an everlasting Father, however, reveals to us closeness and relationship. As a Father, He is committed to His children. There is closeness in this name. Notice something else about this name. The word "everlasting" cannot go unnoticed. His relationship to His children is forever. He will be our Father forever. Nothing will ever separate us from Him.

Prince of Peace

In light of the turmoil that surrounded Judah, this child would be called "Prince of Peace." He would come to offer peace. This peace was, first of all, between God and His people. That was the principle reason why Christ came. He came to bring sinners to the Father. He came to restore us to a right relationship with God. It should be

understood, however, that that peace would also be experienced in an ongoing way by those who had accepted Him. As the Prince of Peace, He offers peace to us in our daily walk. He offers to all who come to Him the assurance that the Lord God is sovereign over every problem and difficulty in this world. Those who know this Saviour also know that all things work together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Believers are confident in His purpose and are able to live in peace and contentment.

What an incredible ministry this child would have! Verse 7 tells us that the increase of His government and peace would have no end. In other words, His rule would never end. His influence would move across the globe. His peace would extend to the far reaches of the earth and from generation to generation. Nothing could ever stop the increasing of His influence and the expansion of His kingdom.

This child would reign on David's throne. As a descendant of David, He would uphold justice and righteousness. His reign would be established on these two principles. He would reign with perfect justice and righteousness, ruling according to God's holy standard. Notice in verse 7 that His reign would be forever. In other words, His reign would be an everlasting and eternal reign. He would never stop being Lord. No one would ever be able to take His reign from Him.

Isaiah told his hearers that the zeal of the Lord Almighty would accomplish these things. There was nothing that could stop this eternal purpose of God to bring this child to the earth to reign. God was very zealous about this matter. Satan did his best to stop it from happening. Herod, the king, tried to kill the Lord Jesus but failed. Pilot

allowed the Lord Jesus to be crucified, but God raised Him from the dead. The zeal of the Lord would accomplish this purpose.

The child promised was a very important child indeed. This child was the hope of victory for Judah and the world. In the days of Isaiah, God's people were surrounded by the forces of King Pekah and King Rezin. We too were surrounded by our enemy. Satan had us in his grip, and we were slaves of sin. We were separated from God and His blessing. This child came to offer hope. He is the answer to all our needs.

Verses 8-12 prophesied judgement on the northern kingdom of Israel (referred to here as Ephraim and Samaria). God would judge these people because they refused to turn to Him for safety but trusted in an alliance with a pagan nation. The people of Ephraim and Samaria were untouched by the warning of coming judgement. They spoke arrogantly against God saying:

The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stones; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars (verse 10)

These people claimed that when invaders destroyed their belongings, they would simply replace them with better things. They refused to humble themselves and turn to the Lord. They rejected Him and His gracious purpose in discipline. They stubbornly persisted in their evil deeds. God would stir enemies against Israel, and she would be devoured. A refrain of judgement is repeated four times in this section of Scripture: "for all this, His anger is not turned away, His hand is still upraised" (verses 12, 17, 21; 10:4). This shows us something of the hardness of

His people's hearts. Despite His warnings and discipline, His people would not repent and turn to Him—His anger against them was not appeased.

In verses 13-17 the Lord intensified His anger against Israel's leadership. Isaiah warned that God would cut off from Israel both the head and the tail. The elders and prominent men of the land were the head. The tail represented false prophets. The highest branch of the majestic palm tree of Israel would be broken down and the lowest reed that grew in the muddy swamp would be trampled. Notice in verse 14 that this would happen in a single day. This judgement would be swift, effortless and complete.

Because His people were steeped in sin, God took no more pleasure in them. He would not pity the fatherless and the widow. They were all ungodly and wicked. Only evil and vileness came from their mouths. Only by turning back to the Lord and repenting of their sins could the anger of the Lord be calmed.

Isaiah tells us in verses 18-21 that Israel's wickedness was like thorns and briers. These evil deeds would be consumed in the fire of God's judgement. The land would be scorched. The people of the land would be the fuel for this fire.

Manasseh would feed on Ephraim and Ephraim on Manasseh (verse 21). Both of them would turn against Judah. Brotherly love would perish in their midst. Instead of supporting and encouraging each other, they would fight and devour one another. Even after all this, the people would still not repent, and so the anger of the Lord would not turn from His people.

As we examine this section, we are struck with the reality of how hard our hearts can be. God intensified His judgement but His people continued to rebel. They seemed to be untouched by what God was saying to them.

Open your eyes to what the Lord is doing in your life. Listen to Him and what He is saying through your circumstances. Let Him break away the sin and rebellion. Accept His discipline, and let Him accomplish His perfect plan in your life.

For Consideration:

- Consider the names given to the Lord Jesus here. What particular aspect of His character brings you encouragement in your situation today?
- Has the Lord been trying to get your attention through the circumstances of your life?
- Has God been trying to communicate to your society? What are the evidences of this?

For Prayer:

- Consider one of the names Isaiah gave to the Lord Jesus. Thank the Lord for what that name represents to you today.
- Thank the Lord that in love He disciplines us to bring us back to Himself.
- Ask the Lord to give you a soft heart to His discipline and teaching.

9

GOD'S DISCIPLINE

Read Isaiah 10:1-34

In the first four verses of this section, Isaiah continued in his prophecy against the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah began in verse 1 by speaking to the judges of the land: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees." Judges were making decrees that oppressed the poor and deprived them of their legal rights. These leaders were robbing orphans and preying on widows. God's heart favours the poor, the widow, and the orphan, and He often challenged His people to provide and care for them (Leviticus 19:9-18; Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

God was angry with His people because of this oppression and would bring disaster on them from afar (verse 3). God asked these oppressors what they were going to do in the day He called them to give an account of their actions. The day was coming when the Lord would take all their wealth from them. Nothing would remain of what they had taken by oppression. Instead the oppressors would be among the captives and fall among the slain.

Isaiah focus changes in verse 5 to pronounce a curse on Assyria, who would be “the club” of God’s wrath against Israel. God saw His people as godless (see verse 6). The cry of the widow would not go unheard. God would discipline those who acted with injustice. He would dispatch the nation of Assyria against His own people. Even as Israel had robbed and taken by force, God would allow Assyria to seize, loot, and plunder them. They would be trampled down like mud in the streets.

While the judgement of His own godless people would be very real, God would also judge the other godless nations as well. The judgement of His people was but the beginning. God’s intention was to purge the land and cleanse it of its pride and injustice. That process would begin first with His people and extend to the nations.

Notice the reason why the Lord was going to judge Assyria (verses 8-11). The Assyrians boasted that all their commanders were kings, in terms of wealth and power. In verse 9 the king of Assyria boasted of his great power. No city could withstand him, and he listed the cities he had conquered. He boasted that Jerusalem and her images fall just as other cities had fallen under his attack: “Shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols?” Just as the Lord heard the cry of the orphans and widows, so he heard the boasts of the king of Assyria. When He had finished His purifying work among His own people (Israel and Judah), God would then punish the king of Assyria for his pride (verse 12).

The king of Assyria compared himself to someone reaching into a bird’s nest to take away the eggs (verse 14). He reached his hand into the nest of the nations and took away their wealth. Not one of these nations could

resist him. This pride was a real offense to God: "Does the axe raise itself above the one who swings it?" asked Isaiah (verse 15). The king was merely an axe, in the hands of the Lord. How important it is for us to give God the credit for what He has accomplished in us and through us. We are merely instruments in His hands.

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would defeat the mighty foe Assyria (verse 16). The king of Assyria would be humbled as the fire of God's judgement burned against him. Verse 17 tells us that the Light of Israel would become a fire and the Holy One a flame. The Lord God would judge Assyria. This proud and powerful king would be no match for the Almighty God of Israel and Judah, and he would fall in a single day. He would be consumed as easily as a fire consumed thorns and briars (see 37:36-38). His land would be laid waste. The splendour of his forests and his fertile fields would be destroyed like a sick and dying man wasting away (verse 18). What remained of the forest after the judgement of the Lord would be so small that even a child could count the number of trees (verse 19).

When God judged Assyria, He would catch the attention of His own people. Seeing the judgement of Assyria, they would return to their God. This was all part of God's great plan to renew and restore His people. Although God's people had been as numerous as the sand of the sea, they would be judged because of their sin and evil. A few of them, however, would return to the Lord. Through Assyria God would discipline and bring His people back.

Isaiah reminded his people that they were not to be afraid of the Assyrians (verse 24). Isaiah used two historical examples to illustrate the Lord's future deliverance of Israel: Gideon's victory over the Midianites and the

slaughter of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Israel's suffering would be a painful, but it would not last forever. God's anger would cease. God's intent was not to destroy His people but to discipline them. On that day the Lord would lift the tremendous burden His children bore. He would take the yoke from their necks and restore health and prosperity to His people. There are times in our lives when the discipline of the Lord is very harsh. There are times when the Lord will have to purge and refine us but we are not to be discouraged. God is purging and refining us for greater things.

Notice in verses 28-32 that the judgement of the Lord was already coming. Isaiah challenged his people to prepare themselves for what the Lord was about to do. Already Assyria was approaching. Isaiah foresaw the army passing through various towns and arriving at Nob, just north of Jerusalem. God's people would suffer for their sins. The discipline of the Lord would be painful, but the Lord would destroy Assyria in the end. He would bring their enemy down like a tall tree. The great army that advanced against God's people, as numerous as the trees of the forest, would be cut down by the axe of the Lord God Almighty.

The Lord promised through Isaiah that He would not leave His people. His discipline was not to destroy them but to refine them and purge them of sin. When God's work was finished, His people would return to Him with their whole heart.

For Consideration:

- What do you learn here about the judgement and discipline of God?
- We see that the sin of God's people blocked His blessing of their land. What blocks the blessing of God in your church and your land today?
- God allowed Assyria to attack His people but then judged them for their actions. Does God stop us from sinning? If God allows us free will to sin, is He still just in punishing us?
- What is the heart of God for the widow and the orphan?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to enable you to bear His discipline with patience.
- Thank God that He has your best interests at heart when He disciplines you.
- Take a moment to consider how the Lord has disciplined you in the past. What did that discipline teach you? Thank the Lord for lessons learned.

10

THE SEVEN SPIRITS AND THE MESSIAH'S REIGN

Read Isaiah 11:1-16

In the last meditation, we learned that the Lord was going to discipline His people through the Assyrians. Through this, God would purify His people and draw them closer to Himself. In Isaiah 9:1-7 we examined Isaiah's prophecy about the coming Messiah (9:1-7). In chapter 11 Isaiah prophesied about the time when Messiah would come and lead His people into peace and security.

Although Israel would be severely reduced by God's judgement, there would be a remnant of faithful believers in the land. In verse 1 Isaiah told his people that a shoot would come up from the stump of Jesse and a Branch would grow and produce fruit. A stump is what is left after a tree has been cut down—that tree was the nation of Israel. We have already seen that Judah and Israel would be cut down under the discipline of the Lord. Notice that the stump is the stump of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David. Out of that stump of Jesse would grow a Branch

that would produce fruit. The Lord Jesus, Israel's Messiah was a descendant of David. He was the Branch that would grow from the stump of Jesse.

In verse 2 Isaiah told His people that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on this shoot or branch. The Messiah would be an instrument empowered by the Spirit of God to accomplish the will and purpose of the Father. Isaiah tells us in verse 2 that this Branch would be endowed with seven spirits. The number seven represents perfection. We also read about seven spirits in Revelation 1:4. We should not see these spirits as seven different spirits but rather different manifestations of the one Spirit of God. Let's look briefly at these seven spirits.

Spirit of the Lord

The Messiah would have the Spirit of the Lord resting on Him. A quick look at the use of this phrase in the Old Testament Scripture shows us that the Spirit of the Lord came to individuals enabling them to accomplish God's will. The Spirit of the Lord empowered tabernacle workers (Exodus 31:3), Samson (Judges 14:6), Saul (1 Samuel 10:10), and David (1 Samuel 16:13). The Spirit of the Lord would also enable Messiah to rule effectively. This spirit is evident in the Lord Jesus in how He exercised His authority as Lord to accomplish the will and purpose of the Father.

Spirit of Wisdom

Wisdom has to do with the application of truth. The Messiah would come to show Israel how the truth of God applied to everyday life. He would come to live that truth before His people and demonstrate how that truth could affect and radically change an individual who lived in it.

We see in the life of the Lord Jesus a wonderful demonstration of wisdom. He did not come simply to impart knowledge but to reveal how that knowledge could change lives.

Spirit of Understanding

The Messiah would also have the Spirit of understanding on Him. How many times do people hear the truth of God but do not understand it? The enemy has blinded the eyes of those who do not believe. Messiah would come to open those blind eyes so that they could see and understand the truth of God in a new and fresh way. He understood perfectly the will and purpose of the Father who sent Him and proclaimed that truth for us to understand.

Spirit of Counsel

Isaiah had already referred to the Messiah as Wonderful Counsellor (9:6). He would guide and direct His people and lead them in the way they needed to go. The Messiah would never leave His people but always be by their side to comfort, encourage, guide and direct.

Spirit of Power

The Messiah would also be endowed with the Spirit of power. The Lord Jesus demonstrated His power to heal and to raise individuals from the dead. This was the power of God flowing through the life of His divine servant. Through that power, the Lord Jesus would push back the forces of darkness and expand the kingdom of God.

Spirit of Knowledge

The Spirit of knowledge also rested on him. This knowledge was about God and His purposes as well as His knowledge about humanity. The Messiah would know the deep thoughts of the human heart. Nothing would be hidden from Him. The Lord Jesus knows everything we are going through. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows the thoughts of your heart. The Lord Jesus knows the end from the beginning. You may worry and fret because we do not know what tomorrow holds, but nothing takes Him by surprise.

Spirit of the Fear of the Lord

This Spirit was a spirit of reverence and obedience. The desire of the Messiah would be to honour God and to obey Him to the end. Verse 3 tells us that He would delight in the fear of the Lord. The Lord Jesus was willing to die rather than disobey or dishonour the name of the Father. He laid down His life with delight because it brought glory and honour to the name of His Father. He lived in perfect fear and obedience to the Father. He was without sin.

This passage tells us some important things about the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. He came with the authority of the Father on him. He demonstrated in practical ways the truth of God and the impact that truth could have on our lives. He opened our eyes to the truth of God in a way we could understand. He was a counsellor to guide us in the ways of God. He was filled with the power of God to accomplish God's purposes. He knew all about the needs of humanity. In all that He did, He served in the fear of the Lord. The father honoured Him because He willingly offered His life in obedience to the Father's purposes.

Those of us, who know this Lord today, have felt the impact of these wonderful attributes of the Messiah. We bow in worship and praise of the One who came to earth to draw us to the Father.

In the remainder of chapter 11, Isaiah told his people something about the reign of the Messiah. Let's examine this reign more closely. Isaiah has several things to say about this reign

A Reign of Righteousness (verses 3-5)

Messiah's reign would be a reign of righteousness and faithfulness. Isaiah told his people that the Messiah would not judge by what His eyes saw or what his ears heard. Instead, He would judge with righteousness. The Messiah's judgement would not be influenced by external appearances. He would judge all people with the knowledge of the truth about them. He would slay the wicked with the breath of His lips and the rod of His mouth. Righteousness would triumph under the Messiah's reign.

A Reign of Peace (verses 6-9)

The Messiah would lead His people into a reign of peace. This peace is without parallel in the history of the world. The conditions outlined by Isaiah indicate that there would be no more killing or shedding of blood. The wolf would lie down with the lamb and the leopard with the goat. The nursing child would play over the hole of the cobra without fear. Isaiah paints a picture of perfect security.

Notice in verse 9 that the whole earth would be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Instead of sin and evil motivating the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of the land, God's people would be motivated by the fear and knowledge of God in all they did.

We have not yet seen a day when the whole earth was full of the knowledge of the Lord. That day is yet to come. Even after the cross, we still live in a world that groans under the effects of sin and evil. Isaiah looked forward to a day when Messiah would restore complete peace and banish all evil and sin. Satan will be defeated. His work will be destroyed and the Lord will reign in His kingdom of righteousness and peace.

A Reign of Reconciliation and Restoration (verses 10-16)

The Messiah's reign would also be a reign of reconciliation and restoration. The Messiah would stand as a banner both for Israel and for the Gentiles. Isaiah tells us that His place of rest would be glorious (verse 10). Living in this peace and righteousness would be a glorious experience. Men and women would be at peace with God and with each other.

God would reach out to His hand to reclaim His people who were scattered (verse 11). God would reclaim His remnant from the lands of their exile to bring them back to the land He had promised to their fathers (verses 11-12). God's people would be restored to their place of honour.

Isaiah tells us in that in Messiah's reign strife will cease among the twelve tribes of Israel (verse 13). God was going to restore harmony between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. They would

be restored as one people—Israel. And as a united nation they would swoop down like an eagle and plunder their enemies. Israel would be free from foreign oppression.

In verse 15 Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea and the Euphrates River so that His people could return home unhindered. The Lord would prepare a highway for His exiled remnant to return from the land of Assyria, even as he had dried up the Rea Sea so His people could be set free from the bondage of Egypt.

The reign of the Messiah would be a glorious one. In His righteous kingdom, sin and evil would be banished, giving way to peace and harmony. His people would be reinstated to their rightful inheritance and to a perfect relationship with each other. All the world's nations would acknowledge the sovereign rule of Messiah.

For Consideration:

- Have you felt the impact of the Spirit of the Lord in your life? What difference has knowing Him meant to your life?
- Take a moment to examine each of the seven aspects of the Spirit of the Lord. Do you demonstrate these same attributes in your life?
- Consider for a moment what it would be like to live in a time when the whole earth was filled with the knowledge of God. What difference would that make?
- What affect has sin had on the world around us?

- One of the characteristics of Messiah's reign was that He would restore relationships between His people. Are there any barriers between you and another believer?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the way His reign has affected your life.
- Thank the Lord that He demonstrates His attributes through us to the world. Ask God to help you to be a better reflection of Christ's character to those around you.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful promise of the restoration of peace and righteousness to the earth under His reign. Ask Him to reveal this more and more as His kingdom expands.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any barriers between you and a brother or sister in Christ.
- Thank the Lord for the victory that is ours in Him.

11

PRAISE AND JUDGEMENT

Read Isaiah 12:1-13:22

In chapter 11 Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come to deliver His people and reign in righteousness and faithfulness. He would bring peace to the nations. Chapter 12 is a song of praise for the deliverance that Messiah would bring. Chapter 13 is a prophecy of judgement against Babylon.

In chapter 12 Isaiah reminded his people that the day was coming when they would sing a song of praise to the Lord. Under the reign of this wonderful Messiah, their hearts would leap for joy. In verse 1 the people praised the Lord because, although He had been angry with them, He had turned His anger away. God's discipline was ending, and He was bringing His people comfort and reassurance. He had been their judge, but He would also be their counsellor and comforter. For those of us who know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we can identify with this. We too were under the wrath of God, but because of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, that wrath has been turned from us. Now the One who was our judge has become our closest friend and counsellor.

Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when God's people would draw water with joy from the wells of salvation and give thanks to the Lord (verse 4). Their experience of this salvation would be so wonderful that they would want to share it with the world. "Call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted." These individuals would not sharing the good news about their Saviour because it was their duty but because they were so excited and overwhelmed by their God that they could not restrain their joy. There is no greater motivation than a heart full of enthusiasm and love for God. Do you have that sort of excitement in your heart?

Isaiah prophesied that in that glorious reign of Messiah, Israel would be shouting aloud for joy (verse 6). We should not hesitate to give glory to the Lord. We should not hold back. Let the praise and thanksgiving resound all over the earth. Sing for joy. Let that joy be seen. The God of Israel is a great and awesome God. He is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. How thankful we should be that we are His children, saved from His wrath. How our hearts ought to leap for joy because He has reached out to us.

In chapter 13 Isaiah's attention shifted to the nation of Babylon. This prophecy served to show God's people that He had not forsaken them. In His own time, God would judge the nations for the evil they had done to His people. It also served as a warning to the people of God of the futility of trusting these nations.

Isaiah began this prophecy by announcing that a banner was going to be raised on a bare hill. Banners were used to summon armies for war. Notice that the hill was bare. There were no obstacles standing in the way. The call

went out to many kingdoms; the Lord was mustering an army for a victorious war against the whole land of Babylon (verses 2-5).

I cannot help but see a comparison to the call of God on our lives as well. Isaiah began by painting a picture of a bald hilltop where a banner was raised. This, in some ways, is a wonderful picture of Calvary. The cross was raised up high on that barren hill and we have been summoned to appear beneath that cross to receive our battle orders. Under the banner of the cross, we have been called to move out in triumph over the enemy. Just as God's army could not fail, neither can the church of Jesus Christ. Nothing can stop the advancing of our Lord's kingdom.

The day of God's judgement would be a day to be feared. The people of Babylon were called to wail because that day was coming very soon (13:6). It would be a day of terrible destruction for this powerful nation. Hands would go limp as all strength would be drained from them. Hearts would melt with despair. The Babylonians would be seized by terror and gripped with pain and anguish. This mighty nation that had once inspired fear in the hearts of those they conquered would now experience that same fear. Isaiah compared Babylon to a woman in labour, with a face of agony (verse 8).

Isaiah told his people that the stars of the heavens and their constellations would be darkened and not show their light on that day (13:10). The same would be true for the sun and the moon.

In the "day of the LORD," God would punish the whole world for its evil. Isaiah told his people that God would put an end to the pride and ruthlessness of humanity. On that

day people would be scarcer than pure gold. Many would perish because of their sin and rebellion against God.

Isaiah prophesied that in the day of judgement, the Lord would shake the whole earth (13:13). There are many similarities between Isaiah's words and the vision that John saw in Revelation 6:12-14:

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Both Isaiah and John spoke about a time when the lights of the sky would be dimmed and the earth shaken as the Lord moved in anger and judgement on the earth. Perhaps this prophecy of Isaiah has yet to be completely fulfilled. It was fulfilled in part when the Medes and the Persians invaded the conquered the nation of Babylon and defeated the enemies of God's people. That historical victory, however, may be a symbol of an even greater victory that is yet to come when the last Babylon will be destroyed (Revelation 18).

Isaiah warned the Babylonians that their conquest would be very harsh (13:14-16). People would scatter like frightened animals. Those who were captured would be killed with the sword. Their children would be dashed to pieces while their parents watched. Their houses would be looted and the women raped as this terrible army of the Medes and Persians lashed out against them. These Medes would not care for silver or have any delight in

gold. They would not be bribed. They would come to conquer, and they would not show pity.

Isaiah prophesied that Babylon, which was at one time a jewel among the nations, would become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Babylon would never again be inhabited (13:20). No one would pitch a tent that in that land. The once-prosperous land would become a desert wasteland given to the desert creatures. Jackals would fill her houses. This land of prosperous cities would now become a place for wild animals. The hyenas would howl in her strongholds and the jackals would inherit her luxurious palaces. This day was coming quickly.

This chapter reminds us that there is a day of judgement coming on the world, just as it came for Babylon. It is important for us to note that this prophecy of Babylon's fall came many years before it happened. After Isaiah's time, Babylon would increase in power on the earth. She would rise up against God's people and conquer them. For seventy years, God's people would be in exile in Babylon. It would be hard for God's people to understand this prophecy when, instead of seeing Babylon fall, they saw her increasing in power and influence on the earth. Their faith in God's purposes would be stretched as they waited for Isaiah's prophecy to come to pass. There are times in my life when I have prayed for victory and seen things get worse. We should not lose hope in these times. While we may not see this victory immediately, God is working out His purposes. He will not fail.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to you that God your judge has become God your Saviour?
- What motivates you to share the gospel with others?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God has summoned His people to move out in triumph over their enemies under the banner of the cross?
- Have you ever found yourself praying for victory in a certain area of your life only to see things get worse for a time? What comfort do you receive from this passage?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you the reality of what He has done for you through the Lord Jesus.
- Ask the Lord to stir up your heart to rejoice like those in chapter 12.
- Thank the Lord that He does lead us into victory.
- Ask the Lord to give you confidence in your struggle that, although things seem to be presently getting worse, He will conquer evil and lead you into victory.

12

FALLEN BABYLON, ASSYRIA AND PHILISTIA

Read Isaiah 14:1-32

In the last meditation, we saw the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the fate of Babylon. This was prophesied many years before it actually happened. At this point in history, God's people did not see the real threat of Babylon, because Assyria was more dominant. However, God was going to raise up Babylon, use her to judge His people, and then destroy her. God would again have compassion on His people, and they would be released from the grip of Babylon.

In verse 1 Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when God would return His people to the land He had given them. Notice that aliens or foreigners would assist Israel in this return. We can see a historical example of this in the way the Persian kings—Darius and Cyrus—assisted the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland after the Babylonian captivity. This return was decreed by these pagan kings who even paid for the rebuilding of

Jerusalem. In verse 2 Isaiah stated that following this return, Israel would have authority over the nations that formerly oppressed her.

In the day that the Lord restored her blessing, Israel would celebrate the downfall of the king of Babylon who had been their oppressor. Verses 4-23 bring to light the Lord's description of this pagan king and his end. In verse 4 Isaiah began by announcing that the end had come for the king of Babylon. God's wrath had fallen on him, and the Lord had broken the rod of the wicked and the sceptre of the rulers. It was with this rod that the people of God had been oppressed. The sceptre was a symbol of power and authority. God broke this authority.

Notice in verse 6 the reason for the great anger of the Lord against the king of Babylon. Isaiah revealed that he struck down people with unceasing blows. He was relentless in his aggression against God's people and many other nations. The Lord was not blind to this. Verse 7 tells us the response of the nations to the downfall of Babylon was joyful singing. Even the trees join in the happy chorus.

In verses 9-11 Isaiah pictured the grave being astir because the king was dead. The spirits of other departed rulers were aroused to greet the king who was descending to the grave. They mocked him that he had become weak and helpless like them (verse 10). All his pomp had been brought down to the grave. The noise of harps used in his former victory celebrations was silenced. Instead of the royal robes that covered him on earth, maggots and worms would be his covering in death.

The king of Babylon was portrayed in verse 12 as a fallen star from heaven. Many commentators see in verses 12-

15 a symbolic reference to Satan and to his downfall. Notice that this star had been cast down to earth. Babylon's king felt that he was a god. He felt that he could raise his throne even above the throne of God. There were times when he openly defied the people of Judah and their God. He believed that not even God could stop him in his conquests. He saw himself as an awesome leader, seated in the heights of the mountain of God. He boasted that he would one day make himself like the Most High God and raise himself above the tops of the clouds.

His pride was his downfall. The God of Israel would bring him down to the grave. He would be destroyed along with all his pride. As powerful as he was, he was no match for the God of Israel. All who oppose our God's reign will be brought down. Even our great enemy Satan will be brought down to the pit (Revelation 20:10).

The nations would stare at the defeated Babylon. They would be given cause to reflect. "Is this the man who shook the earth . . . and made the world a desert, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?" (verses 16-17).

The fate of the king of Babylon would be different from that of the other rulers. The kings of the other nations lay in state, and each was properly buried in his own tomb. Babylon's leader, however, would be cast out of his tomb and covered with those whom he had slain. He would be like a corpse trampled underfoot. He was unworthy of the honour of a proper burial because he had destroyed his own people.

Isaiah reminded his people in verse 20 that the offspring of the wicked king would never be mentioned again. As a

nation, the great Babylon would cease to exist. In verse 21 the Lord called for a place to be prepared for the slaughter of the king's sons because of their sin. These sons would never inherit the land their father had taken by violence from others. These sons would not rise to cover the earth with cities like their forefathers. They would perish along with their influence.

God was going to rise up against Babylon (verse 22). He would cut off her name from the earth. Her offspring would not pass on her name to the next generation. Her once-prosperous and glorious land would become a swampland. God would sweep her with the broom of destruction. This was God's plan for Babylon, and nothing could change that plan.

While Babylon was one of the great enemies of God's people, she was not the only one. God would also judge the other nations because of their evil. It is important that we understand that these nations never claimed to worship the Lord God of Israel. They had not grown up like the Israelites, hearing the stories of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were not linked to this God by means of a covenant. They were unbelieving nations. However, the individuals in these nations would still be held accountable to the God of Israel. They would be judged even though they did not have the prophets in their midst. We must take this matter seriously. Those who do not know the Lord will be judged. Those who have never heard the truth are still lost in their sin and need the Saviour.

Assyria and the Nations

Isaiah began this section with a judgement against the nation of Assyria (verse 25). The Lord would crush

Assyria (see 37:36-37). God promised that He would trample down the king of Assyria who had opposed His people. He would take the Assyrian yoke from off the necks of His people. What God did to Babylon and Assyria was His plan for the whole earth (verse 26). Isaiah stated that the hand of God was stretched out over all nations. This is a very sobering thought. There is not an individual on the surface of the earth who does not need to be set free from this judgement of God. Because God is holy, He will not ignore sin and rebellion. Only those who have been covered by the blood of the Lord Jesus can escape this judgement. Nothing can turn back the hand of God. He has determined to deal with sin and evil (verse 27).

Philistia

It was in the year that King Ahaz died that Isaiah received this prophecy regarding the nation of Philistia. In verse 29 the Lord told the Philistines not to rejoice that the rod that had struck them was broken. A quick look at the history of the Philistines will show us that Uzziah of Judah conquered the Philistines (2 Chronicles 26:6). For a number of years, they were not a problem to Judah. It was under the reign of Ahaz, however, that the Philistines broke free from this domination (2 Chronicles 28:18). The Philistines were rejoicing in their new found freedom. Isaiah reminded them, however, that their rejoicing would be temporary. They had broken the rod that had been oppressing them, but a viper would spring out of that broken rod. That viper would strike them, and they would perish. God would destroy them at the very root.

Verse 30 tells us that while the poorest of the poor would find pasture and the needy would lie down in safety, Philistia would be destroyed at the root. Who were these

poor that would lie down in safety? Could they have been the people Philistia was oppressing? They would find pasture and lie down in safety because their oppressor, the Philistines, would be judged by God and would not rise again.

A great cry would be heard from the nation of Philistia. They were melting away under the intense heat of God's wrath. A great cloud of smoke rose up from the north. This was where the enemy would descend upon them. Notice that there was not a straggler in the ranks of this powerful army that came from the north. Every soldier was intent on defeating Philistia.

Verse 32 tells us that in that day envoys sent to Judah would be told of how God had established His people and given them refuge from her enemies. God would protect His people. The picture Isaiah presented was of the Lord God judging the nations in His holy anger. Only His people would be safe.

This section reminds us very powerfully of the wrath of God. He is a God who will judge sin and evil. His sovereign hand is over all the nations of the earth. A day of accounting and judgement is coming. Only those who are saved by His grace will be protected. While He is a flaming fire for those who have rejected Him, He is a refuge for those who have accepted His salvation.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about the holy anger of the Lord?

- What hope would we have if God did not get angry with sin and rebellion but simply let it go unpunished?
- What does this chapter teach us about the need to share the hope we have in the Lord Jesus with the nations?
- Where do you stand with this holy God of righteous judgement? Are you sure of a relationship with him? How do you know?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He promises victory over sin and evil.
- Thank Him that, as a holy and just God, He will deal with sin and evil in our world.
- Thank Him that He sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to take the punishment of our sin so that we could be set free from His divine wrath.
- Ask the Lord to show you how to reach out to those who have not yet trusted in Him.

13

JUDGEMENT OF MOAB

Read Isaiah 15:1-16:14

Isaiah had been prophesying about the divine judgement of various nations that oppressed the people of God. God was comforting His people by telling them that He would avenge their harsh treatment and protect a believing remnant. In chapters 15 and 16 Isaiah spoke a prophecy against the nation of Moab, which lay east of Judah. Let's consider what the Lord had to say to this nation.

Isaiah began by announcing the devastation of the various Moabite cities. The cities of Ar and Kir would be destroyed in a night (15:1). This showed how easily this nation would fall. Dibon was pictured as going up to its temple and high places to weep. These high places were the Moabites worshiped their gods. This same weeping would be heard in the cities of Nebo and Medeba. The shaving of heads and beards was a sign of mourning. People could be seen in the streets wearing sackcloth as they grieved for the condition of their land. The hearts of the armed men of Moab would faint within them. They

would be powerless before the devastation around them (verse 4).

Isaiah, representing the Lord God, lamented the condition of the nation of Moab. He saw fugitives fleeing as far away as Zoar, on the extreme boundary. They fled, weeping as they went. Isaiah saw the whole nation in mourning and shock. They would be completely ruined.

The waters of Nimrim would be dried up, and the vegetation withered away (verse 6). There would be nothing green in the land at all. The blessing of God would be removed. Moabites were seen carrying their wealth with them as they fled to safer regions. Their crying would be heard along the border of Moab and as far as the city of Eglaim, in the extreme south, and to Beer Elim, in the extreme east. Dimon's water was full of blood, and more death was coming. Fleeing the invading armies would not bring security because wild beasts would hunt down the refugees (15:9).

In light of this terrible devastation, the leaders of Moab would send a tribute of lambs to Judah (16:1). Could it be that the reason for this was to gain the favour of the God of Judah? Moab would need all the help she could get in this time of judgement. Moab's women would be pushed from their land like birds from their nest. They are pictured as crying out to Judah for counsel and help. God's people had at one point been subject to the nation of Moab. But the tables would be turned. Moab would ask Judah to make a shadow like night at high noon to hide Moab's fleeing refugees so that they could escape unseen.

For Judah the day was coming when a throne would be established (16:5). A king would sit in faithfulness on that

throne. He would be a descendant of David, and He would judge with justice and righteousness. The Lord Jesus fits this description. The day was coming when Judah would experience blessing from a great king. That blessing would come when the Messiah came to sit on His throne and establish righteousness and justice on the earth.

Isaiah continues with the theme of Moab's destruction (16:6). Moab was going to be judged because of her pride and insolence. She had made many boasts, but all those boasts were empty. Under the discipline of God, she would wail and grieve. Her fields and vines would wither away. The rulers of the nations would invade and trample down her choicest vines. Those vines stretched out toward the desert and as far as the sea. As profitable and as fruitful as they were, they would be ruined. Moab would weep for her destroyed vines. The cities of Heshbon and Elealeh would be drenched with tears. The shouts of joy over abundant harvests would cease. No one would sing for joy in the orchards anymore. God would put an end to all the jubilant shouting.

Isaiah felt agony in what he saw (16:11). His heart lamented for Moab. All Moab's prayers and sacrifices to her gods on the high places were to no avail. She wore herself out for nothing in seeking help from her gods. There was nothing they could do for her. They were powerless before the judgement of the God of Israel and Judah.

Isaiah prophesied that within three years all Moab's splendour would be ruined. She would be left with very few survivors. Again, in these chapters we come face to face with the judgement of the Lord God. Everything that Moab had amassed would be of no value to her in the

end. Her gods would not be able to help her. She would fall and there was nothing she could do about it. God had already determined the details of her fate.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the judgement of God?
- Why do we not hear much about the judgement of God in our day?
- What should be our response to the understanding that the Lord is a God of holiness and justice?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to understand what He has done for you in setting you free from His wrath.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has not understood that God will truly judge sin in the end.

14

A WORD TO SYRIA AND ISRAEL

Read Isaiah 17:1-14

Earlier in the book of Isaiah, we saw that the northern kingdom of Israel had formed an alliance with Aram (Syria) in an attempt to conquer the people of the southern kingdom of Judah. In this chapter we return to this alliance. God had a word for both Syria and Israel.

In verse 1 Isaiah introduced his prophecy by telling his people that it was an oracle concerning Damascus (the capital of Syria). He prophesied that this city and the country it represented would become a heap of ruins. The cities of Aroer would be deserted and left to the flocks of sheep. Isaiah tells us in verse 2 that there would not be anyone left in the city to make these sheep afraid.

In Israel the same thing would happen. The fortified cities of Ephraim (the largest tribe in the northern kingdom) would disappear. The power of Damascus would fall. The glory of the remnants of Aram would fall like the glory of

Israel. Isaiah prophesied that the glory of Israel would be taken from her because of her disobedience in trusting pagan nations for her security instead of the Lord Almighty.

The fat of Israel would waste away (verse 4). The fat was a symbol of the prosperity of the land. That prosperity would be stripped from the people. They would waste away under the discipline of the Lord. The day of the judgement of Israel is compared to a reaper that gathered the harvest (verse 5). This harvester would take away the fruit and prosperity of the nation. Isaiah prophesied, however, that while the harvester would strip their blessings, he would leave a remnant.

God would do a powerful work through those who remained after His judgement. These individuals would look to their Maker again (verse 7). They would turn from their pagan altars and the works of their own hands and look to the Holy One of Israel. No longer would they seek aid from their pagan Asherah poles or to their incense altars.

While that day of renewal was coming, there was also a day of discipline when the strong cities of the land would be abandoned and left to become thickets. Because they had forsaken God their Saviour and not remembered the Rock, their fortress they would be stripped of His blessings (verse 10). They would plant the finest plants in the soil, but, even though they had the skills necessary to bring them to bud, they would not see the harvest. The blessing of the Lord would be removed from their harvest. We can have tremendous skill and do everything the right way, but, if the hand of the Lord is not on what we do, we will not see the harvest. This is true in the physical world, but it is also true in the spiritual world as well.

This chapter concludes with a picture of the nations raging and roaring like the sea (verse 12). These nations are raging and roaring as they approach to destroy Israel. As powerful as they were, when the Lord rebuked them, they flee from His presence. They are driven away like chaff blown in the wind on the hills. They fled like tumbleweed blown by the force of a great wind.

Isaiah tells us that Israel would be harvested. The harvester would fall on her and strip her of her blessings, but there would be a remnant left. God would not allow His people, sinful as they were, to be completely destroyed. In verses 12-14 we see that the enemy would come to loot and plunder, but God would deal with them. He would only allow them to go so far before driving them away. Even Israel's enemies were controlled by God. God would protect and guard the remnant of His people. When He had accomplished His purposes through Israel's enemies, He would drive those enemies away and restore His people as He promised in verses 7 and 8.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the control of the Lord, even over the enemies of His people?
- What do we learn about our need of God despite our skills, gifts, and talents?
- What does this passage teach us about the mercy and compassion of the Lord in His discipline?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He restrains the efforts of our enemies?
- Ask the Lord to help you to see your need of His blessing on your gifts and talents in order to produce lasting fruit.

15

ETHIOPIA AND EGYPT

Read Isaiah 18:1-19:1-25

The prophecy of chapter 18 begins with an announcement of judgement: “Woe to the land of whirring wings along the rivers of the Cush” (verse 1). Isaiah spoke of Cush (Ethiopia) as a land of whirring wings. This probably referred to the boats they used with great wing-like sails. The sound described was the wind in these sails as they journeyed down the rivers. Verse 2 seems to favour this interpretation, stating that Cush sent out envoys in papyrus boats.

These envoys were to go swiftly to a people of smooth skin who were feared far and wide and to an aggressive nation with a strange speech living in a land divided by waters. Perhaps this was a call for these messengers to return to their own country and announce the danger that was coming to them.

In verse 3 the whole earth was to witness what was about to happen to this people in the land of whirling wings. A banner was going to be raised up on the mountain. That

banner was a rallying point for the army that was going to go out in the name of the Lord. The day was coming when the trumpet would sound and the battle cry would go forth. Cush would hear that trumpet and see the banner that was raised against her.

The Lord would remain quiet and wait for the right time to fulfil this prophecy of judgment. The New Living Translation interprets the last part of verse 4 in the following way:

I will watch quietly from my dwelling place—as quietly as the heat rises on a summer day, or as the dew forms on an autumn morning during the harvest.

For the moment the blossom was coming on the plants, indicating a good harvest (verse 5). But before that blossom would produce fruit, the Lord would cut it off with His pruning knife. When Cush was at her height, the Lord would cut her down. As powerful as she was, she would fall under the sovereign Lord's judgement.

In the day that Isaiah spoke this prophecy, Cush was a powerful influence. In Isaiah 37:9 we read that the army of Cush chose to fight the powerful Assyrians. Cush, however, would be humbled by the Lord God. Verse 6 shows us the extent of that humbling. The people of Cush would be left for the birds of prey and the wild animals to devour. The birds would feed on them all summer and the wild animals all winter. God would break their pride and humble them in the eyes of the world. This powerful nation would be brought low.

It would be easy for us to assume from this that the Lord had finished with the nation of Cush. This was very far from the truth. How thankful we need to be for verse 7

that tells us that the day was coming when Cush would bring gifts to the Lord Almighty. This nation of people who were powerful and feared far and wide would, after the discipline of God, become a worshipping people. This aggressive nation divided by rivers would bring gifts to the Lord God in Zion. God's intention was to bring these people to Himself. Even in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, we see the great missionary heart of God. He wanted to raise up a worshipping people from every nation. Cush would experience this work of God. Before that could happen, however, her pride needed to be broken. Only when that pride and self-reliance was broken would this promise be fulfilled.

In chapter 19 the focus changed to the nation of Egypt. Isaiah began by portraying the Lord coming to Egypt to judge her. Isaiah foresaw the Lord riding a swift cloud to judge Egypt. As His chariot of clouds drew near, the idols of Egypt trembled, and the hearts of the Egyptians melted within them.

In that day of judgement, the Lord would stir the Egyptians against themselves. There would be internal strife. They would lash out against each other. They would not be able to trust even their own fellow citizens. Egyptians would lose heart. God would bring their plans to nothing. They would consult their idols and the spirits of the dead in an attempt to protect themselves, but none of this would help (19:3). The Lord would hand them over to a cruel master. They would be subject to a fierce king who would rule over them, and their power would be broken.

God's blessing would be removed from Egypt. The waters of the river Nile would dry up. Its river bed would be parched and dry. The canals would stink and the streams of Egypt would dwindle and dry up. The vegeta-

tion as well would wither away. The plants that grew along the Nile River would perish. The fields along the Nile too would become parched and blow away in the wind. The prosperity of the land would be removed.

It is important for us to understand how dependent we are on the Lord for all things. With the hand of the Lord removed from the land, everything would fail. The Egyptians would not get along with each other. Their fishing industry and their textile industry would fail. Their sources of water would dry up. The enemy would come in and take over all they had. Where would we be today if it were not for the Lord's hand of blessing on us?

Isaiah turned his attention to Egypt's leaders and officials (19:11). The Lord characterised Egyptian officials as nothing but fools. Pharaoh believed himself to be one of the wisest men on the earth, but he would perish along with all his wisdom. Egyptian wisdom would not save him in the day of the Lord's judgement. If the officials of Egypt were really wise, they would have kept Egypt from this terrible judgement.

The sovereign Lord would pour out on Egyptians a spirit of dizziness (19:14). They would be like drunkards who staggered and fell in their own vomit. There would be nothing that Egypt could do under this terrible judgement of God (19:15). From the head to the tail or from the least to the greatest among them, no one would help them. The whole land would shudder with fear at the uplifted hand of the Lord.

Isaiah tells us that while Egypt would be brought down, Judah would be lifted high (19:17). The Lord would again empower His people. Even the mention of the name of Judah would bring terror to the hearts of the nations.

Why would the Lord humble the nation of Egypt in this manner? Isaiah tells us that the day was coming when the cities of Egypt would speak the language of the people of Judah and swear allegiance to her God (19:18). Notice that one of the cities that would make allegiance to the Lord God was called the City of Destruction.

It is unclear why this city was called the City of Destruction. What is clear is that this city would find new hope in the Lord God of Israel. God can transform whole cities and whole nations for his glory. He can break the pride of nations so that they will come to Him. This picture gives us hope for our own land.

The day was coming when there would be an altar to the Lord God in the middle of Egypt (19:19). A monument to the Lord God would stand at her border so that all who came into the land would know that this land was dedicated to the Lord God of Israel. That monument would be a witness to the world of the Lord God Almighty.

While under oppression Egyptians would cry out to the Lord. The Lord would hear them and send a saviour to their rescue. While this leader might only be a political saviour, the Lord promised to do a powerful spiritual work among them as well. The Lord would make himself known to the Egyptians. He would do so by breaking their pride. The day was coming when the Lord God would be worshipped in the land of Egypt. The people in this land would offer Him sacrifices and offerings. They would make vows to the Lord and keep those vows (19:21).

It is true that the Lord would strike Egypt with a plague again, but the day was coming when He would also heal her. Under this discipline of the Lord, Egyptians would

call out to Him. Isaiah promised that the Lord God would listen to their cry and come to their aid.

The day was coming, said Isaiah, when there would be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. Both of these powerful nations would go together to worship the Lord. In that day, Israel would also go along with them. There would be peace among these nations who were formerly enemies. Worshipping the same Lord would draw these nations together in a common bond. God's blessing would be on Egypt; Assyria would be His handiwork; Israel would be His inheritance. All would belong to the Lord and know His blessing.

Once again, it is vital that we see what the Lord is doing in this chapter. Isaiah tells us that the heart of God is for the nations. We see that God was going to do a powerful work in the land of Egypt. He was going to humble the Egyptians for a time so that they would see their need of Him and come to Him. God would raise up a people for Himself in Egypt. He would do the same in the nation of Assyria. He would also restore peace between these nations. God's heart is a missionary heart. How we need to thank the Lord that his heart is for the world. He is not only the God of the Jews—He also the God of the nations. While elements of this prophecy are coming to pass as the gospel penetrates these countries in our day there may still be a further fulfilment yet to come.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the love of God for the nations?

- What does the Lord need to break in your life in order to bring you to this place of renewal?
- God's heart clearly embraces the nations. Does your church have this missionary heart for the nations?
- Why do you suppose God's blessing often comes through the breaking of pride and great struggle?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal anything that stands in the way of His blessing on your life and society.
- Thank the Lord that His heart is for the world. Ask Him to give you this same heart for the world.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the particular blessings He had given you.

16

STRIPPED AND BAREFOOT

Read Isaiah 20:1-6

There are times when the prophets of the Old Testament were called to act out the word of the Lord. Sometimes people would understand more from the actions of a prophet than from his words. Isaiah was not alone in this. Ezekiel was called to lie on his left side to symbolise judgement for the northern kingdom of Israel and on his right side to symbolise judgement for the southern kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah was told not to marry in order to explain to his people that the Lord was going to take away their wives and their children. Hosea was to marry a prostitute to remind the people of their unfaithfulness. Jesus often illustrated His messages in parables.

The events of chapter 20 happened in the year that the supreme commander Sargon of Assyria came to Ashdod. Ashdod was a city in the region of the Philistines. History tells us that the Assyrians under Sargon conquered this city of Ashdod in 711 BC. It was at this time that the Lord gave Isaiah a very particular command. The Lord told him to take off his sackcloth and sandals (verse 2). It should be noted that sackcloth was a garment of coarse hair that

was worn by an individual who was in mourning. Isaiah was obviously wearing this garment as a symbol of what would happen to Israel, Judah, and the nations in his prophecies. Although his prophecies spoke of future events, the prophet knew that all the Lord's words would come to pass. Isaiah did not proclaim his messages of doom and gloom without feeling the pain of those messages in his heart.

Verse 2 tells us that, in obedience to the Lord, the prophet went about stripped and barefoot. From verse 3 we understand that Isaiah lived this way for three years. It would not be hard to imagine the shame that Isaiah felt. When God called him to be a prophet, he called for the surrender of his heart and will. Isaiah could not choose the words he wanted to speak. Having surrendered his will to the Lord, he chose to be obedient even if it meant humiliation.

There was a very particular reason why the Lord was asking Isaiah to do this. Verse 3 tells us that just as Isaiah had gone three years stripped and barefoot, so the king of Assyria would lead away the people of Cush and Egypt barefoot and naked with their buttocks exposed. Obviously, this was a means of humiliating the captives. As they were marched naked at the point of the sword, they were publicly exposed and shamed. For three years Isaiah acted out this prophecy in obedience to the Lord. We could only wonder if we would have the courage to obey the Lord in this way.

God would show the world how futile it would be to trust in these nations for help. When those who sought help from Egypt and Cush saw what happened to them, they would understand that all who rely on nations instead of the Lord would be put to shame (verse 6).

We need to see the end for those who trust in human strength. Those who watched these great nations march naked at the point of the sword into captivity would realize that there was not a force on earth that could protect them from the wrath of God. We need to be willing, like Isaiah, to be obedient no matter the cost. Would you be willing to obey the Lord like Isaiah? Are you willing to risk everything to be obedient to what the Lord is calling you to do? Will you surrender your will, heart and life unreservedly to the Lord for Him to use as He pleases?

For Consideration:

- What stands in the way of complete and total obedience to the Lord and His will for your life?
- Take a moment to consider if there is any way that you have been trusting in human efforts rather than in the Lord.
- What is your motivation in ministry? To what extent are you serving the Lord for what you can get out of it yourself? What sacrifices would you be willing to make to be obedient to the Lord and His call on your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to enable you to live in total obedience to Him.
- Ask the Lord to purge you of any self-centred motives in ministry. Ask Him to make you like Isaiah, who not only deeply felt His messages but was

willing to sacrifice everything so that the messages would be communicated to his people.

17

FROM THE DESERT BY THE SEA TO THE VALLEY OF VISION

Read Isaiah 21:1-22:14

Commentators agree that chapter 21 refers to the land of Babylon as a Desert by the Sea. Historians tell us that the land Babylon occupied was once covered by the Euphrates River. A system of dykes was built to make the land usable. These dykes were eventually broken, and the land returned to a swamp.

Isaiah prophesied that a great whirlwind of judgement would sweep through the southland—invaders would come to invade Babylon.

Isaiah saw in his vision that the Babylonians would be treated treacherously. The enemy would come and loot the land. The nations of Elam and Media would lay siege to Babylon. Historians tell us that Elam and Media were part of the Persian army that defeated Babylon in 539

BC. God would judge Babylon because she had caused a lot of nations to groan. God was going to give her a taste of her own medicine.

As a prophet, Isaiah felt very deeply the pain of what of what he prophesied (verse 3). Isaiah's body was racked with pain, like that of a woman in labour. He staggered at what he heard. His heart seemed to falter, and he began to tremble with the understanding of the message he was proclaiming.

In verse 5 Babylon was pictured spreading out her rugs to eat and drink and also prepare for war. The tables would be set and the food prepared, and the officers would be told to oil their shields. These shields were covered with leather and anointed with oil to prevent the leather from cracking. This prophecy may have been fulfilled when amid a celebration of Belshazzar, the Persian army invaded Babylon (Daniel 5).

In his vision the Lord called Isaiah to post a lookout and report any chariots accompanied by riders on donkeys and camels. Historians tell us that this was how the Persian army marched. As the watchman went out, he reminded Isaiah that he stood day after day at the watchtower, and every night he stood his post (verse 8). It should be mentioned that some translations (NKJV and KJV) use the word lion in this verse instead of lookout.

The meaning seems to be the same. The idea was that the watchman compared himself to a lion. The lion is very alert when he stalks his prey. Every sense in its body is finely tuned and ready to hear or see the smallest detail that would give away the location of the prey. Like the lion, the watchman was finely tuned and ready to do his task. Like a lion, he would let nothing get past him.

From the Desert by the Sea to the Valley of Vision¹⁰⁷

Verse 9 shows us the result of the diligent work of this watchman. He spotted a chariot in the distance. This chariot brought the message that Babylon had fallen, and all her images and gods had been shattered on the ground. Although Isaiah's prediction foresaw the conquest of Babylon by the Assyrians in 689 BC and by the Persians in 539 BC, this prophecy may also look forward to the ultimate fall to God's great enemy (Revelation 14:8; 18:2).

There is no reference to the battle that took place. Babylon seems to have fallen in an instant. Her power was no match for the Lord Almighty. Isaiah spoke this prophecy to Judah who would be conquered by Babylon and crushed like grain on a threshing floor. He spoke to encourage God's people that they would not be forsaken in their trial and that their oppressor would be defeated (verse 10).

In verse 11 the scene changes from Babylon to Edom, as Isaiah speaks about the region of Dumah in the nation of Edom. The word *dumah* means "silence." Many commentators think that this particular region was chosen to represent Edom because the only response to this judgment was silence. Perhaps *dumah* referred to the ultimate future of Edom. She would be silenced.

A voice called out from Seir (Edom) and asked Isaiah: "What is left of the night?" (verse 11). The night represented the trouble that Edom was experiencing. The question was really, How much more trouble will we see? How much longer will we have to suffer?

Notice the response of the prophet in verse 12. Isaiah prophesied that morning was coming, but so was the night. In other words, Edom would experience a short-

lived deliverance from oppression, but more foreign domination would follow. Historically, we understand that after this prophecy, Assyria would oppress Edom. Then, the nation of Judah would be captured by the Babylonians. Edom would rejoice greatly and profit from the fall of Jerusalem. This is the subject of the Book of Obadiah. This rejoicing would not last for Edom, as her day of judgement would return. She too would fall to Babylon, just as the prophet spoke in this passage.

In verses 13-17 Isaiah spoke about the region of Arabia. These Arabic people were nomadic, living in caravans and wandering over desert regions. In particular, they were pictured as fleeing from the battles that raged around them. Though they had no fixed land of their own, they too were suffering from what was happening. In verse 14 a call went out to Tema (a desert city in north-west Arabia) to bring water and bread to the fugitives, who were thirsty and hungry. Verse 15 tells us clearly that these fugitives were fleeing from the sword, the bow, and the heat of the battle.

These wandering Arabians were also guilty before the Lord. Through Isaiah the Lord told them that in one year to the date, the pomp of Kedar (area of northern Arabia) would come to an end. The Lord bound Himself to this date as a servant would be bound to a contract. There was nothing that would stop the Lord God of Israel from accomplishing His purposes in the time He had determined. In one year God would destroy the pride of these wandering tribes of Kedar. The deserts of Arabia would provide no security for refugees as they sought shelter from the advancing armies. The only sure security was in the God of Israel.

From the Desert by the Sea to the Valley of Vision¹⁰⁹

The prophecy in chapter 22 concerned Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by mountains. It is described here as the Valley of Vision because it was the place where God revealed Himself in visions to His prophets.

Isaiah foresaw serious trouble in Jerusalem. He reproached the people for going up on their flat rooftops to rejoice when they should have been repenting for their sins. God's judgement was approaching. The people would not die in combat (but by starvation), and the leaders would flee but be captured (22:2-3, 2 Kings 25:2-6).

Isaiah grieved as he realised the destiny of the people of God. His heart was broken by what he saw in his vision. Isaiah refused to be comforted (22:4). The Lord would bring a terrible judgement on Jerusalem. On that day the walls of the city would be battered down, and the people would be crying out to the mountains for help.

Elam and Kir would prepare for battle. Isaiah did not identify Babylon as the main force but instead named two of her many allies, perhaps emphasising the size of the foe. The choicest valleys would become full of chariots, and horsemen would be posted at the city gates. Judah's defences would be stripped away as the Lord removed His defensive shield. Judah would search everywhere for weapons and defences, faithlessly trusting in physical strength instead of the Lord. The people would use all their resource, but they would fail to look to God for help (22:11).

The Lord was calling His people to seek Him and to weep for their sin and the condition of their land. The Lord was calling them through these prophecies and circumstances

to pull out their hair, put on sackcloth and mourn. Notice what they were doing instead of mourning and humbling themselves. God's people chose to bury their guilt and pain by having a great party (22:13). They laughed and expressed their superficial joy. They slaughtered their cattle and prepared great banquets. They ate and drank wine until they were full. The people of Judah had no regard for eternal values.

Because of their unwillingness to repent and turn to God, Isaiah told them that until their dying day their sin would not be atoned for (22:14). They would go to the grave with their sin and have to face a holy God. What a terrible thing this would be. There are believers who will go to the grave with unresolved issues between them and other believers. There are some who will never deal with the bitterness and anger that ravages their hearts. There are believers who will go to the grave never having found victory over certain sins in their lives. They will stand before a holy God one day. They will wish that they had made things right.

The prophecies of the last eleven verses of chapter 22 concerned two men—Shebna and Eliakim. These prophecies provided immediate evidence that the prophecy about Jerusalem would also come to pass at a later date. Shebna (22:15-19) was self-seeking and proud, just like the people of Jerusalem. Shebna was in charge of the palace, second in authority to the king. To guarantee future recognition, he prepared a grand tomb for himself, worthy of his status. But God would throw him out of Judah and into a foreign country where he would die in disgrace. God would depose him from his high office and give his position to another.

From the Desert by the Sea to the Valley of Vision¹¹¹

The Lord would choose Eliakim to replace Shebna (22:20-25). The Lord predicted that Eliakim would prove to be an able and sacrificial leader of the people. He is referred to here as “my servant.” God would place on his shoulder a key. The key on his shoulder symbolised his authority. He would become a stabilising force, a “tent peg,” in Judah during troubling times. All who trusted in his capable leadership, however, instead of trusting in the Lord, would be disappointed. Even Eliakim would “give way” and “fall.” Our only certainty is in the Lord God.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about Isaiah’s heart? Do you grieve like Isaiah over the condition of those who are not right with God?
- Are there issues that you need to make right with God? Have you been guilty of burying those issues instead of dealing with them?
- What are the gifts and responsibilities the Lord has given you? Have you been faithful?
- What does this passage tell us about putting confidence in people? Who alone should be our confidence?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything you need to deal with in your relationship with Him. Ask Him for the strength to confess and deal with any sin that He reveals to you.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have trusted in yourselves and not in Him.

- Ask the Lord to open the eyes of your nation to the truth of God and His purpose before it is too late.
- Ask the Lord to enable you to be faithful to what He is calling you to do.

18

A WORD TO TYRE

Read Isaiah 23:1-18

Attention shifted to the nation of Tyre. Tyre was an important Phoenician seaport known in Bible times as a great commercial centre, famous for its purple dye. The older part of the city was located on a rocky fortress about half a mile from the shore, and the area on the mainland was on a rocky, narrow strip of coastline. The name Tyre means “rocky.”

Isaiah began with a cry to the ships of Tarshish. The term *ships of Tarshish* most likely referred to large trading vessels capable of open sea voyages to and from the city of Tarshish in Spain. These merchant ships were called to wail because the destruction of Tyre would remove a great source of income from them. These seamen would learn about this when they reached the port of Cyprus.

Isaiah called the people of Phoenicia to be silent. This included the merchants of Sidon, another important coastal port. This silence was commanded because there

was nothing they could say that would change the mind of the Lord and the judgement He was going to render.

The people of Tyre and Sidon had been enriched by many nations. Merchants travelled from many countries, bringing their wares. From the region of Shihor in Egypt came grain. The harvest of the Nile River was part of the revenue enjoyed by Tyre, which had become the marketplace of the nations and a very prosperous city.

In verse 4 Sidon was called to be ashamed. Tyre, the fortress of the sea, was also to be ashamed. The sea spoke out against them. The sea, which had been their source of income and life, refused to recognise them as her children. Tyre had been the pride of the earth, but would become a place of shame.

In verse 5 Egypt would hear the word of the defeat of Tyre. Egypt would be in anguish because Tyre had been a principal source of income for Egypt. One of her greatest trading partners would be destroyed. This would have devastating consequences for Egypt.

In verse 6 the inhabitants of Tyre were called to escape to Tarshish for help and support in their hour of need. Verse 7 reminds us that this city of Tyre was an old and grand city. Her inhabitants had once travelled and established colonies, but soon they would be forced to leave and settle in far-off lands. Tyre had been secure in her long history and prosperity, but all that would be taken from her.

Verse 8 reminds us that Tyre was the one who bestowed crowns and whose merchants lived like princes. Her traders were renown in the earth. Isaiah asked the question: "Who planned this against Tyre?" Isaiah was

really asking: Who could ever bring down such a city? The answer to Isaiah's question came in verse 9. It was the Lord Almighty who planned this defeat of Tyre. He did this because of the pride of her people.

It was not the fact that Tyre was rich that brought her down—it was what she did with her wealth. She had allowed her wealth to become her god. Her inhabitants became proud because of what they had. Their wealth did not lead them to thanksgiving and praise of God. They did not use their wealth for the glory of God but for themselves. The Lord chose to destroy Tyre. He would humble all who sought to live independently of Him.

Isaiah called the inhabitants of Tarshish to till their land like the Egyptians because the great harbour of Tyre would be no more. Tarshish and other merchant cities were so dependent on Tyre for trade that they would have to turn to other sources of income when it fell (verse 10).

God had determined to judge this nation. He had stretched out His hand over these kingdoms of the sea and made them tremble. He had given an order that the fortresses of the nation of Phoenicia (of which Tyre and Sidon were part) be destroyed. There would be no more revelling in the region of Tyre and Sidon. All joy and celebration would be stripped from them (verse 12). The inhabitants would flee to the region of Cyprus. Even in this foreign land, they would find no rest from their struggle and judgement.

Lest the people of Tyre believed that these things could never happen to them, God called them to look to the example of the Babylonians (Chaldeans). At this point in history, the Assyrians had taken over Babylon. The

Assyrians raised up their siege towers and broke down fortresses, leaving the land of Babylon in ruins. Babylon had become a place where the desert creatures lived. These events were recalled to Tyre. She too would fall like the nation of Babylon into the hands of the Assyrians.

The ships of Tarshish again were called to wail because the fortresses of Tyre would be destroyed. Isaiah prophesied that for a period of seventy years the nation of Tyre would be forgotten to the world. After those seventy years, Tyre would be restored. Isaiah compared what would happen to the city of Tyre with the song of a prostitute. In order to be noticed, the prostitute took up a harp and walked through the city. After seventy years Tyre would again attract the attention of the nations. Again, there would be a renewal of her commerce. The kingdoms of the earth would come to her. The difference this time, however, would be that the Lord would be glorified. Instead of the earnings glorifying Tyre, they would be set apart for those who lived before the Lord. Her income would be consecrated to the servants of the Lord to provide for their food and clothing. As with Cush (18:7) the Egyptians and Assyrians (19:25), this prophecy of a time of consecration to the Lord seems yet to be completely fulfilled (60:5). It is interesting to note, however, that in Matthew 15:21 the Lord Jesus would visit the region of Tyre. Paul also found disciples in this city (Acts 21:3).

Again, we should note that the Lord would humble the people of Tyre to bring them to Himself. He would strip away the barrier of wealth and possessions for a period of seventy years to teach them how to use their resources. Isaiah promised that Tyre would ultimately learn her lesson and use her resources for the Lord.

There are times in our lives as well that the Lord will strip us of our resources and blessings to teach us not to trust in them. God's discipline always has a purpose. His discipline draws us closer to Him. We do not need to be afraid of this discipline. Instead, we need to allow God to accomplish His perfect will and purpose through it in our lives, even as He would do for ancient Tyre.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about pride?
- What does this passage teach us about what God expects regarding the use of our resources?
- Why does God sometimes take His blessings from us?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you how to better use your resources for His glory.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from pride.
- Thank the Lord that He loves us enough to discipline and train us in godliness.

19

THE JUDGEMENT OF THE EARTH

Read Isaiah 24:1-23

In chapters 13-23 Isaiah's prophecies were to demonstrate to God's people the folly of trusting in foreign nations instead of trusting in the Lord God. The Lord controls all nations, establishing them and bringing them down to accomplish His divine purposes in history. No matter how strong nations appear, the Lord controls their destinies. The only security for any nation or individual is repentance for sin and obedience from the heart to the ways of the Lord.

In this next section of prophecy, chapters 24-27, Isaiah speaks about the earth in general and praises God for His future victory and deliverance of Israel. Isaiah reminded His people in verse 1 that the Lord was going to lay waste to the earth and devastate it. The Lord would ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants. The prophecy of the apostle John revealed a destruction of the earth and a judgement of its inhabitants in the final days (Revela-

tion 9:1-9; 21:1). Isaiah's prophecy may have been partially fulfilled for Israel and Judah in the days of Assyrian and Babylonian domination, but this prophecy may see its ultimate fulfilment at the end of human history.

Notice in verse 2 that this judgement would be on all the inhabitants of the earth, regardless of social standing. The priest as well as the ordinary person would suffer. The master would be judged but so would his servant. The mistress and the maid, the seller as well as the buyer, the borrower and the lender, the debtor and the creditor would all have to face this day of judgement. On that day Isaiah tells us that the earth would be completely laid waste and plundered. These things would happen because the sovereign Lord had spoken it.

In verse 4 Isaiah began to describe the earth in those days. He tells us that the earth would dry up and wither. He pictured the earth groaning under the judgement the Lord inflicted on it. Like a flower drooping for lack of water, so the life of the earth would be drained from it.

God's judgement would not be without reason. From the beginning, humans have defiled the earth by their disobedience to the laws of God (verse 5). Adam and Eve first violated God's statutes and broke his covenant (Genesis 2:17), bringing a curse on themselves and the earth (Genesis 3:17-19). Israel also broke the Abrahamic Covenant that commanded devotion to God's law, bringing additional curses on Israel (Deuteronomy 27-28). The judgement of God would come over the whole earth because of mankind's immorality and hardened hearts (Romans 1:18-32). Isaiah saw the curse of God consuming the earth and guilty people being burned in the fire of

God's holy judgement (verse 6). The Lord, however, would save by grace a remnant of believers for Himself.

In verses 7-13 Isaiah described the world as a city in desolate ruins where there was no longer any cause for rejoicing. The merry-makers groaned because there was too much devastation for them to enjoy their parties. The doorways to the homes were barred shut, as if they were abandoned. No defences were left. In the streets people cried out for wine, but there was no wine after the vines had withered. All joy turned to gloom because of the worldwide judgement of God.

Again, Isaiah tells us that a remnant will survive (verse 13). He compared this judgement to harvesting olives and grapes. It will be "as when an olive tree is beaten or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest." In order to get the ripe olives from the olive tree, the harvester would shake the tree so that the olives would fall to the ground where he could gather them. After this was done, there would be very few olives left on the tree. Those that remained would be so few that they would be not worth the effort required to gather them. The same was true for the one who harvested the grapes from the vine. This is what the earth will be like after the judgement of God. This judgement will be so severe that very few people will be left.

After the cleansing of the earth, Isaiah tells us that the inhabitants who remained would raise their voices and shout for joy (verses 14-16). In the west they would acclaim the Lord's majesty. In the east they would give glory to the Lord. The islands of the sea would exalt the name of the God of Israel. Even to the ends of the earth, people would be singing: "Glory to the Righteous One." Isaiah could not join in this celebration because he

grieved over his own sin and that of the world around him. God's purposes would be accomplished, but many would perish in the process.

How encouraging it is for us to understand that the day is coming when the Lord will purge evil from the earth. Sin will not prevail. God will overcome and righteousness will triumph. Disobedience brought a curse on the earth that would ultimately destroy it. Only by removing this disobedience could the blessing of God be restored. This was what God was revealing in this prophecy.

In the meantime, the inhabitants of the earth were wasting away under this judgement of God. In verse 17 Isaiah continued to describe this judgement and the effects it had on the earth. "Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth." The earth was no longer a safe place to live. Snares had been set and pits dug to trap people. Hatred, bitterness, and murder filled the hearts of earth's inhabitants. There was no way of escaping this terror. Those who escaped the pit and climbed out would be caught in a snare.

In verses 18-20 the judgement of God on the earth was pictured by Isaiah as heavenly floodgates opened up, sending a flood of terror on the earth. The foundations of the earth would be broken as these floodgates poured out their wrath. The earth would be shaken and split apart under the holy wrath of God. Like a drunkard, the earth would reel and sway. Its guilt and rebellion would be so heavy that it would fall under its load and never rise again. The Lord Jesus came to take the heavy load of guilt and rebellion off our shoulders. For those who continue to reject the gracious offer of forgiveness from the Lord Jesus, the burden of that guilt will become so

heavy that it ultimately will crush the earth beneath its weight.

In that day, the powers of the heavens would feel the impact of God's wrath. The apostle John tells us that the light of the sun would fail, the moon would turn to blood, and the stars would fall from the heavens (Revelation 6:12-13).

Not only would the powers of the heavens feel the impact of God's wrath but so would the powers on the earth (verse 22). The kings of earth would be herded together like prisoners, bound in a dungeon for many days, and then punished (see Revelation 20:1-3, 11-15). Verse 23 tells us that in those days the moon would be embarrassed and the sun ashamed when compared to the glory of the Lord Almighty (see Revelation 21:23).

God will triumph. Sin and evil will be destroyed. The day of His judgement will be a terrible day. The earth and the heavens will feel the impact as God purges them of evil and rebellion. A curse once fell on the earth because of disobedience. Men and women perished because they refused to allow God to remove the burden of that curse. This chapter challenges us to consider our ways. It reminds us that God will one day destroy this earth with all its rebellion and evil. The only ones who will be safe in that day will be those who have had their sin and guilt removed by the blood of the Lord Jesus.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the fate that awaits this earth because of rebellion and evil?
- Isaiah reminds us that disobedience brings a curse. Could it be that we are experiencing this curse in our society or personal life?
- Have you ever felt the weight of sin crushing you beneath its load? Explain. What happened when the Lord took that weight from you?

For Prayer:

- Isaiah spoke about the weight of guilt and rebellion crushing those who refused to deal with it. Do you know of someone who is under that load? Take a moment to pray that this individual would let the Lord remove all guilt and sin.
- Thank the Lord that He will ultimately triumph over sin and evil.
- Thank God for the hope of victory over sin through the death of the Lord Jesus.

YOU HAVE DONE MARVELLOUS THINGS

Read Isaiah 25:1-26:9

In the last meditation, we saw how Isaiah told his people that the Lord would judge the earth and conquer its sin and rebellion. In chapter 25 Isaiah offered a song of praise to God for the marvellous things in these prophecies. It should be understood that while the earth itself would be left in ruins, Isaiah saw the hand of God conquering evil. It was for this that the prophet raised his voice in praise and thanksgiving.

Isaiah began by giving thanks to the Lord for being his God. Isaiah committed himself to exalting and praising the name of the Lord. Notice in verse 1 that Isaiah did this because the Lord, in perfect faithfulness, did marvellous things planned from long ago. There are several things that need to be noticed here.

First, we need to understand what the Lord was doing in this context. The Lord had shown Isaiah the final judge-

ment of the earth. The land would become terrified under His mighty hand. Isaiah recognised, however, that despite the devastation, the Lord was going to bring good from it.

Second, we need to see that God had planned this judgement long ago. Nothing would ever take the Lord by surprise. He controls the destiny of all nations as well as His own people, Israel. The Lord has long had a plan for the victory of His people.

These truths ought to encourage us today. Could you say what Isaiah said in the midst of the storms of your life? Can you praise the Lord in the middle of your struggle because you understand that He is doing a wonderful thing in you? Can you take confidence during your trial because you know that the Lord has already planned how this is going to end and because He has your best interest at heart?

In verse 2 Isaiah tells us that he saw the city of Israel's enemies in a heap of rubble. The foreigner's stronghold would never be rebuilt. God had destroyed the power of the enemy that had come against His people. He had broken down their stronghold and humbled them in the presence of His chosen ones.

Notice the result of God's discipline in verse 3. The strong and ruthless nations would revere His name. They would see the power of the Lord God in their defeat. They would know that the Lord is the powerful and awesome God of all the earth. This is the desire of God. It is His purpose that the nations see His power and bow the knee to Him.

The nations would see that the Lord had been a shelter for the poor (verse 4). He protected the needy in distress. These foreign nations had been very ruthless. They were like a driving storm beating against a wall. They had persisted in striking God's people. The enemy was like the relentless heat of the desert. They would realize that God had sheltered His people. Like a cloud blocking the sun's rays and reducing the heat of the desert, so God would come to the rescue of His people in their time of need. The result was that the rejoicing song of the ruthless was silenced.

Having silenced the enemy and preserved His people in His judgement, the Lord would then prepare a great feast for His people on Mount Zion. This banquet would include rich food and aged wine. He would set before them the best of everything to eat.

In verse 7 Isaiah promised that the Lord would destroy the shroud that enfolded His people and take away the sheet that covered the nations. The shroud and the sheet symbolised mourning and despair. The nations had certainly been put to shame and crushed for their sin and rebellion. After the humbling would come a renewing. It is important to notice that this covering would be stripped from all the nations so they would see the light of the Lord's presence.

From every nation and tribe, people would come to the Lord and bring glory to His name. They would bow down and worship the Lord God of Israel. We are seeing the partial fulfilment of this in our day as the message of the gospel of our Lord Jesus is reaching out to the far corners of the globe. People from every tribe and nation are coming to know and love the Lord God of Israel. God is

removing their covering of shame and letting them see the light of His Word.

Isaiah prophesied of a time when the Lord God would swallow up death forever (verse 8). The Lord God would wipe away all tears from the eyes of His people and remove the disgrace and shame from their faces. The apostle John had something very similar to say in Revelation 21:4:

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Notice that Isaiah tells us in verse 8 that this promise was for “His people from all the earth.” This phrase is important. It tells us that it is the purpose of God to have a people set apart for Himself from the whole earth. Both Jews and Gentiles from all nations would be brought into the fold. All this would happen because “the LORD has spoken.”

While God would extend His hand in favour to all the nations from Zion, not all would accept his offer. Verse 10 reminds us that Moab would be trampled down. As straw is trampled in manure, so Moab would become like a refuse heap. Moab represented all who would refuse this marvellous work of grace and forgiveness offered by the Lord. The judgement of these people would be so severe that they were pictured as being trampled like manure. Isaiah saw them in his vision spreading out their hands like a swimmer to swim in this manure, but they were losing the battle. Like a drowning man trying to keep his head above water, so these people would drown in their filth. Despite all their cleverness, they would be brought

low. Their fortified walls would be brought down. God would bring them to the ground, even to the very dust.

In chapter 26 Isaiah told the people that they would sing this song in the days following their deliverance. Judah would praise the Lord because Jerusalem would be a strong city. The Lord would make “salvation its walls and ramparts” (26:1). This is a wonderful picture for us. The people of God are in the city of God surrounded by the wall of salvation. Jerusalem would become a city of strength and security for the redeemed.

Isaiah envisioned Jerusalem as a place where the righteous nation could enter. Only those who keep faith would be welcome inside the walls of salvation. Jesus told us that He is the “gate for the sheep” (John 10:7). Those who were inside this wall of salvation would be kept in perfect peace (26:3). There is something we need to notice about this peace. This peace would be reserved for those whose trusted in the Lord and fixed their thoughts on Him. This kind of peace would characterise Jerusalem. It is a wonderful picture of the salvation God offers to all who will accept it.

Isaiah encouraged everyone to trust in the Lord forever because He is their eternal strength (26:4). As a Rock, He cannot be penetrated by the enemy. He is steadfast and sure. He is someone we can build our lives on, who will never let us down. The fact that He is an eternal Rock means that He will always be there. We can have peace because of the nature of the Lord our God. Who can harm us when He is protecting us?

This eternal Rock would humble those who dwell on high and lay low the great cities by levelling them to the ground (26:5). The arrogant would be trampled down to

the ground by the feet of the poor and oppressed. There is no power that can stand in the way of the Lord. He would lift up the power of the poor and oppressed above the strong and the powerful. We owe everything we have to the Lord our God.

God makes the way of the righteous level (26:7). This merits some consideration. The word *level* does not mean that we will never have problems in this life. God's people were pictured in previous chapters as coming through a very rough time. There are many difficulties in this life. Even the Lord Jesus had to suffer for our salvation. Although the way we travel may have its ups and downs, there is a clear focus to it. God knows exactly what He is doing. He goes before us, preparing the way and accomplishing His purposes for our lives. The reality of the matter is that the road we travel is filled with obstacles. The temptation for us is to believe the lies of the enemy that tell us that we will never have victory. Isaiah tells us that the Lord will always go before us to level out those difficult spots.

There are times when we do not understand what God is doing. There are times when we look around us and all we can see are obstacles. Isaiah reminds us what we need to do in these times (26:8).

Walk in His Laws

Isaiah tells us that in our times of trouble and turmoil, we are to remain faithful to the Lord God and His ways. Very often, the trials that come our way can distract us from the purpose of God. They can cause us to turn our backs on God and His purposes for us. In these times, we are tempted to wander from God. Isaiah challenges us to set

our mind to be faithful to the revealed law of God as found in His Word.

Wait for Him

We are also to fix our eyes on the Lord and wait for Him. Our peace can only come by placing our confidence in Him. The waiting is a time of trust. Those who wait in this sense are those who believe that the Lord is indeed an eternal Rock. They do not take matters into their own hands but trust in what the Lord is doing.

Set Our Hearts on God's Name

Notice also that as we wait on the Lord, we are to set our hearts on the glory of His name. All too often in our trouble we do not set the glory of the Lord as our first desire in life. Instead, we are tempted to seek our own comfort. When we set the name and renown of God first in our lives, we become willing to suffer so that God will receive the glory.

It is important to see the powerful work that God promised to do in the lives of His people. His people would be surrounded by the wall of salvation and find a wonderful peace as they set their hearts on the Lord, the eternal Rock. They would wait on their God in absolute trust and commit themselves to obey His Word, whatever the cost. Their greatest desire would be the glory of His name. These people would yearn for God in the night (26:9). As they lay on their beds at night, their hearts would be filled with the thought of the Lord and His glory. In the morning when they woke, they would find themselves still longing for Him and His glory. What a wonderful work God would do in the lives of His people.

For Consideration:

- Why is it so hard to trust the Lord when things appear to be difficult? What does this meditation tell us about the wonderful work God does through turmoil and struggle?
- What do these chapters teach us about the heart of God for the nations?
- What comfort do you receive from the picture of God's people being surrounded by the wall of salvation?
- Are you experiencing the peace that Isaiah spoke about? Could it be that you are not setting your attention on the Lord in a particular area of your life?
- Isaiah tells us that in our time of trouble we are to wait on the Lord, remain faithful to His purpose, and place His glory first in our lives. Has this been your experience?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for what he is going to accomplish in you through your struggles and turmoil.
- Thank the Lord for His desire to reach out to the entire world to form a people for Himself. Ask God to give you this missionary heart.
- Ask the Lord help you to keep Him and His glory the central focus of your life.
- Thank the Lord that He promised to be the eternal Rock for us.
- Thank God that He promised to go before us to level the path He has called us to follow.

21

VICTORY ASSURED BUT NOT YET

Read Isaiah 26:10-27:13

In the last meditation, we saw the wonderful work that the Lord would do in the hearts of His people. From verse 10 we understand that this work would not touch everyone. Some would resist what the Lord was doing.

God's judgement of the earth prior to this wonderful renewal would have a very particular purpose. It was the desire of the Lord that those disciplined would learn righteousness. It was the intent of God that His discipline would draw men and women to Himself. Verse 10 tells us, however, that the wicked, would refuse to learn. Instead they would keep on doing evil in the land. They would have no regard or respect for the majesty of God in their midst. The wicked would be punished severely. The fire of God's judgement would consume them (verse 11).

As for the righteous, their attitude would be very different. In verse 12 they would recognize God as the source of

peace and look to Him for security. They would trust in His purposes. Notice also that they would recognize God as the source of all their accomplishments. Everything they ever did or were able to accomplish would be seen as the result of the hand of God in their lives.

Isaiah reminded God's people in verse 13 that, while others lords had ruled over them throughout their history, it was only the name of the Lord God of Israel that deserved honour. These other lords were dead and lying in the grave. God had punished them and brought them to ruin.

Isaiah saw a future for Israel which would gain glory for the Lord (verse 15). The trials they were experiencing were to be seen as only temporary setbacks. The Lord their God could not fail. In His time He would expand their boundaries and restore to them all that had been taken from them (see Exodus 23:31; Psalm 72:8).

The people of Israel suffered the Lord's discipline when they departed from Him. In their distress, they would pray for relief (see Judges 2:18-19 for an example). When the Lord disciplined His people, they could barely whisper a prayer (verse 16). Have you ever been in this situation? I have had times in my life when I could hardly pray. My prayers seemed to come out of my mouth and fall directly on the floor in front of me. My prayers did not seem to reach God. There are times in our lives when we feel so helpless we cannot even pray to God for help.

Isaiah compared the people of God to a woman about to give birth. They were in tremendous pain. Verse 18 tells us that, even in their pain and agony, they only gave birth to wind. In other words, all their agony did not produce anything of value. It was as if they struggled for nothing.

Isaiah reminded them, however, that their dead would live again. They would rise again from the dust and wake up to shout for joy. The dew of God's blessing would fall on the land of the dead and renew it so that it would again give birth and produce life. When everything seemed helpless, the Lord would step in and bring victory. He would prove that He is Lord and that nothing is impossible for Him. Because God lives, there will always be hope. He can take the most difficult of circumstances and make something new. He can raise the dead and cause the barren to give birth. There is no reason for despair.

Victory would come to the people of God. Isaiah reminded them that their time of agony would end. For the time being, however, they were to enter their rooms and shut the doors behind them. For the moment, they were to hide themselves until God's wrath had passed (verse 20). The time was not right for the Lord to release them into the blessing He had in store for them.

This time of waiting is never easy. I have found myself struggling with this very issue over the last year. I have known the agony of crying out to the Lord in tears. I have known the barrenness of not even being able to whisper a prayer for help. I have felt the ups and downs. Through it all, the Lord kept saying: "Wait." There are times when we wonder if we can wait. The temptation is to take things into our own hands. Waiting is not easy. There are times when the Lord asks us to go to our rooms, shut the door and wait. We do not like to do this. God's call to us is not to be busy but to be obedient.

For the moment, the Lord was going to cleanse the land. He was coming to punish the earth for her sins (verse 21). It was time to let God do His work. The earth is

pictured as crying out for the violence that had been done in her. The Lord was responding to the earth in discipline and wrath. God's people were to wait for the Lord to complete this work.

In verse 1 of chapter 27, we are introduced to Leviathan. The word *leviathan* means "twisted animal." Leviathan represented a fierce enemy intent on destruction. Leviathan was seen as a coiling, gliding snake and a monster of the sea. He was a foe to be avoided at all costs. He may have represented the nations who invaded God's people to bring them down. God would slay this overwhelming enemy.

When the Lord killed Leviathan, God's people would sing a new song (27:2). In that day they would sing a song about a fruitful vineyard. The vineyard was a popular figure for the nation of Israel (5:7). After the judgement of Israel's enemies, prosperity would be restored to the land. During Leviathan's reign of terror, the blessing of God seemed far away. There are times in our lives when the enemy comes in like a monster. He strips away our blessings and leaves us questioning where the Lord is in all our trials and tribulations. In this passage we see that the Lord does not abandoned His people. He knows what our enemy is doing. The Lord will come and deal with Leviathan. He will restore our blessings. We will again sing the song of the fruitful vine.

Isaiah reminded His people that the Lord would watch over His vineyard in that day. He would water it continually and guard it night and day so that no one could harm it. It was true that the people of God were being disciplined when Isaiah wrote this prophecy, but God would not be angry with them any more (27:4). His desire was for His people and their good. As any good gardener, however,

the Lord would deal with the thorns and briars that hindered the growth of His vines.

While the Lord was going to deal seriously with Israel's enemies, notice that His desire was that they take refuge and make peace with Him (27:5). God does not take delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23, 32). He would much rather that they come to Him and repent of their sins. He reminded them that He would not hesitate to judge them for their evil, but He offered them the opportunity to repent and make peace with Him. Notice that the phrase "let them make peace with me" was repeated two times. This shows us the heart of God for His enemies. He wants to make peace with them. He wants them to come to Him and be renewed.

Isaiah prophesied that in the days to come, Jacob would take root and bud and fill the whole earth with fruit. This would happen because God would water His people and weed out the thorns and briars. He would watch over them and protect them.

I used to work in a plant nursery. People would come in to purchase rose bushes for their garden. They would ask the gardeners how to prune their rose bushes to produce the best roses. The gardeners would reply: "Let your neighbour prune them." If they were to prune their own bushes, they would probably not be as severe as their neighbour who had no personal interest in the bush. In other words, the best roses come from the bushes that have been most radically pruned. Verse 7 prophesied that God would strike down His people. He would cut them back like the rose bush. The bad branches would be cut off, and the bush would look like it would never live again. But from that pruned stock would grow wonderful branches that would produce the greatest fruit.

God's people would experience the fierce blast of His holy wind (27:8). He would prune them radically with war and exile from their land. By means of discipline, Jacob's (representative of God's people) guilt would be atoned. In other words, though this discipline Jacob's stubborn heart and will would be broken and made one with God (27:9). Israel's sin would be removed. The altars built to foreign gods would be crushed. The pagan Asherah poles would be cut down.

In contrast to His merciful dealings with Jacob, the fortified city representing Jacob's enemies (25:2; 26:5) would be desolate and abandoned. Her branches would be stripped bare and burned. This would happen because these people had forgotten their Maker and turned their backs on Him. Their Creator would show them no favour (27:11).

In that day the Lord would thresh from the Euphrates to a certain region of Egypt. Threshing was the process of separating the wheat from the chaff and is here a symbol of God's judgement and purifying of the land. God's people who had been exiled to these regions "will be gathered up one by one" (27:12). The day was coming when a great trumpet would sound, and God's people would be restored to Him and their land. They would worship the Lord again on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Jacob would again bud. His branches would spread out to the far corners of the earth. From this nation the message of the gospel and the plan of God would unfold. Victory was assured. For the moment, however, this nation had to wait.

For Consideration:

- Why do you suppose some people refuse to listen to the Lord and accept His way despite the fact that they have enough evidence that He is real and His ways are right?
- What do we learn about the purpose of God's discipline?
- Why is it hard for us to wait?
- Why is it so hard for us to accept the discipline of the Lord in our lives? What encouragement do you find in this passage for the trials you are going through today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to learn how to wait on Him and His timing. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you rushed ahead of Him.
- Thank God that He is able to take even the most difficult situations and bring life and renewal.
- Thank the Lord that He desires our fruitfulness. Ask Him to prune you to make you more fruitful
- Ask the Lord to give you the confidence that His discipline is for your good.

22

THE REJECTED STONE

Read Isaiah 28:1-29

Isaiah spoke to the people of God and addressed sin in their society. In the previous chapters, the Lord had promised to do a wonderful work in the lives of His people, but, before that could take place, they needed to be purged of sin and rebellion. Isaiah prophesied judgment on Ephraim (another name for the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom).

Isaiah begins this chapter by speaking about the wreath of Ephraim's pride. Ephraim's capital city of Samaria was like a crown as it set at the end of a beautiful valley. Isaiah described this city as proud and given to drunkenness. Isaiah told the inhabitants of this city that the Lord had a particular plan for them. He would send someone against them who was powerful and strong (verse 2). This force (Assyria) would come on them like a powerful hailstorm and destructive wind, throwing the city to the ground. The pride of Ephraim's drunkards would be trampled underfoot (verse 3).

The northern kingdom was ripe for judgement. Her enemy would come and swallow her whole, as a ripe fig (verse 4). However, during the necessary judgement, the Lord would preserve a believing remnant. The Lord would be their “glorious crown, a beautiful wreath” in contrast to Ephraim’s fading glory (verse 5).

As a people, they would have to suffer the discipline of the Lord. God’s people would be forced to turn their attention from their possessions and entertainment to Him. In those days He would move in their midst in a powerful way. The Lord would have mercy on His remnant and would be to them a source of justice and strength (verse 6). God’s people would be judged for their sin, but their judgement would draw them closer to the Lord.

Isaiah rebuked the religious leaders of the nation (verse 7). Even the priests and prophets were drunkards and exercised their ministries under the influence of alcohol. They staggered when they were seeing their visions. They fumbled when they were making their decisions. Their tables were filled with vomit. There was not a spot without filth. These were the spiritual leaders of the land, who were to set an example for the people of God. These were the individuals called to guide God’s people in holy ways. Instead, they lay spread across their vomit-filled tables, stinking of wine and beer. Their interest was not in the Lord and His glory. They cared nothing about the principles of His Word or the condition of His people. By their very presence, they defiled the glorious presence of the Lord. They were an abomination to the Lord and worthy of punishment.

Notice the response of the drunken religious leaders to the words of Isaiah. “Who is he trying to teach?” (verse

9). These individuals felt that they were somehow above these laws and rules. These were adults who were free to make their own decisions and do as they pleased. They were not little children who needed to be guided. They resented and rejected what Isaiah was telling them.

Isaiah knew that they were rejecting his message. There was nothing more he could tell them. Their minds and hearts were closed to everything he said. "Very well then," he prophesied, the day will come when you will hear these words from foreign lips in strange tongues (verse 11). God would speak to them through His judgment in foreign oppression. The Lord would speak to His people through their enemies and in the language of foreign invaders. Because they refused to listen to their own prophets, they would have to learn of God's disapproval through the sound of their enemy's voice.

God had told these people that their nation could have been for them a resting place, a place of repose where the weary could find rest (verse 12). All hope of that was gone. They had rejected the Lord and chosen their own way. This place of rest and repose had been destroyed by their rebellion. The very words and rules they had rejected would judge them (verse 13). They would fall backward and be captured by the enemy.

In verse 14 Isaiah turned his attention to the rulers in Jerusalem (the capital city of the southern kingdom). Like the leaders of Samaria, they too scoffed at the word of the Lord. These leaders boasted about having entered into a covenant to protect their nation from the "overwhelming scourge" (Assyria). Isaiah revealed, however, that by trusting in another nation for protection instead of the Lord, these leaders had really entered into a covenant with death and the grave (verse 15). They heard the

word of the Lord around them, but they didn't pay any attention to it. They chose to believe the lie that they would be safe without turning to the Lord. They were terribly mistaken. There are many people in this same situation today.

The Lord spoke in particular to those who were seeking refuge in foreign alliances. The Lord would provide the only sure refuge (verse 16). The Lord God was laying a stone of refuge in Zion. That stone was "a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation." All who trusted in that stone would never be dismayed. There can be no doubt as to the identity of this stone. The New Testament clearly spoke of this stone as the Lord Jesus. The apostle Peter made this clear in Acts 4:10-11:

Then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'"

Peter expresses a similar idea in 1 Peter 2:4-8.

Jerusalem's leaders were trusting in lies for protection against foreign invasion. The refuge the Lord would lay in Zion would be characterised by justice and righteousness (verse 17). For God's faithless people, judgement would overflow into their hiding place of lies. Verse 19 prophesied that this judgement would come as waves of the ocean, beating against the shore line. Historians tell us that the Assyrians would return numerous times to the same area—each time slaughtering and pillaging. This would bring "sheer terror." The false protection that Judah had chosen would prove uncomfortable (verse 20).

Those who reject the Lord's refuge stone separate themselves from the blessing of God. They live their lives like a person whose bed is too short and whose blankets are too narrow. They are uncomfortable and unprotected.

Isaiah told his people that the Lord was going to rise up as he did at Mount Perazim. The word *perazim* means "to break forth." In 2 Samuel 5:18-20 we see that at this region of Perazim, the Lord "broke forth" in judgement against the Philistines and defeated them. The Lord was going to rise in wrath again. Verse 21 tells us that He would break forth, not against the foreign enemy but against His own people.

These words were not well received by the people of God. Isaiah stood up to those who mocked him and the word of the Lord (verse 22). He told them that if they didn't stop their mocking, their chains would become heavier. The Lord had decreed judgement on the whole land, but they could lessen that judgement by repentance.

In verse 23 Isaiah illustrated his prophecies of judgement with an example from the world of agriculture. The farmer knows that ploughing the soil does not go on forever. There is a time to plough the ground and break it up, but there also comes a time when that ground will have to be levelled and planted with seed (verse 25). In telling his people this, Isaiah was reminding them that the Lord who gave this common sense to the farmer would do the same thing in their lives. For the moment the hard soil of their lives was going to be broken up, but that ploughing would not last forever. There would be a time when this breaking would end, and God would then plant His seed in their lives.

Isaiah reminded them also that each seed was harvested in a different way (verse 27). The small caraway seed and cumin seed were separated from their stocks in a very different way than the larger grains. They did not use a large sledge or cart to separate the small caraway seed from its stock. To do this would crush the seed and render it useless. Instead, these plants were beaten by a rod or stick so that the seeds would fall to the ground where they could be gathered. Again, Isaiah taught an important lesson: the God who gave common sense to the farmer to use the proper means of harvesting would also treat His people in a wise manner. He would discipline them as they needed and as they could handle.

In verse 28 Isaiah used another illustration. He reminded them that the farmer would use the wheels of the threshing cart to separate the grain from the stocks, but he would not let his horses grind it. The hoofs of the horses would destroy the grain and crush it. The threshing cart was designed especially for this purpose. The farmer would take special care to use the correct instruments to do the threshing. Isaiah reminded His people that the Lord who is wonderful in counsel and wisdom would certainly show the wisdom of the farmer in dealing with His people in their time of judgement.

This chapter shows us how we can believe the lie that everything will be okay. In Samaria and Jerusalem, God's people were living in rebellion. They felt that nothing could happen to them. They believed the lie of the enemy that God would never judge them. Isaiah pointed these people to the stone that the Lord would set up in Jerusalem. This stone was their only hope. Their lies would be exposed, and they would be disciplined and judged. God would not forsake them in their judgement,

however. He would very carefully and wisely correct them with the purpose of drawing them back to Himself.

For Consideration:

- Do you know individuals who are seeking a refuge in lies? What are these lies?
- What answers does this chapter give us for those who believe the lie of the enemy that everything will be okay?
- What does this chapter teach us about the discipline of the Lord in our lives?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He disciplines us with wisdom and knowledge of how much we can actually handle.
- Thank the Lord that He sent us the Lord Jesus, the living stone, as our hope and confidence.
- Take a moment to pray for those who continue to take refuge in the lies of the enemy.

23

A WORD TO RELIGIOUS ARIEL

Read Isaiah 29:1-24

This section of the prophecy of Isaiah (chapters 28-33) dealt with the people of God, their sin, and how God would punish them for their wickedness. In chapter 28 Isaiah reminded God's people that when they rejected God's word and covenant, divine judgement would surely follow. God would be merciful and wise in His judgement and accomplish the purpose of bringing His people back to Himself. Chapter 29 continues with this same theme.

A judgement was declared on "Ariel." Ariel was described as the city that David settled. This was obviously the city of Jerusalem. The meaning of the word *ariel* is somewhat debated. Most commentators translate this word as "hearth of God," perhaps referring to the altar that was located in the city where the sacrifices were made by the priests. Jerusalem was the centre of the worship of God.

Isaiah sarcastically told his listeners that they were to let the cycle of their festivals continue. Because the temple was located in Jerusalem, this city was the centre for the religious festivals celebrated throughout the year. Jerusalem could not be faulted in the external expression of religious ritual. The people thought this assured them of God's blessing.

God told this religious city, however, that He was going to besiege her (verse 2). She would be broken and become like an altar hearth. The altar contained the burnt remains of the sacrifice. The city of Jerusalem would be destroyed like a sacrifice on an altar. All that would remain of the city would be the charred and burnt fragments of former glory.

In verse 3 the Lord told His people that He would encamp against them. He would set up His towers and siege works against them to bring them down. God's people are pictured in verse 4 as speaking from the ground with a mumbling, ghostlike, whispering speech. This was the voice of defeat, the sound of a broken person uttering dying words.

The punishment of Jerusalem would be severe, but God would remain in control (verse 5). The punishment would only last for an allotted time, and then God would judge the nations that He used in disciplining His people. These enemies would become like fine dust and blowing chaff. In an instant the Lord would come to His people. He is portrayed as coming to them with thunder, earthquake, great noise, and wind storm with flames of devouring fire. This awesome God was coming to judge the nations who had oppressed His people. Isaiah told God's people in verse 7 that these nations would be like a vision in the night—disappearing when the eyes open. The victory of

the enemies would be as fleeting as a hungry man dreaming that he was eating but waking to discover hunger again.

In verse 9 the focus returned to the people of God and their judgement. They would be stunned at what would happen. While the victory of the enemy would be short and restrained by God, it would be nonetheless a victory. The religious city of Jerusalem with all her sacrifices and festivals would suffer the judgement of God. Empty religion would not protect her. God's people were willingly blind to God's ways and willingly deaf to His prophets. They spiritually impaired themselves.

The Lord would bring a judgement of deep sleep on His people. In verse 10 Isaiah prophesied that God would stop speaking through the prophets. The eyes of the prophets would be sealed so they could no longer see visions from Him. The heads of their seers would be covered so that they would be left in the dark. Jerusalem was filled with religion, but she was not hearing from the Lord God. Notice the response of God's people to the words of Isaiah. Isaiah's prophecy was as useless to God's people as hidden words in a sealed scroll (verse 11). They did not understand or even want to hear what he was saying.

In verse 13 the Lord issued His complaint against His people. They were a people who honoured Him with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. They were very busy with religious activities, but their worship was heartless and hypocritical. It consisted only of rules and traditions. Their religion had nothing to do with love and devotion to God.

The day was coming when the Lord would astound these religious people with His wonders (verse 14). These wonders would relate to the judgement of His people. These hypocrites had turned from the true wisdom of God to human wisdom. All their scheming and planning without God's guidance and provision would perish.

Isaiah told his people that there were those in their midst who went to great lengths to hide their plans from the Lord. They did their evil deeds in darkness. They felt that God would not see them. These were the same people who faithfully practised their religion in public. They were hypocrites. They did not understand that God saw everything.

Notice something else about these people. Isaiah told them that they turned things upside down. They treated the potter like the clay. The potter had the right and authority to do what he wanted with the clay. These people treated God as if he had nothing to do with their lives. They rejected Him as Creator and Sovereign.

Isaiah concluded this chapter with a reminder to his people that the day was coming when the Lord would do a mighty and redemptive work in their lives. God promised that the reversal of conditions would be as great as if the forests of Lebanon turned into a fertile field (verse 17). "In that day" the spiritually deaf would hear the words of the Lord as recorded in the sealed scroll. Their ears would be opened to the Word of the Lord. The Lord would also open the eyes of His spiritually-blinded people. The humble and needy would again rejoice in the Lord, the mockers would disappear, and the evil-doers would be cut down. Justice again would prevail in the land.

Isaiah told his people that the Lord who began a good work in Abraham would graciously complete that work in the house of Jacob (verse 22). The day was coming when Jacob would no longer be ashamed. They would become a people who would keep the name of the Lord holy. They would again be a nation that acknowledged the Lord and revered Him as the Holy One of Israel (verse 23). In that day of renewal and revival, those who had a wayward spirit would gain understanding of God, and those who complained would once again accept the instructions of God (verse 24). True religion would return to the house of Jacob.

What is important for us to understand is that these people were a very religious people. They faithfully practised the sacrifices and festivals, but they did not really know the Holy One. They were still living in sin and rebellion against God and were deaf to His word. They had all the outward appearance of religion, but they were very far from God. They turned to evil and human wisdom in times of trouble instead to turning to the counsel of the Lord.

This chapter gives us cause to reflect on our own faith. God is not looking for the outward show of religion. Isaiah reminds us that the Lord is looking for hearts that are in tune with Him and desire Him above all else. He is looking for worshippers who will surrender themselves to Him like clay on the potter's wheel. He is looking for people who have ears to hear Him and a will to obey what they hear.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about what the Lord is looking for in His people?
- Take a moment to consider the accusations of God against His “religious” people. What particularly challenges you as a servant of God?
- How easy is it to grumble and complain against the Heavenly Potter who is shaping us on the wheel of life? What does this chapter have to teach us about surrendering to the purposes of God in our life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to how He wants to challenge you through this chapter.
- Ask the Lord to make your faith more real to you. Ask Him to renew your heart so that you worship not out of rules, regulations, and duty but from sincerity, love, and truth.

TRUSTING IN EGYPT

Read Isaiah 30:1-33

Isaiah had been warning the people of God that the day was coming when an enemy would come against them and they would suffer the discipline of the Lord. In 722 BC Assyria invaded the northern kingdom and carried many into captivity (2 Kings 17:6, 22-23). The response of God's people in the southern kingdom of Judah was to go to Egypt for help against Assyria. In this section of his prophecy, Isaiah spoke to his people about trusting in Egypt instead of the strength of the Lord.

Isaiah began by pronouncing judgement on the rebellious people of Judah (verse 1). God charged them with the evil of making plans that were contrary to His will. The people were carrying out policies that were not from His Spirit. They were "weaving together plans" (NLT). These strategies were carefully planned and woven together. These plans looked good, but they were not from God. The people were "heaping sin upon sin."

Notice in verse 2 that they had gone down to Egypt for help without consulting the Lord. They had put their trust in Pharaoh's protection and not in the Lord's wisdom. Isaiah warned them in verse 3 that in trusting Pharaoh they would be put to shame and disgraced. We can make all the plans we want, but, if these plans are not blessed by the Lord, of what use are they? It is a real challenge for us as children of God to make a commitment each day to seek God in all we do. We are called to die to our own ideas and desires and seek the Lord's will alone. Judah had to learn this lesson. I suspect that we need to learn it as well.

In verses 6 and 7, Isaiah painted a picture of the Judean envoys and their animals trudging through the dangerous Negev desert, on their way to Egypt to purchase assistance against Assyria. The alliance with Egypt would ultimately provide no help to Judah, and so the Lord called Egypt "Rahab the Do-Nothing." *Rahab* was a mythological sea monster representing an evil force (Job 9:13; 26:12). The word *rahab* means "pride or arrogance." Despite her great pride and strength, the evil power of Egypt would do nothing for the people of Judah.

The Lord instructed Isaiah to take a tablet and a scroll and to write down this prophecy so that it would be a lasting witness for His people (verse 8). Isaiah was to write about the people's rebellion and their unwillingness to listen to the instructions of the Lord. This written record was necessary because the people of God had instructed the prophets to cease speaking the Lord's counsel and only speak what they wanted to hear. They did not want to hear the words of the Holy One of Israel (verse 11).

Because they had rejected Him, God had something to say to them through Isaiah. They had built a wall of sin by

piling one sin on top of another. They had done this by refusing to trust in the counsel of the Lord. This great wall of sin would one day come crashing down on them (verse 13). Like pottery, it would break into useless pieces. Their lives and plans for security were not built on the Lord's purposes and will. All their human efforts would come crashing down on them.

Isaiah called his people to recognise what they were doing. He told them that their salvation was found only in repentance and rest (verse 15). Their strength could only be found in quietness and trust. Repentance required that they recognise that they were not in a right relationship with God and that they were sinning. It required that they turn their hearts back to God and humble themselves, choosing His will instead of their own. Rest required waiting on the Lord alone and trusting in His strength.

Their strength was to be found in quietness and trust. This is just as vital for us today if we want to move ahead in our relationship with the Lord. How easy it is to miss this. God calls us to be quiet. He calls us to take the time to listen to Him for direction and guidance. This quietness comes from an absolute confidence in the good plans of the sovereign Lord.

God's people of Isaiah's day did not want to listen to this message (verse 15). They felt that they knew a better way. Instead of trusting God for security, they would flee on swift horses. They would take matters into their own hands. Isaiah prophesied, however, that their pursuers would be on even swifter horses and overtake them (verse 16). One thousand would flee at the threat of only one of their enemies. Five of their enemies would cause them all to flee (verse 17). Complete defeat is symbolised by a deserted flag on a hilltop.

Isaiah concluded this section by reminding his people that the Lord longed to be gracious to them (verse 18). Since Judah refused to wait on the Lord for security, the Lord would have to wait to be gracious to this nation. Isaiah reminded them that great blessing comes to those who wait on the Lord. That waiting is not always easy. There are times when every nerve in our body cries out for relief. We are often tempted to take matters in our own hands. We are tempted to doubt the sovereign purposes and plan of God. The Lord does know what He is doing, and waiting for His wisdom and direction will bring blessing in the end.

While God's people in Zion would be punished for their sin, the day was coming when they would be restored to a right relationship with God (verse 19). Isaiah prophesied that they would weep no more. The Lord God would be gracious to His people and answer them as soon as He heard them. Isaiah described a time when there would be no more waiting, and God's blessing would be poured out abundantly.

Although the Lord would give them bread of adversity and water of affliction those days would pass (verse 20). God would again open His people's eyes to the truth of the prophet's message. Their teachers would no longer be hidden from them but exercise their ministry and gifts in the open. As the blessings of God were restored so were the teachers of the Word. There was a very clear connection between these two. Disobedience to the requirements of God had stripped them of their blessings and brought judgement. Obedience to the Lord and His ways was a sure way of maintaining the blessings God was promising to pour out on them.

In those days of renewal, God's people would again hear Him. Isaiah told them that wherever they turned they would hear the voice of the Lord telling them: "This is the way; walk in it" (verse 21). What a contrast to the first part of this chapter where the people of God were described as making all kinds of plans on their own.

In those days of restoration, there would be such a change in their hearts that they would turn from their idols and images, throwing them away like a filthy rag (verse 22). These idols would be detestable to them. They had longed for these idols at one time in their history, but they would grow to hate them with a passion. Their hearts would be devoted to the Lord their God, and they would want Him alone.

Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when the Lord would send them rain for their seed and bless their harvest (verse 23). Their cattle would graze in rich and large meadows, and their oxen and donkeys would again work the soil and eat their fill of fodder and mash.

Verse 25 prophesied that after the strong towers of the enemies fell, a stream of water would flow on every high mountain and lofty hill. This water seems to be a symbol of the overflowing of the blessing of the Lord in the land. The barren hills would again be well watered. From these heights, blessing would flow down to the rest of the land. As an added symbol of this tremendous blessing during this time, the moon would shine as bright as the sun and the sun would be seven times brighter.

In this day of God's blessing, the Lord would bind up the wounds and bruises He had inflicted on His people. Notice that Isaiah stated that while the enemy was involved in this wounding, it was ultimately God who had

inflicted His people. He had used the enemy as an instrument to discipline His people for their sin. When that discipline had accomplished its purpose, the Lord would restore them and heal their hurts.

While the Lord used the fury of Israel's enemies to purify and discipline them, He still held these foreign nations accountable for their actions. The enemies of God's people would experience the fury of His wrath. In verse 27-28 God was pictured as coming from afar with burning anger. He was covered in dense clouds and smoke. Wrath was on His lips, and His tongue was a consuming fire. His breath was like a great rushing torrent that rose up to the neck and threatened to drown its victim. The Lord would sift the nations like grain in a sieve and lead them to destruction as a bit leads a horse.

As for the people of God, they would again sing and celebrate the goodness of God as in the days of a great and holy festival (verse 29). Their hearts would rejoice as they went to the mountain of the Lord to celebrated and worship the Lord, the Rock of Israel. Worship and praise would again fill their hearts and minds.

God would cause the nations to hear His majestic voice (verse 30). He would come on His enemies with raging anger, consuming fire, cloudburst, thunder, and hail. God would shatter Assyria and strike them down with His sceptre. Verse 32 tells us that every stroke the Lord would inflict on the enemy would be accompanied with the music of tambourines and harps. Perhaps this pictured God's people rejoicing at the defeat of their enemy.

Verse 33 tells us that Topheth had been made ready. Topheth was a region outside the city of Jerusalem

where the corpses of the sacrifices were dumped. Historians tell us that a fire burned continually in this region. It became a symbol of eternal torment and punishment. Isaiah is telling us that this place of eternal torment has been prepared for God's enemies. The fire pit has been dug and the wood piled and ready to burn. Everything is prepared for the breath of the Lord to ignite the flames of judgement and consume these enemies.

There is a real contrast in this section of Scripture. On the one hand, we see the incredible blessing and renewal of the people of God. On the other hand, we see the eternal condemnation and judgement of the enemy. How important it is for us to know where we stand. The love and compassion of God is very real, but so is His wrath.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself trusting in your own wisdom and strength and not seeking the Lord? What was the result?
- In what do you find it hard to trust the Lord?
- What is the connection between the blessings of God and obedience to His Word?
- What are the characteristics of the revival that Isaiah described?
- Have you experienced this wonderful renewal in your own life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you those areas of your life where you still trust in human wisdom.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have doubted His wisdom and taken matters into your own hands, like the people of Israel.
- Thank the Lord for His promise that truth will triumph.
- Ask the Lord to bring this renewal to you personally and to your community in general.

25

EGYPT AND THE REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read Isaiah 31:1-32:20

Chapters 31 and 32 of this prophecy continued with the theme of the sin and folly of Judah trusting in Egypt for security against Assyria, instead of trusting in the Lord Almighty who controlled the destiny of all nations. Isaiah began chapter 31 with a warning to those who put their trust in Egypt. We saw in the first half of chapter 30 that when the enemy threatened to take the city of Jerusalem, certain individuals felt the need to ask the Egyptians for support. They put their trust in Egypt and not in the Lord their God.

In verse 1 Isaiah spoke to the individuals “who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses” and chariots. These Judeans of Isaiah’s day were relying on the strength of Egypt’s horsemen, believing that Egypt could rescue them from the hand of the enemy that had come against them. How easy it is to fall into this trap. While it might seem natural for us to run to the Lord in our time of

need, it is not always the first thing we do. A missionary friend of mine once said: "It's not that we don't pray; it's that we don't pray first." How often have we waited until we were backed into a corner before going to the Lord? How many times have we done everything we could in our own strength, and only when we had nothing left, did we run to the Lord? The Lord has been impressing on me in recent months with the need of bringing everything to Him in prayer.

Regarding our need of wisdom, Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Notice that we are told not to lean on our own understanding but in all our ways acknowledge God. To acknowledge God is to take Him into every decision we make. How often do we lean on our own understanding? Israel had been trusting in her own understanding and strength. She failed to understand how much she needed God.

Isaiah told his people that while Egypt was strong and wise, the Lord God too was powerful and wise (verse 2). He would bring disastrous judgement in an instant (30:12-13). What the Lord said, He would not take back. When He said that He would destroy Judah because of sin, He meant it. God was going to rise up against the house of wickedness and all who helped evil doers. Judah was guilty of sinning against the Lord God, and Egypt was coming to help—God would deal with both of them.

Isaiah reminded his people that the Egyptians were mere men and not gods (verse 3). Their horses were mere flesh and not spirit. They were no match for the Holy One of Israel. When the Lord stretched out His hand against them, they would stumble and fall. Both the one who helped the sinner and the sinner would stumble and perish together. Isaiah prophesied disaster for both Egypt and Judah.

In verses 4 and 5, Isaiah illustrates his message for the people of God in two pictures. The first picture was of a great lion, growling over his prey. All around the shepherds were gathering in an attempt to protect their sheep, but the lion was not afraid of these shepherds. They would not stop him from accomplishing his purpose. This was the way it would be for Judah. Even though she had called on Egypt for help, God would not be distracted from His intent to judge those on Mount Zion (His own people).

The second picture that Isaiah painted for his people was of birds hovering overhead. These birds were hovering not to destroy but rather to protect their young in the nest. This was a picture of the Lord, hovering over Jerusalem to protect her from enemies. He would shield and rescue His people from danger.

These two pictures portray different messages. The lion was poised to pounce on God's people while the birds hovered overhead to protect them. Both of these illustrations were true. Could it be that Isaiah was presenting his people with a choice? In verse 6 we see that he called his people to return to God. They were guilty of rejecting the Lord and deserved His wrath. He would come on them like a lion if they refused to return to Him. On the other hand, if they did return to Him, He would hover over them

and protect them from their enemies like a mother bird watching over and protecting her young. For the moment, Judah had called for Egypt to come and be her shepherd. The wrath of God was on her like a lion ready to pounce. The people of Judah had put their trust in their Egyptian shepherds to rescue them. Isaiah told them that the lion of Judah would not allow these human shepherds to stop Him from judging His people. If they turned back to the Lord, however, He would watch over them and protect them.

God's people needed to repent and return to Him. Isaiah promised that on the day that they repented of their sinful ways and rejected their idols, Assyria would fall (see verses 7-8). Their repentance would lead to victory. The sword of God and "not of man" would devour their enemies. They would flee and their young men would be brought into captivity and forced labour. As powerful as these Assyrians were, they would fall and be struck with terror and panic. The Lord God whose fire of judgement was burning in Jerusalem would destroy the enemies of His people.

Egypt represented human strength and wisdom. Victory for God's people could only be found in repentance and trust in the Lord. This is exactly what Isaiah stated in chapter 30:15:

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

Human wisdom told them that they needed to increase their strength by a foreign alliance with Egypt, but God told them that they needed to humble themselves and repent of their sin. Only in repentance would they have

victory. When they repented, their enemies would be dispersed.

In contrast to the wicked leaders of God's people in Isaiah's day, a king would come and "reign in righteousness" (32:1). Not only did Isaiah prophesy of a righteous king but also of leaders who would rule with justice. Isaiah described for his people what would take place in this reign of righteousness.

Protection (verse 2)

"Each man will be like a shelter." This pictured the leaders of the land providing protection instead of exposing the people to God's judgement by their wicked decisions. The hand of the Lord would be on His people under this reign of righteousness to protect and shield them from any threats. Under His reign there would be absolute security. Not enemy would be able to conquer them.

Refreshment (verse 2)

Isaiah stated that not only would each leader be a shelter from the wind but he would also be a stream in the desert and the shadow of great rock in a thirsty land. The idea was that God's people would be refreshed. They had gone through a desert experience, but the day was coming when they would experience a wonderful quenching of thirst and shade. The harsh oppression of sin and injustice would be broken.

Restoration of Gifts of Prophecy and Teaching (verse3)

Isaiah reminded his listeners that the day was coming when the eyes of those who saw would no longer be closed, and the ears of those who could hear would listen. Some commentators think this refers to the prophets. The day was coming when the Lord would again speak to His people through prophets and teachers. Those who had the gift to see and hear the Lord would be anointed to exercise those gifts. The Word of God would again have a prominent place.

Obedience (verse 4)

Isaiah prophesied that the mind of the rash would know and understand. The rash are those who hurry decisions without thinking. The opposite of rash would be one who was level headed who acted with careful thought and direction. In this case, the land of God was filled with people who did what they pleased with no real thought or worries about the consequences. The day was coming when those individuals would understand again. They would again be moved to follow and obey the truth of God. Those living under this reign would live in obedience and trust in God and His purpose.

Moral Cleansing

Those who had stammering tongues would again speak with fluency. Some commentators believe this referred to drunken prophets and priests that Isaiah spoke out against earlier (28:7). Instead of their drunkenness and immorality, these people would walk in integrity and moral purity.

Exposing of Folly (verses 5-8)

In the reign of righteousness, those whose minds were busy with evil would be exposed for the fools they really were. Those who devised evil schemes to destroy the poor would be exposed as scoundrels. The noble qualities of generous people would also be evident to all. The true character of each person would become clear, and only righteous character would be celebrated. Those with evil character would no longer be admired or glamorised. How we need to see this in our day!

Historical parenthesis (verses 9-14)

In verses 9-14 Isaiah interrupted his description of the reign of righteousness with a warning to the complacent women of Judah. They felt quite secure and lived their self-indulgent lives with no real concern for the things of God. They were undisturbed about the prophesied judgement of God. Isaiah warned them that in a little while they would tremble. Isaiah called on these women to prepare for judgement by putting on sackcloth and mourning for the land that would become overgrown and for their cities and dwellings that would be forsaken.

Fruitfulness and Justice (verses 15-16)

In the reign of righteousness, the Spirit would be poured on the land, and the wilderness would again become a fertile, productive field. Justice and righteousness would fill the nation. Sin and oppression would be destroyed.

Peace and Quietness (verses 17-18)

The fruit of righteousness in the land would be peace. When God's people were restored to righteousness, the natural fruit of that would be peace in their relationships with each other. As each person lived according to the standard of God's laws, harmony would be restored in the nation. Not only this, but peace would be restored between God's people and her God. They could live each day with the assurance that they were right with God and that He would care for them. Their obedience would bring quietness to the land. They would live in security in places of undisturbed rest.

Isaiah ends this section of prophecy with a contrast between judgement and blessing (verses 19-20). Notice that while they lived in places of undisturbed rest, outside the hail was flattening the forest. The city was being levelled to the ground. God's people, however, were blessed, sowing their seed and letting their cattle and donkeys roam freely. How important it is for us to understand what Isaiah was telling his people. What does peace look like to you? Peace is not the absence of trouble. Although the hail was all around them and their city was levelled, God's people would live in a place of undisturbed rest and quiet. Terror surrounded them, but they were sheltered and at rest in their hearts.

Isaiah teaches us that rest is the fruit of righteousness in our lives. What is righteousness? Righteousness has to do with being in a right relationship with God. That comes first through the forgiveness of our sins and second by living in the light of that forgiveness. When Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel of John, He told her to go and sin no more. In other words, those who know they are forgiven will live in obedience and turn

their back on the sin that separated them from God. They choose to live by the power of the Spirit and in obedience to the purposes and will of God. Only as we live in obedience can we know the peace and quietness that the Lord promises.

Isaiah promised that under the reign of righteousness, there would be protection, refreshment, renewal in the Word, moral cleansing, peace, and quietness. These are blessings the world seeks. These blessings can only be known through the forgiveness of Christ and obedience to His Word.

While there is certainly in our day a partial fulfilment of this prophecy in a spiritual sense through the work of Christ in the life of the believer, there may be a greater fulfilment to come in the lives of God's people around the world. We look forward to such a blessing.

For Consideration:

- How many of your decisions are based on human wisdom rather than on God's leading and direction?
- Is it possible to truly bring God into every decision? Explain.
- What does this passage teach us about the blessings of obedience?
- What is peace according to this passage? Can we be at peace in the midst of turmoil?
- What is the secret to peace in our life?
- Describe the work of God Isaiah prophesied would take place. How has this been fulfilled in

part through the work of Christ in your life? Do you think God still has a greater fulfilment of this prophecy in store?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to teach you how to bring everything to Him for direction and guidance.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any area in your life where you need to repent and surrender to Him.
- Ask the Lord to give you the peace He speaks about in Isaiah.
- Ask the Lord to reveal to you any area of your life where you are not living in obedience to His Word.
- Thank the Lord for the way He wants to give you His peace and quietness of heart and soul.
- Ask God to bring a powerful work of His Spirit to renew and draw the nations to Himself.

WOE TO THE DESTROYER

Read Isaiah 33:1-24

In chapter 33 Isaiah prophesied the coming defeat of Assyria, which had been an instrument in God's judgement of His people. The northern kingdom of Israel and some parts of Judah were devastated by Assyria, as God punished His people for forsaking Him. The day was coming, however, when the Lord would also judge these wicked Assyrians.

Isaiah began by pronouncing judgement on the "destroyer." Although Isaiah did not name the nation, Assyria was known to be treacherous. King Hezekiah of Judah had paid Assyria money not to besiege Jerusalem, but, after accepting the money, Assyria brought her armies to Jerusalem anyway (2 Kings 18:13-17). Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when these destroying traitors would themselves be betrayed and destroyed.

In verse 2 Isaiah cried out to God to be gracious as the enemy approached. Every day the people in Jerusalem woke from their sleep they needed to be strengthened

and empowered to face the enemy at the gates. This is the same for us today. We too need this empowering and strength each morning. And what power there is at our disposal! Isaiah reminds us that at the thunder of the voice of God, people flee. When the Lord rises, the nations scatter. In verse 4 Isaiah stated that these nations would be plundered like locusts stripping the land. This would happen to Assyria (2 Kings 19:35) and ultimately also to all the nations at the end of history (Revelation 19:19-21).

Verses 5 and 6 looked into Judah's future, following the plundering of nations, when the Lord would reign supreme in Zion with justice and righteousness (see 32:16-18). God would be the sure foundation for Israel. Salvation, wisdom, and knowledge would characterize these times, and the fear of the Lord would be the key to this treasure of God's gifts. The Lord would show Himself to be the opposite of the kings of the nations of earth.

Verses 7-12 return to the days when Assyria was attacking Judah. Judah's envoys, who had tried to buy peace from the traitor Assyria, were weeping bitterly as they saw the treaty broken. All the beautiful parts of the land suffered. The Lord was ready to rise. In the day that God rose up to defend His people, the enemy would be destroyed. In an instant, by the breath of God, they would be set ablaze.

In verse 13 Isaiah called the people who were far away to hear what God had done and to acknowledge His power. As the Lord God rose in Zion and executed His judgment, the sinners of Zion would be terrified. The godless would tremble with fear. Notice in verse 14 that the fire of God is eternal. He will judge sin and evil forever—without end. Isaiah wondered who could stand against this

eternal, fiery judgement of God. It is only the one who “walks righteously” who will be spared in that terrible day of judgement (verse 15). Isaiah describes this righteous person in the next few verses.

The righteous person would be honest in all dealings and reject obtaining gain through extortion and bribery. This individual would not plot evil and murder. Those who were right with God would enjoy security and ample provisions. They would be sheltered and protected in the day of God’s wrath.

Isaiah promised that the day was coming when God’s people would see the Lord in His beauty and view a land that stretched far. The Lord would not be a terror to them as He was for those who had not feared Him. Instead, He would reveal His beauty to them. He would be gracious and compassionate to them and give them a land that stretched as far as the eye could see and beyond. The Lord would restore His blessings to His people.

In verse 18 Isaiah prophesied that one day God’s people would look back at their days of terror. All the enemy officials, who once caused fear, would be gone. God’s people would remember hearing the surrounding enemy speak a foreign language.

The day was coming when the city of Jerusalem would be restored and reclaimed by God for His glory. It would again become a peaceful city, as a tent that would not be moved. The Lord would be the protector and provision for Jerusalem. No war ships or commerce ships would be necessary (verse 21). The Lord their judge, lawgiver, and king would protect His people and keep them from harm (verse 22).

In verse 23 an enemy ship was pictured with its rigging hanging loose, its mast not held secure, and its cargo plundered. Even the lame were depicted as carrying off spoils. God would strengthen His people, and they would plunder their wealth.

Isaiah concluded this chapter by telling his people that no one in Zion would say: "I am ill." In that day, the sins of those living in that city would be forgiven. God would remove sickness and sin from their midst. The apostle John speaks about a similar thing in his vision of the new heaven and the new earth (see Revelation 21:1-4). This leads us to believe that Isaiah prophecy will see its ultimate fulfilment in Christ and the new heaven and new earth spoken of by John.

This passage reminds us that the Lord will triumph over sin and evil. The enemy will be destroyed and God will reign. The day of judgement is coming for those who have turned their backs on God. Only those who live in the fear of the Lord will be able to stand in that day. To those who fear Him, God promises to be a sure foundation and a rich source of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. To those who trust Him, God promises forgiveness of sin and freedom from the bondage that sin brings.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection between the fear of the Lord and the blessing that God wants to pour out on His people?

- Isaiah told his people that God would be their strength each morning. Do you live your life in the awareness of your need of the Lord's daily strengthening?
- Isaiah stated that God would be a sure foundation for their times. What difference does it make in our times to have a life founded on God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a sure foundation.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live your life in the fear of His name each day.
- Thank the Lord that, while we may go through difficulties on this earth, He promises to be with us and strengthen us.

BLOSSOMS IN THE DESERT

Read Isaiah 34:1-35:10

In chapters 34 and 35 Isaiah concluded a section of prophecy (chapters 13-35) which dealt with God's sovereignty over all nations. Through Isaiah the Lord revealed that He would ultimately punish all nations that reject Him. He also revealed that He would punish Judah for her sins but finally exalt her when she turned to Him in righteousness. In chapters 34 and 35 Isaiah continued this theme of judgement and blessing.

In chapter 34 Isaiah began with a statement to all the nations. He called the whole earth to hear that the Lord was angry at all the nations. His wrath was on all their armies, and He would destroy them. Isaiah painted a picture of the devastation that would be the result of this terrible judgement. The stench of the slain would fill the air, and the mountains would be soaked with their blood. The whole universe would be judged. The stars of the heavens would be dissolved and the sky rolled back like a great scroll. The stars would fall from the sky like leaves falling from a vine. This ultimate day of terror

corresponded to that spoken of at the end of time by the apostle John (Revelation 6:13-17).

In verse 5 Isaiah turned from a distant, universal judgment to the nearer judgment of one nation in particular—Edom. From the heavens God's sword would descend on Edom. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau and had been the enemies of God's people from the time Jacob deceived his brother Esau (Genesis 27).

The day of the Lord's vengeance would come. A great slaughter is pictured in verses 6-7. All the nations who trampled His people would be judged. In the day of Edom's doom, her streams would be turned to pitch and the dust of her ground to burning sulphur. The smoke of her judgement would rise up day and night forever. For generations to come, her land would be desolate. No one would pass through it again (verse 10). Instead, the owl and the raven would rest there undisturbed.

In verse 11 Isaiah prophesied that God would stretch out His measuring line of chaos and His plumb line of desolation. Edom would be measured and her sins weighed out. God would judge these people because of their sin and rebellion against Him. In the end, there would be nothing left for her nobles to call a kingdom. All her princes would vanish. Thorns would overrun their citadels and brambles would cover her strongholds. The land of Edom would become a haunt for wild animals.

In verses 16 and 17, Isaiah concluded by reminding those who heard him that they were to look in the scroll of the Lord and read. What the Lord had decreed would surely happen. Each prophecy would be matched with its fulfilment as the desert creatures would be matched with their mates (see verse 15). The mouth of the Lord spoke

the word and the Spirit of God would carry out that word. The sovereign God would allot the land as He saw fit. He reserves the right to take back what He has given. Edom, by her rebellion and evil, had forfeited her right to the land God had given her. God chose to take it from her and give it to the owl, the falcon, and the wild goats.

There are many times that we have taken our blessings for granted. Edom probably never believed that she would end up the way she did. Jesus told the story of a master who went away and left his talents with his servants. One of those servants chose not to use the talents he had been given (see Matthew 25). When the master returned, he took the talents from this servant and gave them to another servant who had used his talents wisely. If we chose not to use correctly what God has given us, He may very well strip us of these blessings and give them to someone else.

Like Edom, Israel would be stripped of her blessing, and her land was going to be laid waste. Unlike Edom, however, the Lord God would restore His people and renew them. While His discipline would be harsh, it would not last forever.

In chapter 35 Isaiah told his people that blessing would follow cursing. The day was coming when the desert and parched land would be glad again. The wilderness would rejoice and blossom like the crocus. We should be encouraged in this. God's discipline is not forever. He delights in restoring His blessings after judgement. Are you going through a wilderness time in your life? Take courage.

In verses 3-4 Isaiah challenged his listeners to strengthen their feeble hands, knees and hearts. Their God would

return to them. His vengeance and retribution on the ungodly would lead to the salvation and exaltation of Zion (see 34:8). God's people would pass through a wilderness because their sins had brought His judgement. But God would come to them and renew them.

Israel would see powerful signs from the hand of their God. The eyes of the blind would be opened, and the ears of the deaf would hear again. Verse 6 tells us that the lame would again leap like a deer. The tongue of those who could never speak would shout for joy. The physical universe in which they lived would be radically changed. Water would gush into the wilderness, and streams would flow in the desert. The hot burning sand would drink the cool refreshing water until it was saturated and became a bubbling spring. The Lord God would move in wonderful power in that day. There are lives that are like hot desert sands that cry out for the cool refreshing water of God. God is able to turn these barren lives into pools of bubbling joy.

There was at least a partial fulfilment of these prophecies in the life of the Lord Jesus on this earth: the lame walked, the blind had their sight restored, to them and the deaf heard again. When John the Baptist was in prison and plagued by doubt, he sent a disciple to the Lord Jesus to ask Him if He was the one who was to come (the Messiah). Jesus responded in Matthew 11:4-5:

Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

These miracles demonstrated Jesus' authenticity.

While the Lord did come to His people and perform these wonderful miracles, the majority of Israel rejected him. For this reason we have cause to believe that God has not yet finished with His people. There may yet be a time of tremendous renewal for the Jewish nation.

In the days of this wonderful renewal, Isaiah told his people that a highway would be built called “the Way of Holiness” (verse 8). The day was coming when the Spirit of God would so work in the lives of His people that they would walk in the ways of holiness. The unclean would not be able to journey on that road of holiness. Only those whose hearts had been touched by God would walk on this road. Only those who had been redeemed would be found walking on that path. No lion or ferocious beast—representing enemies—would be able to get on that road to trouble those who walked there.

Notice the promise in verse 10. Not only would the Lord keep the enemies from those who had chosen to walk in His path of holiness, but He promised that those who had been ransomed would reach their destination. They would enter Zion with singing. Everlasting joy would be on their heads. Gladness would overtake them, and all sorrow and sighing would flee.

Some of this prophecy was fulfilled in the return of Judah from the Babylonian exile. The problem, however, is that God’s people returned from exile, but their joy and gladness was temporary. They quickly fell back into sin, and their enemies overtook them again. This leads us to understand that what God promised to Zion in chapter 35 may yet still happen.

God wants to do a powerful work in the lives of His people in the Jewish nation, but there is a sense in which

we too are partakers of this promise now through salvation in Christ. There is encouragement in this passage for those who are presently troubled and wondering where the Lord is. Take courage. It is the delight of the Lord to renew and protect His people. He has great things in store for those who love Him.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about blessings that are mis-used?
- How faithful have you been with the blessings the Lord had given you?
- Are you going through a difficult time in your life? What encouragement do you find in this passage?
- What does this passage teach us about salvation? What are the pictures used to describe salvation?
- What does Isaiah's prophecy here in this chapter teach us about the plan of God for His people in the time to come?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be faithful with what He has given you.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for taking His blessing for granted and not recognizing the fact that He could take them from us in an instant.
- Thank the Lord that, while He may discipline us for a time, He does not abandon us.
- Thank God that He keeps us and preserves us in the salvation He offers.

- Consider what Isaiah tells us about the days to come. Take a moment to thank the Lord for this wonderful hope.

28

AN ASSYRIAN RETREAT

Read Isaiah 36:1-37:38

In chapters 36-39 Isaiah wrote a historical account of King Hezekiah and the Assyrians. These chapters served as proof that the Lord protects those who trust in Him.

In chapter 36 we read that Sennacherib invaded Judah in the fourteenth year of the reign of King Hezekiah. We understand something important about Hezekiah from 2 King 18:5-7:

Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

The Bible describes King Hezekiah as a good king who served the Lord. He was responsible for tearing down

many pagan idols and altars in Judah. He served the Lord faithfully but refused to serve the king of Assyria. This got him into trouble with Assyria, which had already destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians invaded and captured all the fortified cities of Judah. Although Hezekiah was a good king, he still had enemies. Serving the Lord and living for Him is no guarantee of freedom from struggle. Notice that the Assyrians were given a certain measure of success against Hezekiah.

These events may seem somewhat strange to us. Hezekiah, a good king who was responsible for religious reform in the land, had his country attacked by a fierce enemy. There are certainly times like this in our lives when it seems that the enemy comes in like a flood. We are left wondering what the Lord is doing and why we are experiencing such pain and trial.

After conquering many important Judean cities, the Assyrians sent an army to Jerusalem, hoping that Hezekiah would surrender without a fight. Three of Hezekiah's administrators (Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah the recorder) went out to speak to the Assyrian field commander (verse 3). The field commander told the three men to ask King Hezekiah what made him so confident. Any confidence in Judah's military strength would prove futile (verse 5).

The field commander also reminded Hezekiah that trusting in Egypt would be useless (verse 6). He compared Egypt to a "splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand." This Assyrian also spoke about Judah's God. The field commander confused some details because he did not understand Israel's religion. He saw Hezekiah's reforms to be actions against the Lord God. How could these people think that their God would help

them if they had broken down the altars in their nation? He seems to be referring to Hezekiah's reform and the pulling down of pagan altars. The field commander's intent was to discourage the people and break their spirits.

Notice how the field commander then made a mocking proposal. He offered to provide two thousand horses if they could put a rider on each of them (verse 8). The Assyrians knew that Hezekiah did not even have two thousand men. In verse 10 the Assyrian field commander made his intents clear. He had come to attack and destroy this land. He went as far as to say that the Lord told him to come and attack Judah. There was an element of truth in this. Isaiah had prophesied that God would use Assyria to punish Judah (8:7-8; 10:5-6). We can only imagine how discouraging these words would have been for the three messengers.

To make matters worse, the field commander had been speaking these words out loud in the Hebrew language. Hezekiah's three representatives asked him to speak in Aramaic so that the people would not understand and become discouraged. But the field commander refused to speak in Aramaic. He again mocked them and detailed the horrors of famine that a long siege would entail (verse 12). Speaking loudly in Hebrew, the Assyrian field commander said:

Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! . . . Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, 'The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'

The field commander offered to make peace with the citizens of Jerusalem if they would leave the city and come out to him. He promised that if they did this, they would each eat from their own vine and fig tree and drink water from their own cistern in a land very similar to Judah (verse 16-17). He promised rich blessings for all who would turn their backs on the Lord God of Israel and come to him. This was the same tactic Satan used in the Garden of Eden. Satan has continuously offered great things to those who will turn their backs on the Lord.

The commander pointed them to his record of military victories. "Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?" he asked (verse 18). The Assyrians had been sweeping across the earth, taking one nation after another. The gods of these nations had not been able to protect their worshippers, so why did Judah think that her God would be superior to other gods.

As the Assyrian official spoke, the people remained silent. The king had commanded them not to say anything. Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah returned to the king with their clothes torn. This was a sign of mourning. They were obviously greatly disturbed by what the field commander had said.

If you are walking with the Lord, you too can be sure that you will also have to face attacks of the enemy in your life as well. The enemy promises great things, but he is the father of lies. You cannot trust what he says. He deceived Eve, and all of humanity paid the price. Only by trusting God and remaining faithful can you be assured of victory.

In chapter 37 the historical account continues. The messengers came back to King Hezekiah and reported

what they had heard. King Hezekiah tore his clothes as a sign of mourning, put on sackcloth, and went into the temple of the Lord. Hezekiah then sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests to Isaiah the prophet to seek the will and purpose of the Lord.

These men went to Isaiah with the words of the king that this was a terrible day of distress and disgrace for them as a people (37:3). He compared it to a child being brought to the point of delivery but there was no strength to deliver. Hezekiah recognized that he had no strength in himself. He could not deliver his people from the hands of this terrible enemy. He was hoping that the Lord would hear the blasphemous words of the field commander and rebuke Assyria. Hezekiah asked Isaiah to pray that the Lord God would deliver the surviving remnant.

Isaiah sent word back to Hezekiah that he was not to be afraid of what the field commander had said. God had heard and would take action (37:6-7). The Lord would lead Sennacherib home to Assyria where he would die by the sword. We can only imagine how encouraging this word would have been to Hezekiah and his officials. God had not forgotten them and would not leave them to the enemy.

As Isaiah had prophesied, Sennacherib received a report that the Cushite king Tirhakah was marching out against him. When he heard this, he prepared to withdraw from his Judean campaign but sent word to Hezekiah that Jerusalem would eventually be conquered by Assyria. The gods of the other nations had not protected them, and Hezekiah should not be deceived by His God's vow of protection (verses 10-13).

It is important that we see what was happening. There was a spiritual battle raging, unseen to the human eye. God's Spirit was moving to deliver His people from the oppression of Assyria. The forces of evil were also moving to depreciate what God was doing. God was doing a wonderful thing in causing the Assyrian army to withdraw from Jerusalem and all of Judah. The forces of evil, however, didn't want the Lord to get the glory for this miraculous deliverance. Through the king of Assyria, seeds of fear and doubt were sown among God's people. Sennacherib threatened to return and conquer Jerusalem as he had conquered all the other cities and nations. In that moment of deliverance when the Lord should have received great glory and honour from His people, the enemy tried to quench any worship and praise. This is the way the enemy works. He may be forced back, but he will try to do all he can to sow his seeds of doubt and fear before he goes.

Notice the response of Hezekiah to these words of the king of Assyria. Hezekiah again went to the temple to be in the presence of the Lord (verse 14). He took the letter from Sennacherib and spread it out before the Lord. Then Hezekiah prayed, worshiping the Lord and recognising His uniqueness. The God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, was alone God over all the kingdoms of the earth, including Assyria. The wise and powerful God of Israel made heaven and earth. Who could stand against the purposes of such an awesome God?

Hezekiah brought his concerns to the Lord (37:18). He reminded the Lord that some of the words Sennacherib had spoken were true. The Assyrians had indeed destroyed the nations around them. They had taken the gods of these nations and cast them into the fire. Hezekiah recognised that these gods, however, were not real

but only made of wood and stone. Hezekiah pleaded with the Lord, as the one true God, to deliver Jerusalem from the hands of the Assyrians. Notice the humility of Hezekiah's motivation—so that the whole world would know that the Lord alone is God (verse 20).

Because Hezekiah turned to the Lord God alone for help, the Lord answered him. Isaiah brought the Lord's answer to the king. Isaiah told Hezekiah that the Virgin Daughter of Zion would mock the Assyrians, who had insulted the Lord God of Israel. The Assyrians had lifted themselves above the God of Israel and claimed power over the people of God. The Assyrians boasted of cutting down the tallest trees, digging wells in foreign lands, and defeating Egypt. But God had something to say to these proud conquerors. He told the Assyrians that it was in His plan that they turn these fortified cities into piles of stone (37:26). They had been an instrument in the hands of the Lord to accomplish His purposes. God knew everything about them: where they stayed and what they had spoken out against Him (37:28). Because they raged against the Lord God, He would put a hook in their nose and a bit in their mouth and force them to return to their land.

God gave Hezekiah a sign to assure him of the fulfillment of the prophecy against Assyria. The sign was a supernatural fruitfulness in the land for three years (37:30). When he hastily departed, the people planted again, and the vines and trees produce fruit during their first season to prevent famine. God loved His people and would not forsake them.

Isaiah reassured Hezekiah that the king of Assyria would not be allowed to enter the city of Jerusalem as he had threatened. He would not even be able to shoot an arrow

at the city or build a siege ramp against it. He would return to his own land and not return to Judah. God promised to defend the city of Jerusalem and protect it (37:35). He would do that for the sake of the promises He made to David. The Lord would be faithful to His promise. As if to confirm this word, the angel of the Lord went out into the Assyrian camp, as it prepared to depart for Judah, and slaughtered one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in one evening. When the survivors woke in the morning, "there were all the dead bodies!" (37:36). We are not given the details of how the angel slaughtered these men.

In defeat, Sennacherib broke camp and returned to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. One day when he was worshipping in the temple of his god, his own sons killed him with the sword. This fulfilled the word of the Lord. Sennacherib was succeeded by King Esarhaddon.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself facing the discouragement of the enemy? Explain.
- What is the difference between the conviction of the Lord and the discouragement of the enemy?
- What do we learn about the tactic of the enemy to downplay the work of God?
- How often have we worried and fretted like Hezekiah and his officials? Is God in control of the situation you are worried about today?
- How did Hezekiah deal with his problem in this chapter? What lesson is there in this for us?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray for someone who is going through a time of discouragement. Ask the Lord to help this person distinguish the truth of God from the lies of the enemy.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control of the situation that disturbs you today.
- Ask the Lord to enable you to completely trust Him in the situation in which you find yourself.

29

HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS

Read Isaiah 38:1-39:1-8

King Hezekiah served the Lord. He was responsible for many of pagan altars being torn down throughout the land of Judah. He cleansed the temple, consecrated the priests and, re-established the sacrificial system that his father had forbidden (2 Chronicles 29-31). Although Hezekiah served the Lord, his life was not easy. Serving God is no guarantee of freedom from problems in this life. Even the righteous suffer.

Verse 1 tells us that Hezekiah became very ill to the point of death. Isaiah brought a word from the Lord for the king. The Lord was calling him to put his house in order because he was going to die. On hearing this news from Isaiah, Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed.

Hezekiah reminded the Lord how he had walked with Him faithfully and with "wholehearted devotion." As he prayed and wept bitterly; his heart was broken by the news of his coming death. He was confused and bewildered. While

not specifically mentioned, the cry of Hezekiah was that God would heal him and extend his life.

Although Isaiah had prophesied that Hezekiah would not recover, the king's prayer moved the heart of God. Again, God spoke through Isaiah telling Hezekiah that the Lord had heard his prayer and seen his tears. In response, the Lord chose to add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life and also deliver him from the king of Assyria, who had been a continual threat during his reign.

There is an important detail in this story that we need to understand. From 2 Kings 21:1 we learn that when Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh was only twelve years old. Could this have been part of the reason for why Hezekiah wept so bitterly that day? He had no son to succeed him as king. The fifteen years that the Lord extended his life gave him the opportunity to have a son and raise him to be his successor.

There is something else we need to understand in this story of Hezekiah and his successor. Manasseh, his son, would reverse the reforms of his father Hezekiah to cleanse the land of its injustice and idolatry. He would lead his people directly into the hands of the enemy and cause the wrath of God to fall on them as a people. Manasseh would prove to be a very evil king. Listen to how 2 Kings 21:11-16 describes him.

Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will

stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes, because they have done evil in my eyes and have provoked me to anger from the day their forefathers came out of Egypt until this day. Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD.

When Isaiah came to Hezekiah, he told him that God wanted him to prepare for his death. Had he died that day, Manasseh would never have been born. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: How would the shape of the nation have changed had evil Manasseh not been born? Hezekiah pleaded with God to heal him and extend his life. God answered his request, but it was not for the good of the nation. God knew what was coming, but Hezekiah did not. Was God trying to spare that nation from such an evil son?

God heard the prayer of Hezekiah that day and granted his request. The Lord also gave him a sign that this request would be granted. God told him that the shadow cast by the sun would go back ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz (verse 8). This was contrary to nature. The sun's shadow went in reverse. By this Hezekiah would know that the Lord would perform what He had prophesied through his servant Isaiah.

Hezekiah was so touched by this dramatic healing that he wrote his testimony (verses 10-20). He lamented that he was in the prime of life and did not want to die. He felt that he was being robbed of the rest of his life. He grieved over the fact that he would no longer be in the land of the living to see the Lord and His dealings with humankind. His tent was being pulled up and taken from him. Like a weaver, the Lord had cut him off from the loom and rolled him up. God's work in him was finished.

In verse 13 Hezekiah compared God to a lion that was breaking all his bones and destroying him. He cried out to the Lord in his pain. He moaned like a dove. His eyes were weak as he looked up to heaven for help.

Hezekiah's prayers were rewarded. God did restore his health and let him live again (verse 16). Notice that Hezekiah did not resent the pain he had to face. He recognized that the anguish was for his benefit. It was true that he did have to suffer, but he testified to the fact that God's love kept him from the pit of destruction. The Lord forgave Hezekiah for all his sins. This time of sickness was obviously a time of personal cleansing.

"The grave cannot praise you," said Hezekiah to the Lord (verse 18). Only the living can praise the Lord and tell of His faithfulness to the generations to come. Because the Lord had saved him, Hezekiah would sing and praise the Lord for the rest of his life. His heart would never forget the goodness of God in delivering him from his sin and healing him of his disease. There can be no questioning Hezekiah's gratefulness to God for healing him that day. The blessing of God can also be seen in the fact that Hezekiah did not live long enough to see the devastation that the son born during this time would cause to the land.

Notice in verse 21 the means by which the healing of Hezekiah came. Isaiah told the king to prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to his boil. Isaiah told him that this poultice would be a sign to him that he would again go up to the temple to worship the Lord. As he applied this poultice to the open sore, it was healed. Seeing this miraculous healing was a sign to Hezekiah that God's hand of blessing was still on him.

These were incredible days for Hezekiah as he saw the Lord delivering him from the hand of his enemy and healing him of his disease. His heart was thrilled and overwhelmed by God and His goodness. Hezekiah is an example to us of prayer and praise. He brought his struggle to the Lord. He believed in prayer and its power to deliver and heal. He also believed in praising God "all the days of our lives" (verse 20).

The news of Hezekiah's healing spread. It even reached the king of Babylon. At this point Babylon was a rising power. The king of Babylon sent a gift to Hezekiah when he heard of the recovery (39:1). Judah and Babylon had something in common at this point in their history: both feared the Assyrians. By sending a gift to Hezekiah, the king of Babylon may have been trying to get acquainted with a potential ally.

Hezekiah gladly received the envoys from Babylon and showed them all the treasures of his kingdom (39:2). Was he hoping for an alliance with Babylon? If this was the case, Hezekiah's confidence was not in the Lord but in this alliance. The Lord allowed this to happen to test the sincerity of Hezekiah's heart (2 Chronicles 32:31).

On hearing how Hezekiah had shown all the wealth of Israel to the Babylonian envoys, Isaiah told the king that

the day was coming when everything that he had shown these envoys would be carried off to Babylon (39:6). The Babylonians would return and strip the land of its wealth and prosperity. Hezekiah's own descendants would be taken into captivity and become servants in the house of the king of Babylon. This word did not seem to disturb Hezekiah too much because he knew that he would live in security for the rest of his life.

There are two things we need to observe. The first relates to Hezekiah's trust. It is interesting that Hezekiah often went to the Lord in times of trouble. He was a praying king and a godly king, who was responsible for the renewal of worship in the land. There were also times in his life, however, when he had a tendency to lean on his own strength and understanding. At one point he sought to enter an alliance with Egypt against Assyria (see Isaiah 36:6-9). There is evidence that he also was looking to Babylon for help. In both of these situations, the very nations he sought help from failed him. How many times do we have to repeat the same error in our own lives? How many times will we have to see human strength fail us before we too understand that God is the only safe refuge?

The second thing we need to see in this passage is the lack of concern Hezekiah had for future generations. He had the promise from God that his reign would end in peace and security. He didn't seem to care that his descendants would be taken into captivity in Babylon. How often do we too live for the moment with no thought of how our actions will affect others? Our actions today will influence generations to come. May God help us to see this.

For Consideration:

- What has God done in your life? Have you demonstrated an attitude of praise for what He has done?
- Hezekiah brought his problems to the Lord in prayer. Do you have this same attitude of prayer in all things?
- It is possible for us to come to God insisting on our own will and purposes? How do we find the balance between bringing our personal requests to God and seeking the will and purpose of God in prayer?
- How often have you been tempted to trust in your own wisdom and strength?
- How might your actions today affect the lives of the generations to come?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is gracious to us and does hear our prayers.
- Ask the Lord to help you to pray according to His will and purpose.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live a life that brings praise and honour to Him.
- Ask the Lord to help you to place your complete confidence in Him and to refuse to turn from Him to trust in the flesh.
- Take a moment to pray that the Lord would guide you in your decisions and actions today so that generations to come will be blessed.

30

TO WHOM WILL YOU COMPARE ME?

Read Isaiah 40:1-31

In chapters 40-66 the attention shifted from Judah's immediate problems with the Assyrians and imminent judgement to a distant future and Judah's ultimate deliverance. In chapter 40 in particular, the Lord focused attention on Himself and on the deliverance that He would bring to His people.

The prophecy in verse 1 began with a word of comfort to the people of God. In previous chapters Isaiah had prophesied devastation of their land and exile for the people. These would be difficult years, but they would not last forever. The day was coming when they would be set free. God would return to bless them.

God challenged Isaiah to speak tenderly to Jerusalem. As a prophet, he had often been called to speak harshly to her to warn of the tremendous punishment that awaited her under the judgement of God. But God's prophetic

tone had changed and Isaiah was to speak tenderly to Jerusalem to demonstrate the eternal love and affection He had for His people. Isaiah was to tell God's people that their time of hard service would come to an end. God's discipline would not last forever.

Verse 2 tells us that Israel would receive double from the Lord for her sins. It is somewhat difficult to understand exactly what this phrase means. Some commentators believe that Israel would receive double for her sins in that she would be oppressed by two nations (Assyria and Babylon). It should be noticed, however, that this phrase "double for all her sins" is in the context of Israel's sins being paid. This would indicate that the double payment did not relate so much to the punishment as to the blessing she would receive. In other words, she would receive a twice as much blessing as she had received in penalty. God's grace would doubly cover her sin. Verse 3 began to speak of Messiah who was to come. It was His life that would doubly cover all Israel's sin.

In verse 3 Isaiah spoke about a voice crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord. In John 1:23, John the Baptist was asked about his ministry. He stated that he was the one who called out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist was the one who announced the arrival of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to note that ultimate victory for Israel was to be found in the Messiah who was to come. He would pay double for the sins of His people. He would be the instrument of God to bring forgiveness and cleansing for all their guilt.

In those days Isaiah prophesied that every valley would be raised and every mountain and hill would be laid low. The rough ground would be levelled and the rocky places

would be smoothed out. This pictured the coming of a great king. When a king travelled, he sent his servants ahead to prepare the way. In our day when people of great importance come to town, they are accompanied by a police escort. These policemen will stop the traffic so that the dignitaries can travel without obstacles. Similarly, God would send His servants ahead of the Lord Jesus to prepare the way. When everything was ready, the glory of the Lord would be revealed, and people would see God's great purpose. This would be accomplished because the Lord had commanded and willed it.

Verses 6-8 remind us of the reliability of this word of the Lord. Isaiah was told to cry out and compare the word of the Lord with humankind. Human beings are like grass or the flowers of the fields, which wither quickly. When the Lord blows on them, they fade and are destroyed. How frail we are as human beings. How different is the word of the Lord, which will stand forever. Nothing can cause God's word to fail or fade away. It never loses its power or becomes old or outdated. It is as fresh, real and true today as it ever was. We can rely on this word. What God says we can trust.

Those who brought this good news to Zion of forgiveness and cleansing were to go to a high mountain and lift up their voices with a loud shout. This was good news that needed to be proclaimed to all. Judah's God would come. The Messiah would come to deliver them from their sin and bondage. "Here is your God!" (verse 9). What exciting times these would be! Their sovereign Lord would come to them in power. He would come with a great reward to recompense His people. This would be a time to rejoice and be glad. Their God would come to tend His flock like a shepherd. He would gather His lambs together under His arms and carry them close to

His heart. He would gently lead those who had young. This is a picture of tremendous love and affection. This is how the Lord feels about His people. He longs to tenderly care for them.

This wonderful love for His people is guaranteed by the power of God (verse 12). The God who so gently carries his lambs close to His heart has also measured out the waters in the hollow of His hand. He marks off the limit of the heavens by the breadth of His hand. He holds the dust of the earth in a basket and weighs the mountains in His scales. The God who cares so deeply for His people is a God whose mind cannot be understood by mere mortals. There is no one who can instruct Him or be His counsellor. He knows all things.

This God is so awesome and mighty that the nations are but a mere drop in a bucket or as dust on His scales (verse 15). All their power and glory is nothing to Him. What could anyone ever offer to such a God as an offering worthy of His name? The great forest of Lebanon with all its tall and famous cedars would not be enough for the altar fire that would be required. All the animals in this forest laid on that altar would never measure up to the worth of this great God. Why should He even notice these sacrifices? The nations of the earth are worthless to Him.

Isaiah asked a question in verse 18: "To whom, then, will you compare God?" Isaiah contrasted the Lord God with the idols of his day. All these idols were hand-crafted and could not even stand up without support. On the other hand, the God of Israel sits enthroned above the earth (verse 22). People are like mere grasshoppers before Him. This awesome God, in contrast to the idols, stretched out the heavens like a great tent for us to live

under. He reduces the greatest princes of the earth to nothing. They all bow to His authority and sovereign rule. One moment they rise to power, and the next moment they fall. The whirlwind sweeps them away like worthless chaff. They appear in our eyes to be powerful, but they cannot be compared to the almighty God of this universe.

“To whom will you compare me?” asked God in verse 25. “Who is my equal?” We are challenged to look up to the heavens. With all our modern technology, we have yet to see the limit of outer space. Who created these heavens? Consider the number of stars in the sky. Each one of these stars is like our sun. Who gave birth to these millions of stars one by one? Our Creator calls each of these stars by name. There is not one star missing in the sky that should be there. By His great power He keeps them burning and holds them in their places.

In light of these tremendous facts, Isaiah asked his people how they could think that God was ignorant of their condition or that He had forgotten them (verse 27). God is everlasting and His understanding never fails. He will never grow tired or weary. His love for us will never diminish. He gives strength to those who are weary and increases the power of the weak (verse 29). The power of Almighty God is at our disposal. He delights in making Himself available to us.

In verse 31 Isaiah told Israel that those who hope in the Lord will be renewed in their strength. That strength is the strength of Almighty God. Those who are filled with this strength will soar on wings of eagles. To soar is really to be carried along by the wind. The soaring eagle is relaxed and calm as the elements of nature carry it along. This, said Isaiah, is what it will be like for these who trust in the Lord. As they surrender to Him, they are carried

along by His Spirit and His strength. Even as they run, they do so without growing weary. This is because the strength in them is not their own. The Lord never grows weary. His strength in us is infinite.

One amazing thing about this chapter is the incredible intimacy revealed between God and His people. The awesome and all-powerful God of this universe longs to carry us close to His heart. He longs to pour His strength into us and through us. What an awesome thought this is. The Creator of the universe offers to be our strength. He offers to be our God and to carry us in our time of need. We can soar like the eagle in a strength that is not our own. We can run and not grow weary because He fills us with a strength that will never fail. Has this been your experience? Do you know this depth of experience with the Lord?

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about the heart of God for us as His people?
- What keeps you from experiencing this wonderful relationship with God today?
- Have you experienced this wonderful enabling in your own life? How has the Lord strengthened you?

For Prayer:

- Do you need to be strengthened in your service or relationship with the Lord? Take a moment to ask

the Lord to strengthen you for what He has called you to do.

- Consider the depth of God's love for you as recorded in this chapter. Thank the Lord for that wonderful love. Ask Him to give you grace to open your heart to receive all He wants to give you.

31

ISRAEL, MY SERVANT

Read Isaiah 41:1-29

In chapter 41 the islands were called to be silent before the Lord. God was calling the far corners of the earth to a silence that comes from awe and reverence. God was calling all on the earth to present themselves for His judgement.

In verse 2 Isaiah prophesied that God would raise a servant from the east. This individual would be called in righteousness to serve the Lord in a very particular way. Later Isaiah would identify this as King Cyrus of Persia (44:28; 45:1), but here the emphasis is on the sovereign Lord who called him into action. Notice how Isaiah described this servant.

This individual was God's servant. While Cyrus did not claim to be a servant of the God of Israel, he was used by God to accomplish His purpose. The Lord God uses whomever He desires to work out His sovereign will. He does not require that His servants be perfect, and He even uses unbelievers to accomplish those purposes.

We should also understand in this verse that nations owe their existence and power to the God of Israel, the one true God. No one can legitimately claim strength apart from the Lord. Everything we have we owe to God and His enabling power. The Lord, in His sovereignty, chose to hand the nations over to this conqueror and to reduce them to dust.

By the power of the Lord, this servant would move into new territory and easily conquer it, returning from battle unscathed (verse 3). These events would transpire because the Lord God would carry them through to completion.

In verses 5-7 Isaiah described the islands in fear and the nations trembling before this conquering servant of the Lord. The nations would band together to support each other, but they would not be able to resist him. The nations would also turn in vain to idols to save them. But what hope would they possibly have against the sovereign Creator of the universe? It was foolish to resist Him. Their gods could do nothing to help them.

In verse 8 Isaiah turned his attention from the Gentile nations of the earth to the nation of Israel. Israel was God's servant; God had chosen Jacob. These descendants of Abraham were the friends of God. What a wonderful reality we see in this verse. Those of us who know the Lord are His chosen servants and friends. The great and awesome Creator of the universe has chosen us. There cannot be a more humbling truth than this.

This wonderful and awesome God took His people from the ends of the earth and from the farthest corners of the globe and drew them to Himself. In this context Isaiah was referring to the return of the people of God from their

exile. The Lord would again choose to pour His favour on them. It was for this reason that the people of Israel, God's friends and servants, did not need to worry and fear like the other nations. They did not need to be dismayed because their God would help them, strengthen them, and uphold them with His righteous right hand. In Bible times the right hand was a symbol of favour.

God promised His people in verse 11 that those who raged against them would surely be put to shame. So great would be the defeat of their enemies that they would cease to exist. This wonderful God who created the universe would take them by the right hand and tell them not to fear. When I read this, I like to imagine the picture of a parent taking the hand of a small child. What comfort this brings to the child. What peace floods children's hearts when their parents reassure them! What comfort it is to feel the strong hand of the Lord touching ours.

Notice in verse 14 that Isaiah compared Jacob to a worm. A worm is ugly and weak. The amazing thing is this is that God reached down to that worm and chose to pour His love on it. He chose to call it His servant and befriend it. He promised to help it against its enemies and to redeem it and draw it to Himself. God loved Israel, blessed her, protected her, and treasured her as His own.

Notice in verse 15 that the Lord promised to make His weak people into a powerful threshing sledge. Sledges were dragged over grain in preparation for winnowing. This process was used to illustrate the judgement of God on the nations. Through Israel He would punish the nations and restore justice and righteousness to the earth. God's people would rejoice in His glory and protection.

Verses 17-20 promised Israel that in her deprived state (as a needy captive), the Lord would answer her prayers and come to her aid. The Lord would quench Israel's thirst and enrich the land with luxurious vegetation. He would be known as the Holy One of Israel, the Creator.

In verse 21 God called the Gentile nations to present their case and set out their arguments (see verse 1). The nations were to present evidence that their idols were true deities. The foreign gods of the Gentiles were on trial (verses 21-29). The idols were invited to predict events so that the world would know that they were true gods. The law of God was quite clear for deciding whether a prophet (or in this case, an idol) was true or false. Deuteronomy 18:21-22 stated that fulfilment of prophecy was the determining factor. God was applying this same test to idols. As these challenges went unanswered, Isaiah described the idols in verse 24 as "less than nothing." Their works were worthless, and anyone who chose to worship and serve them was detestable.

In contrast to these useless idols, God predicted some future events (verse 25). He would raise up someone from the north and east of Israel. That person would come and tread on rulers as if they were mortar or as a potter treading the clay to soften it. This ruler from the north would call on the name of the Lord. It is interesting to note what Ezra recorded about King Cyrus of Persia in Ezra 1:2:

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.'

It is quite clear from this that Cyrus of Persia had knowledge of the Lord God of Israel and gave Him credit for his military success.

This prophecy was given in this trial scene as proof that the Lord God of Israel is the one true God. In verse 26 Isaiah reminded those present that it was not the idols who predicted these events but the Lord God of Israel. Only Zion had a messenger of good tidings from the Lord. These idols had failed to produce any proof that they were true gods. They were declared false because their deeds amounted to nothing. They were only wind and confusion as they misled the people.

The contrast between the God of Israel and the idols of the nations is still very real today. How we need to praise the Lord that He has revealed Himself to us and controls the future. What a privilege it is to know Him in our hearts and be called His friends.

For Consideration:

- What differences are there between the relationship of God with His people and the relationship of idols with their worshippers?
- What does this section teach us about the type of relationship that God desires with His people?
- Have you experienced this wonderful relationship with God? How would you describe your relationship with God today?
- What evidence is there that the faith you profess is a real faith?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wonderful fellowship He desires with us as His people.
- Ask the Lord to help you to experience this fellowship with Him on a deeper level.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you lost sight of His protection and sovereign care.
- Take a moment to consider the ways in which the Lord has clearly demonstrated to you that He is real. Thank Him for those demonstrations.

THE COMING MESSIAH

Read Isaiah 42:1-25

In the last chapter, we saw how the Lord God of Israel compared Himself with the foreign gods of the nations. While these idols were helpless to predict the future, the Lord God of Israel spoke to His people of things that would come to pass in the years ahead. In chapter 41 the Lord referred both to Cyrus of Persia as a conquering warrior. In chapter 42 the Lord urged His people to look for another servant who would reveal God to the world.

Verse 1 tells us that the servant that was to come would be upheld by God. God's hand would be on Him to watch over Him and to support Him in His ministry. God would take great delight in this specially chosen servant. God's Holy Spirit would be on Him, enabling and empowering Him with the authority of God. This servant would bring justice to the nations.

It is important that we note that the ministry of this servant would be exercised in gentleness and meekness (verse 2). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, He would

minister with the fruit of that Spirit. His intention would not be to draw attention to Himself and His deeds, unlike the kings of the earth who shout and magnify themselves. The gentleness and compassion of this servant would be such that even the bruised reed and smouldering wick would be safe in his presence. A bruised reed is on the point of breaking. It is very fragile. Even a very gentle wind would snap it in two. A smouldering wick contains a flame that is about to go out. Again, the slightest breeze would snuff it out. This servant would be patient and caring with the most vulnerable among us.

There can be now doubt that Isaiah was referring to the Lord Jesus in these verses (see Matthew 12:15-21). I find verse 3 to be very encouraging. The bruised reed and the smouldering wick often describe our own lives. There are times when at best we are bruised and ready to be broken like that reed. There are times when our spiritual lives are smouldering wicks, dying and ready to go out. How easy it would be for the Lord Jesus to simply blow out our light and pass on. Instead, He ministers in wonderful gentleness to us. He cares for us, heals our bruises, and restores our light. Like a good shepherd, He reaches out to the one sheep that is wandering and lost and draws that one back to the fold. Why He should notice the bruised and smouldering lights is beyond me, but I delight in the fact that He does notice and cares deeply.

This Messiah would bring forth justice in faithfulness (verse 3). He would not falter in His responsibility. He would not be discouraged in serving His Father. As we now know, He willingly laid down His life for us so that the price for sin was paid and divine justice was accomplished. At His second coming, the Messiah will bring

justice and hope to the nations by ruling them according to God's law (verse 3; see also Psalm 2:8-12).

In verses 5-7 the Lord speaks directly to this servant, here identified as "you." The Creator of the universe identified Himself as the one who would call this servant and empower Him to perform His divine purposes. The servant would provide salvation to Israel and the Gentiles. God would use His servant as a light for the Gentiles, as His instrument to open the eyes that were blind, set the captives free from their prison cells, and release those who were in the dungeon of darkness. God would use Him to bring His salvation to those who were being held in darkness by the enemy. We see the fulfillment of this through Christ (Colossians 1:13) and through the New Testament church, the spiritual body of Christ (Ephesians 3:10-12). Through His people the Lord is reaching out to the ends of the earth and bringing the light of the gospel to the remotest places. People from all over the entire world are being set free from their prisons cells of sin and evil.

In verse 8 the Lord stated that He would not give His glory to another. He would not surrender His praise to a worthless idol. At this point in history, Israel was engaged in idol worship. He reminded His people that only the true God could predict the future (verse 9). Prophecy that had already come true would give them assurance that prophecies about the future were just as sure.

In verses 10-12 Isaiah called God's people to sing a new song. The glorious things prophesied should stir their hearts to sing a new song of praise and thanksgiving to their God. This song was to be sung from the ends of the earth. It is the desire of the Lord to hear praise coming from every corner of the earth. The deserts and the towns

were to raise their voices. The nomadic inhabitants of Kedar as well as those who lived in the mountain fortresses of Sela were to sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.

Isaiah reminded His people that the Lord God would march before them like a mighty warrior (verse 13). Like a great military commander, He would raise the battle cry and lead them in triumph over their enemies. When Messiah first came, He was gentle and quiet. But one day He would come as a man of loud wrath and war, bringing His judgement against those who rejected His work of salvation.

The Lord compared His anger to a woman in labour. God had remained silent for a long time and held back His wrath. Like a child developing in a mother's womb, God's anger was waiting the appropriate moment to be birthed. We need to understand that, while the Lord may delay for a time in expressing His anger, the day will come when He will deal with sin and evil. Notice that when the time was right, the Lord would lay waste the mountains and the hills. The vegetation and rivers would dry up, and God's judgement would devastate the earth.

While His enemies were being judged, God would care for His own people (verse 16). They were oppressed by their enemies, but God would not abandon them. Though His children were blind, God would lead them through unfamiliar paths. He would turn their darkness into light and make the rough places smooth for them. How many times have you felt like you were in the dark, not knowing the direction to go? How many times has the path before you been unfamiliar? How many times has the road you travelled been rough and difficult? The Lord God promises to guide you along that unfamiliar path. Take courage.

Though things around may seem difficult for the moment, God will guide you step by step. He promises that He will not forsake you in your moment of need. Those who belong to the Lord God are protected and kept by His hand.

This is not the case for those who have turned their backs on God. Isaiah reminds us that those who trust in idols will be put to shame (verse 17). All who reject the Lord God will have nothing to turn to in their day of judgement. Their idols will not be able to save them.

Lest God's people think that because they were His children, they could do as they pleased, Isaiah spoke directly to them about their sin and its consequences. We saw in verse 16 that God's people were spiritually blind. In verse 18 Isaiah described them as spiritually deaf as well. He reminded them that their messengers were deaf and were not hearing from God. Isaiah lamented the fact that there were none so blind as the ones that were supposedly committed to the Lord God as His servants. This was a powerful statement about the condition of faith in the land. Those who should have been hearing from the Lord were not hearing from Him. Those who should have been seeing Him and His hand in their lives were not seeing Him.

God's people had become so hardened to spiritual matters that they no longer paid attention to them. There was plenty evidence of the hand of God, but they simply did not care anymore. They could not hear because they were not listening. How sad this picture is. We can sense the grieving heart of God in these words. He longed to commune with His people. He longed to reveal Himself to them and show them His glory, but they were not listening. Could this be true of the church of our day? Could it

be that the Lord wants to commune with us, but we are not listening? Could it be that there are none so blind to the things of God as His own people today?

In spite of Israel's spiritual deafness and blindness, the Lord would exalt His law and righteousness in their midst (verse 21). We need to understand that there was a tremendous blessing attached to obeying this law. Through obedience God's people could unlock the treasures He so desired to pour on them. Instead, they were plundered and looted (verse 22). They were trapped in pits and hidden away in prisons. There was no one to rescue them. They were stripped of all the blessings of the Lord. Despite this, God's people did not see what they were doing. "Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention?" asked the Lord (verse 23). God's people were so blind that they did not see that their disobedience led to a cursing of the land.

"Who handed Jacob over to become loot?" Isaiah asked in verse 24. "Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned?" He handed them over to their enemies because they refused to follow His ways and obey His law. In His anger over their disobedience, He poured His judgement on them, but they did not understand. He consumed them, but they did not take it to heart. Truly, there were none so blind as the people of God. They could not see what the Lord was doing. They could not see the results of their sin and evil.

In verse 16 the Lord promised that He would lead the blind through unfamiliar territory. He promised to change their darkness into light and make the rough places smooth. The blind were His own people who could not see what He was doing or the effects of their own sin. God promised to lead them, but His people would not let

Him do this for them. He longed to commune with them and reveal His heart to them, but they did not pay attention. They had become hardened to the things that God wanted to teach them. Does the Lord need to open our eyes and ears again? God, heal our blindness so that we might see Your ways again.

For Consideration:

- Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would minister in tremendous gentleness. Do we see this gentleness in the servants of God today?
- What encouragement do you take from the fact that the Lord ministers in gentleness to us?
- As servants of the Lord, do you have a burden to see the name of the Lord being honoured and praised around the world?
- Is it possible that we too have become blind and deaf to the things the Lord God is doing?
- What does this section teach us about the desire of the Lord God to commune with us?
- Is there a connection today between obedience to the Word of the Lord and blessing in our land?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the way He ministers in gentleness toward us.
- Ask the Lord to give you a gentle spirit
- Ask God to increase your desire to see His name being honoured in your life.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes and ears to see and hear Him again.

- Thank the Lord for the way He wants to commune with us.

A NEW THING SPURNED

Read Isaiah 43:1-28

In the last meditation, we saw that the Lord challenged His people regarding their blindness. There were none as blind as those who had been called by His name. They had failed to see His hand in their lives and they failed to understand His works. The amazing thing was that, while God's people would suffer much because of their blindness, God would not abandon them. He still cared deeply for them and would return to them to minister to their needs.

The Lord spoke to the people through Isaiah and reminded them that He had created them and formed them in the womb (verse 1). He had redeemed them from Egypt and called them His treasure at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:4-6). He would also redeem them from Babylon and spiritually redeem them through the work of Messiah. God expressed tenderness in this verse. The door was wide open for them to return to Him. By their own blindness, they had fallen into the hands of the enemy, but God would set them free. He was calling their name. All they had to do was respond to that call.

God promised that He would be with them in whatever situation they had to go through. As His people, they were not promised an easy life. There would be times when they would go through extreme circumstances symbolised here as floods and fires. They could live in confidence because the Lord their God, the Holy One of Israel, would be their Saviour (verse 3). The children of Israel were precious and honoured in His sight. He willingly turned His back on other nations and individuals in favour of Israel.

The truth Isaiah spoke is also true for those of us who are God's children today. He created us and His love for us is very real. Although we sinned and rebelled, He redeemed us. He promises to protect and keep us. Why He should love us and turn His back on so many others we will never know.

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you," He reminded them (verse 5). He promised to bring Israel's children from the east and gather them from the west. The north would be forced to give them up, and the south could no longer hold them against the wishes of Almighty God. From the ends of the earth, God's chosen people would come back to the Promised Land. Worldwide scattering would not prevent the Lord from fulfilling His promises to give them their land.

In verse 8 those whose eyes were blind and whose ears were deaf (Israel, 42:19) were called to gather as witnesses that their God was the true God. The nations were also gathered to prove God's power over future events. In verse 10 God called His people to be witnesses. Only Israel's God could make accurate predictions. Apart from Him there is no God or Saviour (verse 11). No

one can deliver out of His hand, and when He acts no one can reverse it (verse 13)

How do we know that the God we serve is the one true God? Isaiah tells us that we can know because of the truth He speaks. We can know because His word has proven to be true. As His witnesses, we have seen that what He has proclaimed has come to pass. The Gospel writers make it clear to us that the words of the Lord God will not pass away until everything is accomplished just as He said (Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17). Knowing that His word is sure gives us great confidence in His character. He cannot lie. His word cannot fail. We can trust Him with all our heart. He is worthy of our confidence. We can live in confidence, knowing that He who created us and redeemed us will also go with us and protect us on the way.

In the first half of this chapter, the Lord reminded His people of the tremendous love He had for them. As a demonstration of this love, the Lord told His people how He would deliver them from the Babylonians. It is important to remember that at the time Isaiah spoke this prophecy, Judah had not yet been taken into captivity in Babylon. The Lord would once again use the deliverance of His people out of a stronger nation to demonstrate His sovereign power to the whole world (see Exodus 9:13-16) and prove He was the true God.

In verse 14 the Lord reminded and promised His people that, as their Redeemer and the Holy One of Israel, the Babylonians would flee as fugitives in the ships that they prided themselves in. These great merchant ships sailed up and down the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

In verse 15 God reminded His people that He would deal with the Babylonians because He was the Lord their Holy One. He had created Israel and was her true King. As such, He wanted to protect and provide for her. He would deliver Israel not because of her faithfulness but because she belonged to Him.

The Lord reminded His people in verses 16-17 about what He had done for them in the past. He was the one who made a way through the sea and a path through the mighty waters when they came out of Egypt. In those days he led them across the Red Sea on dry land. He was the God who drew the chariots and horses of Egypt's army into that dry seabed and then drowned them by bringing the waters on top of them, snuffing them out like a wick.

In verse 18 God called them to forget the former things and not to dwell on them because He was going to do a new thing in their midst. As a people, they were looking in their past to see the work of God. The problem was that they themselves had no stories of God's wonderful and miraculous work in their own lives. Where were the contemporary illustrations of God's power and miraculous goodness? How true this is for us as well. We delight in a God who did wonderful things for other people but fail to see His work in our own lives today. God calls His people to forget the past. This forgetting has more to do with moving on to fresh stories of God's power and goodness than it has to do with completely forgetting what He did in the past. While we should always remember and learn from God's wonderful actions, we must move on from there to expect Him to do new and fresh things in our day as well.

The Lord told His people that if they would open their eyes, they would see a wonderful new thing happening (verse 19). God was making a way in the desert. He was placing streams in the desert wasteland. There would flow into their midst a wonderful blessing of the Spirit of God. Even as I write this, I feel the need to see the desert wasteland in my own life being refreshed by the Spirit of God. The Lord promised fresh blessings for His people so that they would have fresh reasons to praise His name.

Israel failed to see what God was doing. She failed to bring Him the glory He so longed to receive. His people received His blessings but did not honour Him and praise him for them. They did not call on him or bother to seek Him (verse 22). Notice that seeking God is not always an easy thing. There are times when we find ourselves wearied in our pursuit of Him. Isaiah challenges us to persevere in this pursuit. It is a pursuit that is well worth the effort.

Isaiah tells us that God's people did not honour Him with their sacrifices (verse 23). God's requirements were not a heavy burden for them, yet they did not bring Him what He required. They only brought Him their sin and wearied Him with their offences (verse 24). Isaiah informed His people that, in spite of their utter unworthiness, the Lord God, in His grace, would forgive all their sin. He would remember their sin no more (verse 25). He would cast it from them and never bring it against them again. He would do this for His own sake. Despite her failures Israel would always be God's chosen people.

In verse 26 the Lord called His people to correct Him if His assessment of their sinful condition was incorrect. Until we see that we are completely unworthy of God's

forgiveness, we will not receive it. He forgives us for His own sake—to reveal His gracious character—and not because we deserve to be forgiven.

Israel's sins were long-standing, going back to her forefathers. All the generations of Israel had sinned against the Lord. While God deeply loved His people and would restore them, He was obliged to disgrace them in judgement. Jacob, as a people, would be consigned to cursing, and Israel would be scorned. God promised to do a new thing in their midst, but first they would suffer His purifying judgement.

For Consideration:

- Consider for a moment the promises of God to be with us. Is there a particular situation in your life right now where you need this promise?
- Why is it so important that the word of the Lord be true? Could we place our confidence in a God whose word was not true?
- What new thing has God been doing in your life?
- Has your life been full of praise and thanksgiving to God for the wonderful things He has been doing?
- What keeps you from offering God the praise and thanksgiving He deserves?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His wonderful promises to us and His love that is beyond understanding.

- Ask the Lord to give you the strength to live with confidence in His word and belief in His promises. Ask Him to forgive you for the times that you have doubted His word.
- Ask the Lord to renew His blessings in your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times when you too have spurned the new things the Lord wanted to do in your life.

WHO IS LIKE ME?

Read Isaiah 44:1-28

God's love for His people has always been very real. In the last few chapters, He had been calling Israel back to Himself. He longed to have fellowship with His beloved nation. He reminded His people that He alone was the one true God and that the idols of the nations were counterfeit and worthless.

The prophecy of chapter 44 began with a call to God's people to listen to what He had to say. He reminded them that they were His servants and that He had chosen them. God told them not to be afraid. There were some difficult times coming for them (the Babylonian captivity), but they were not to lose heart. This judgement would not be His final word to them. God had formed them in the womb and would not abandon them. In verse 2 the Lord called His people by the name Jeshurun, which means "my dear upright people." Most commentators agree that it reflects the tenderness of God's feelings toward Israel (see also Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5, 26). Although Israel had stumbled morally, she would be held upright by God's hand.

God promised that He would spiritually refresh Israel like water poured on dry ground. In the future God's Spirit would be poured on Jacob's offspring. This was the heart of God for His beloved nation. In Isaiah's day Israel was suffering from the curse of disobedience. The spiritual lives of God's people were dry and barren like the desert, but God promised that their children would spring up like grass in the meadow. They would prosper like poplar trees growing by a stream of water.

It is easy to see the heart of the Lord God for His people. In my life I have been very slow to understand just how much God desires to bless. I have often wrestled with feelings of inadequacy. God has had to deal with me in this area of my life. I have come to understand that God does love me and wants to bless me. In these verses we see that this is the heart of God.

Notice in verse 5 what the result of the outpouring of God's blessing would be: Israel would be bold in her relationship with Him. One person would boldly proclaim: "I belong to the Lord." Others would call themselves by the name of Jacob, proudly identifying with the Hebrew race. In that day it would be an honour to be an Israelite, and many Gentiles would come to Israel's God.

In verse 6 the Lord reminded Israel of who He is. As Israel's king, He had authority over them and assured them of His leadership and protection. As Israel's Redeemer, He would pay the price for her sin. As the LORD Almighty, He is the omnipotent God. As the first and the last, He declared His eternal nature. When this earth is destroyed and everything we know passes away, God will still be unchanged. He is the only surety we have.

Through His servant Isaiah, the Lord asked His people a question: "Who then is like me?" (verse 7). Again, God called on the idols of the Gentile nations to prove their deity by correctly predicting the future. Since the Lord had given Israel accurate predictions since her birth as a nation, she would qualify as God's witness that there is no God except for Him (verse 8). For this reason the people of God were called to be bold. There was no cause for them to tremble or be afraid. Israel's God rules the world. Everything is in the hands of God their Redeemer.

In verse 9-20 Isaiah entered a lengthy comparison between the Lord God of Israel and the idols of the nations. The idols of the nations were nothing, and those who promoted them were blind and ignorant. Even common sense should have told them how foolish they were to trust in something they had shaped with their own hands (verses 9-11).

The artisans of idols grew tired in their efforts to create these false gods (verses 12-13). The workers grew hungry and lost their strength. Ultimately, the question was this: How could a mere human, who grows weak and faint from lack of food and water, create a god who could govern the universe? The creation cannot be greater than the creator. If the creator grew weary and fainted, how much more the creation?

In verses 14-17 Isaiah showed how idol-makers were confused. To make an idol, a tree had to be cut down. An artisan then took some of the chopped wood to use for warming or cooking. The rest of the wood from the same tree was used to carve false gods. Actually, the wood used for warming and cooking was the only part of the

tree that helped the idol-maker. No lifeless idol could render any service to its builder.

How foolish it was to bow down to these idols (verses 18-19). These idols knew nothing. They had no eyes to see or minds to understand. But these idol worshippers could not see these facts. They were as blind as the idols they created. Isaiah reminded the idol-makers that they fed on ashes. They trusted in something that would be burned up. They were misled and deluded. They trusted in a lie. Though reason alone should have convinced them of the error of their ways, these people were so bound in evil that they could not accept the truth.

God called on Israel to remember the truths revealed in this section of Scripture, namely, that He is the only God who foretells and creates history. The false gods of the Gentile nations are lifeless and worthless pieces of wood. Remembering these truths would motivate Israel to fulfil her purpose of being God's servant in the world (verse 21). What Israel needed more than anything to be God's servant was to be cleansed of her sin. The Lord's purpose for His people is stated with clearly: "Return to me for I have redeemed you" (verse 22).

In verse 23 the earth was called to sing for joy. Creation was to shout praise to the Lord God who had redeemed His people. The mountains and the forests were to burst into singing because God had chosen to reveal His glory in Israel.

The Lord reminded His people that He was the sovereign Lord who created Israel, the whole world, and the future (verses 24-25). God predicted that Jerusalem and the towns of Judah would be rebuilt out of their ruins and that a man named Cyrus would give the command for Jerusa-

temple and her temple to be rebuilt (verses 26-27). This prophecy was given about one hundred and ninety years before it was fulfilled. Both Ezra and Nehemiah recounted the story of how this prophecy was fulfilled just as Isaiah predicted, demonstrating to all that the Lord God is the true God and that all events are indeed in His hands.

In this chapter we see how the Lord God called His people to return to Him. He showed them the foolishness of trusting in idols and foreign gods. In Him alone were they secure. He alone held the destiny of the universe in His hands. He promised to pour His blessing on them and renew them. The God who created and governs this universe calls us to a deep and profound relationship. He longs to bless and reveal Himself to us if we will respond to His love and forgiveness.

For Consideration:

- What kind of idols do we worship today? Why is it foolish to bow down to them?
- Is there evidence in our day of the blindness that Isaiah spoke about in this chapter? Are there people who just cannot see the foolishness of trusting in their false gods?
- How were your eyes opened to the truth? How did God expose the error of your ways?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for opening your eyes to the truth of His Word.

- Thank the Lord for His sovereign control over the events of this universe.
- Do you know someone whose eyes are closed to the truth? Take a moment to ask the Lord to open the eyes of this person.

35

THE DELIVERER

Read Isaiah 45:1-25

There are times when the ways of the Lord seem very strange to us. In this chapter God spoke not to His own people but to Cyrus, king of the Persians and promised him many blessings. It should be remembered that the Lord gave this prophecy almost two centuries before fulfilling it.

In verse 1 the Lord referred to Cyrus as His “anointed.” This was shocking because this title was previously reserved for leaders of Israel. The Lord was teaching His people that He was Lord of all humankind, not just Israel. Cyrus would be an instrument in the hands of the Lord to accomplish a mighty work for Him. God would use King Cyrus to subdue nations and strip kings of their armour, thus rendering them powerless. Because God would be with Him, nothing would hinder him. God promised to go before him and level the mountains that stood in his path and give him the hidden treasures of nations (verses 2-3). The Lord planned this in order to reveal himself to Cyrus: “So that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.”

Why did God choose to bless Cyrus in such a way? Verse 4 tells us that it was for the sake of His servant Jacob and Israel His chosen one. God was bestowing a title of honour on Cyrus to use him to bless Israel. God is not obliged to use only those who know Him personally. The Lord uses whomever He wills because He is sovereign over all people.

How easy it is to believe that because we have experienced the anointing and blessing of the Lord that we are obviously close to Him. This passage tells us clearly that this is not necessarily the case. Throughout the history of the world, the Lord has often used individuals who are not right with Him to accomplish His greater purpose. Cyrus is a clear example of this. The pharaoh of the Exodus is another example (see Exodus 7:3-5). Although Cyrus did not claim to be a worshipper of the Lord, he was His instrument to prepare the way for the children of Israel to return to their homeland and rebuild it.

God promised to strengthen Cyrus, even though he did not acknowledge the Lord (verse 5). The Lord would do this to proclaim His own greatness (verse 6). The day would come in the midst of all his military conquests that King Cyrus would have his heart softened to bless the people of God and pay for their return to their homeland. Why would Cyrus feel the need to be compassionate to Israel when he was stripping all the other nations of their wealth? Why would he feel compelled to share that wealth with God's people? The only explanation for this is that the hand of God was on him, softening his heart. If God could soften the heart of the greatest and most powerful king on the earth, then He is indeed the Almighty God. People from every corner of the earth would see that the true God was showing favour to His people.

Verse 7 reminds us that there is no god like the Lord God of Israel. He forms the light and creates the darkness. He brings prosperity or disaster, as He chooses. God has a plan for this universe. We should note here that God does not create evil. He can create very unpleasant circumstances, but He does not cause people to be wicked. Verse 8 tells us that His desire and delight is that righteousness would be showered on the earth, causing His salvation to spring up. In this case the Lord accomplished His salvation and righteousness for His people through a pagan king who did not acknowledge Him.

While the ways of the Lord differ very often from our ways, we are not to doubt His purposes. Verse 8 reminds us that the purpose of the Lord is to bring salvation and righteousness to the earth. This is His purpose for us as well. As a great potter, He is shaping each of us on His wheel. The history of this universe is in His hands. He raises kings to accomplish His purposes. He sends what may appear to be tragedy to accomplish His righteous plans on the earth. Who are we to doubt His righteous intentions? Who are we to question the heavenly potter about what He is doing (verse 9). Can the clay on the wheel tell the potter what to do?

We have all seen how the Lord can take what appears to be a tragedy and use it to accomplish His righteousness in our lives. Though His ways may appear strange to us, they are always good. We cannot doubt the goodness and righteousness of God in what He does.

Verses 10-12 remind us that we need to accept the purposes of God in our lives. God brought us into this world, and He uses the circumstances of our lives to shape us. He can use even the most tragic circumstances to accomplish His righteous plan. Have the circum-

stances of your life been difficult or tragic? Isaiah challenged those who would question God and His plans. Do you question the Holy One of Israel who created this universe? Do you have questions regarding His dealings with His children? Do you have anything to tell Him about the works of His hands? This is a God of infinite wisdom and understanding. He knows what He is doing.

Regarding Cyrus, God had a definite plan. God was going to raise Him up and make His ways straight (verse 13). Cyrus would be the instrument God would use to rebuild the Lord's city and release the Jewish captives from captivity. Notice that Cyrus would do this without any reward. In other words, Cyrus would ultimately get nothing out of this for himself. He would be moved by the sovereign God of Israel to rebuild Jerusalem at his own expense.

This section of the prophecy of Isaiah reminds us of the sovereign plan of God to accomplish His salvation and restore righteousness on this earth. Sometimes the means He uses are confusing to us. His ways are very different from our ways, but we cannot question His intent. If we look back at our own lives, we can see that the Lord has often used similarly strange means to accomplish His glory and righteousness in our lives. Let us learn to trust His purpose. Though His ways are different from ours, they are always good.

In verse 14 Isaiah prophesied that after the release of Israel from captivity, many Gentiles would come to Israel's God, realizing that the true God was surely with her. Notice that while the ways of the Lord are very mysterious and hidden, no one can question their effectiveness (verses 15-17). The artisans who made idols would be put to shame and go off in disgrace. Their gods

could do nothing to help them. Israel, however, worshipped the one true God and would be saved with and everlasting salvation. Israel would never be put to shame or disgraced if they trusted in their God.

In verses 18-19 the Lord reminded His people that He not only created the universe but He also chose to communicate with His creatures. He revealed Himself to Israel in wonderful and clear ways. The Lord has always spoken the truth and declared what is right. It is not the intention of God to hide Himself from His people. His desire is to reveal His ways and His purposes to us.

God again contrasted Himself with the false gods of the Gentile nations in verses 20-25. He reminds us that He is able to save but idols are helpless. God alone can accurately predict the events to come because He makes them happen. He declared in verse 21: "There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour."

In verse 22 the Lord invited the ends of the earth to come to Him to be saved. This great and mysterious God of the universe called out to all who would listen and invited them into a wonderful and deep communion with Himself. He reminded His people in verse 23 that the day was coming when every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that in this Lord alone was righteousness and strength. The day was coming when people from every tribe and tongue would confess that the God of Israel was the one true God, and those who turned their backs on Him would be put to shame. In this God all the descendants of Israel would find their righteousness. In Him alone they would rejoice and offer praise (verse 25).

There are several important details we need to understand in this section. We need to see first that, while the

people of Isaiah's day were accusing God of hiding Himself, it was not the intention of God to do so. He delighted to reveal Himself to His people. It did not serve His purpose to hide His plans and His face. Does God seem distant to you? Be assured that He does not choose to remain hidden. Very often, the reason God is hidden from us is because of our own sin. Isaiah 59:2 tells us:

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

The second thing we need to see in this passage is that God calls all people to be saved. He pleads with them to come to Him for righteousness. No one can merit His favour. People cannot find enough goodness and righteousness in themselves to merit salvation. What is righteousness? It is a right standing before God, and He offers this to all who will humbly come to Him, seeking forgiveness of sin.

Far from desiring to hide Himself, the Lord God wants to speak to us and enter a deep and profound relationship with us. He calls you today to cast off everything that would keep you from entering a relationship with Him. Remove the barriers and watch Him reveal Himself to you in a way you never thought possible.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the means God uses to accomplish His purposes on the earth?

- What comfort should we take from the fact that the Lord can use anyone to bring His salvation and righteousness to the earth?
- What means did God use in your life to bring you to Himself?
- Does God seem hidden from you today? What does this section reveal to you about His will?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have questioned His purposes in the earth.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use whatever happens to you for your good and to bring glory to His name.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any obstacles that would keep you from enjoying a deeper intimacy with Him today?
- Thank the Lord that He does want to enter a deep intimacy with you.

GOD AND THE IDOLS

Read Isaiah 46:1-13

Beginning in chapter 40, Isaiah's prophecy focused much attention on comparing the God of Israel with the pagan idols of the time. Idolatry was obviously a real problem for the people of God who were tempted to look to the false gods of the surrounding nations and forsake their own true God. This temptation would increase when Judah was exiled in idolatrous Babylon. Perhaps this is why the Lord was emphasizing the foolishness of idolatry here again in chapter 46.

Isaiah began by speaking about the false gods of Babylon. The name Bel is another spelling of Baal, which means "lord." He was the god who assured fortune and good harvests. The popularity of the false god Nebo can be seen in the fact that King Nebuchadnezzar was named after him. What is important for us to note is that these two gods were being carried about by "beasts of burden" (verse 1). These idols were helpless and even a burden to the animals that carried them from place to place.

Isaiah painted a picture of a people going into exile. The enemy had come and was leading them away from their homeland. Their gods, who should have rescued them from their enemies, were even more helpless than the people who worshipped them because the idols could not even walk into captivity—they had to be carried.

The God of Israel was different. He did not need to be carried. Instead, He had carried the house of Jacob since He had given it birth (verse 3). God promised to continue to sustain and rescue the house of Israel in the future (verse 4). Verse 5 reminds us that there is no idol that can be compared to the God of Israel. Gold and silver were weighed out on the scales and given to the artisan to form a god. People then would bow down to these idols crafted by the artists of the day. These idols were lifted up on their shoulders and carried to a place where they would be set up. The lifeless idol could not move from the place it was fastened. Even though its worshippers cried out to it, it could not answer them because it could not speak. It was powerless to help its followers (verse 7).

God's people were called to remember this picture (verse 8). They were to ponder and take to heart what Isaiah was telling them. God's people are described here as rebels. They needed to remember who their God is. They were to remember and consider the things that God had done in the past to protect them and sustain them. How simple this matter is but how difficult to put in practice. In those times of temptation, how easy it is to forget God's wonderful deeds. How easy it is in our trials to forget how the Lord God has been with us since our conception. How easy it is to forget how He carried us through each struggle. We worry and fret. In this passage we are called to keep a mental scrapbook of all His wonders.

When we are tempted to turn our backs on Him, we are to take out that mental scrapbook and remind ourselves of the wonderful goodness of God. He who has carried us since our conception will never abandon us.

This wonderful God knows the end from the beginning (verse 10). He knows this because He is the one who unfolds all these events according to His divine plan. He is in complete control of the events of this universe. He does as He pleases. His purposes cannot fail because He declares what must happen. The destiny of all nations is in His hands. He summons a bird of prey from the east (verse 11). He calls a man from a far off land to accomplish His purpose (such as Cyrus of Persia as seen in chapter 45). He uses whomever He desires to accomplish that wonderful purpose.

God spoke in verse 12-13 to those who had resisted Him. "Listen to me you stubborn-hearted, you who are far from righteous." Israel had wandered from the truth and fallen prey to the temptations of the enemy. God told His people that He was going to bring His righteousness near. His salvation would not be delayed. He would grant salvation to Zion, and Israel would again see His splendour. God would keep His covenant promises and bring the righteousness to His people that they lacked.

God's people had at this time fallen away from Him and were as sinful and guilty as the pagan nations. God, who promised to carry them from their conception to their old age, was going to be faithful to His word. He would not leave them to be destroyed in captivity. He would come to them and rescue them from the hand of their enemies and from their own rebelliousness. God would not forget them.

We see how the Lord compared Himself with the gods of the nations. These gods were helpless to do anything for their people as they were being dragged off into exile. The God of Israel, on the other hand, promised to carry His people from conception to old age. As an almighty, all-powerful and sovereign God, the whole course of the universe was in His hands. Nothing could foil His plans. Beyond this was the fact that he cared deeply for His chosen people and longed to draw them to Himself. He would come to save them and renew them. He would care for His own.

For Consideration:

- Take a moment to consider the good things that Lord has done for you in the past.
- Have you ever found yourself forgetting what God has done?
- What is the difference between the Lord God of Israel and the gods of the nations?
- How has the Lord revealed Himself to you? How has He carried you over these last few years?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He cares deeply for you and promises to keep you to the end.
- Thank God that, as an all-powerful and sovereign God, nothing is impossible to Him.
- Thank Him that He unfolds the events of this universe for His glory and our good.

THE SILENCE OF BABYLON

Read Isaiah 47:1-15

Babylon would be the instrument of God's judgement on His own people. She would take Judah into a cruel captivity. But the day of Babylon's judgement would also come. Through Isaiah, God issued His sentence against this great nation.

As chapter 47 opened, God called Babylon to go and sit in the dust (verse 1). Notice that He called her the Virgin Daughter of Babylon. As a virgin, she had been untouched and unspoiled by the nations. This was going to quickly change. She was to sit in the dust, a position of mourning. Her throne would be taken from her. This Virgin Daughter of Babylon would no longer be called tender and delicate. She would no longer be looked on with respect and admiration.

Verse 2 tells us that Babylon would be disgraced. She would be given a millstone and required to grind flour like a common slave. Her veil would be removed, which was a sign of great humiliation. Her skirt would be lifted up to

expose her bare legs as she waded through irrigation ditches, working in the fields. Her nakedness would be exposed for all to see. God would take vengeance on her, sparing no one among her (verse 3). The Lord God, who was the Holy Redeemer of Israel, would step out in defence of His people. It was a serious matter to offend His children.

It is important that we understand that the Lord God does not take lightly those things done against His children (see Matthew 18:5-6). To offend even the least of His children is to offend God. It is true that the people of God did not deserve this great grace and affection, but they were still His children. How careful we need to be about what we say about the children of God. God cares very deeply for His own family, and we will have to answer to Him for what we do to those who belong to Him, no matter how unworthy they are.

Babylon was called to sit in silence and to go into darkness (verse 5). The time of her judgement had come. No more would she be considered the queen among the nations. Her time of glory had come to an end.

Verse 6 reminds us that God had been angry with His people and allowed His inheritance to be desecrated by the Babylonians. While God allowed this to happen, Babylon showed no mercy. In particular, she showed disrespect for the aged by placing on them a heavy load. God noticed this disrespect and would judge it.

We need to understand that God's judgement is tempered with mercy. Even those who are under His discipline, if they belong to Him, must be treated with respect and dignity. How often have we seen cases of discipline in churches where the respect and dignity of the individu-

al being disciplined was lost? This is not an easy balance to maintain. Babylon had failed in this matter of mercy and would have to answer to the Lord God for disrespecting those under their power.

Notice in verse 7 that Babylon very quickly became proud. She was given a moment of glory and believed she would never be defeated. She believed that she would continue forever as the queen of the nations. She did not consider that there was someone greater than she who would call her to answer for her actions. She did not consider how quickly she could lose everything she had. She did not “reflect on what might happen.” This is an important exercise for each of us. How quickly we take for granted what we have. We may have a God-given moment of glory and then believe that nothing can happen to us. We fail to remember how quickly things can change.

God had an important word for Babylon, who lounged in her security (verse 8). The people of Babylon lived for the moment. They felt that they were secure and that nothing could happen to them. “I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children,” she boasted. But the Babylonians would lose their kingdom in a single day. There would be nothing they could do about it. All their sorcerers and magicians would be helpless in that day when the Persian army unexpectedly captured Babylon (see Daniel 5:30).

Babylon felt that she was getting away with her wickedness (verse 10). She trusted in her evil plans. She did not think that anyone could see her or know what she was doing. She was confident in her magical arts, and believed that she was superior and invulnerable. She trusted in herself but she would quickly fall. Verse 11 tells

us that disaster would come on Babylon that she would be powerless to resist

In verses 12-13 Babylon is sarcastically challenged to try her magic spells and sorcery to see if they would inspire fear in the hearts of those who came to conquer. But all the magic and sorcery would prove useless against the all-powerful hand of the God of Israel. Babylon had trusted in her astrologers and stargazers for counsel. This counsel had done nothing for the people but worn them out. Isaiah challenged the stargazers to save Babylon from the coming judgement.

These counterfeit spiritual leaders would be burnt up like stubble by the fire of God's judgement (verse 14). They would not even be able to save themselves in that day. The defeat of these astrologers, sorcerers, and magicians would be so great that when the fire of God's wrath fell on them, it would not even leave enough coals to warm anyone. There would be nothing left of them. These spiritual leaders of darkness, in whom the Babylonian had trusted and with whom they had consulted from their childhood, would fail their people. They had led them into error and could not save them in their hour of need.

The sad reality of this chapter is that Babylon had been deceived. She had been deceived by a false sense of security and believed that nothing bad would ever happen to her. She had been deceived by her spiritual leaders who counselled her by astrology and magic. There are many like this even in our day. They have been deceived by their false prophets who lead them to believe that they are secure and that nothing bad can happen to them. The truth of the matter is that only in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is there any hope and

security. Only in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ is there any forgiveness. All other ways are false and will be exposed in the end, but then it will be too late. Only those who trust in Him can know true security.

For Consideration:

- Why did Babylon fall? In what did she trust?
- What do we learn in this section about respecting the children of God?
- What things do we trust in today that give us a false sense of security?
- Have you ever found yourself believing that you were strong enough to resist any temptation? How quickly could you fall?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to remind you of just how much you need the Lord, His daily strength and wisdom.
- Thank the Lord that He does provide for us all the security we need in life.
- Ask God to expose the false prophets of our day before they mislead people into error and sin.
- Thank the Lord that He always has your best interest at heart.

38

IF ONLY YOU HAD PAID ATTENTION

Read Isaiah 48:1-22

From the very beginning of time, the enemy has tried to discredit the word of God. In the Garden of Eden he succeeded in causing Eve to doubt what the Lord had clearly commanded. She disobeyed and sinned. This was exactly what the enemy wanted. Disobedience to the word of God brought terrible devastation on the earth and placed its inhabitants under the curse of sin and death. Even in the days of Isaiah, the enemy continued to cast doubt on the word of God. Over and over again, he was successful in causing the people of God to wander from truth. In this chapter, Isaiah spoke about the way in which God's people had turned from the truth of God and incurred His judgement.

Isaiah began by calling his people to listen to what he had to say. He particularly addressed those who were insincerely calling on the name of the Lord. They were not living in truth or righteousness (verse 1). They called

themselves citizens of the holy city and claimed to rely on and serve the Lord God Almighty (verse 2). The many descriptions of the Israelites in these verses reminded them of their origins and obligations to their great God.

Their God foretold the things that would come to pass. He was the God who unfolded the events of history. He made known to His prophets the things that would happen before they occurred, proving to all that He was the only true God.

Notice in verse 4 the reason God gave His people prophecy. He did so because He knew the stubbornness of their hearts. The sinews of their necks were iron and inflexible. Turning their heads to focus their eyes on the Lord instead of their evil lusts was like twisting iron. Their minds were as impenetrable as bronze. Over and over again, God proved Himself to His people by foretelling events and then causing these events to occur exactly as He had predicted. Isaiah challenged his people to examine these things and admit that the words of the Lord God were indeed true and faithful. The purpose of prophecy was so Israel would trust her God, not just so she would know the future.

In verse 6 the Lord told His people that He would reveal to them hidden things that they did not know. The prophecies of this section of Scripture would be distinctive from what God had revealed before (verse 7). But God's people could not hear what He was telling them. By nature their ears were closed to the things of God. They chose to reject what God was so clearly revealing. From birth they had been rebels. This is the reality for every one of us. By nature we are sinners who do not understand or trust the ways of God.

God could have so easily given up on His people. He could have destroyed them because of their wilful blindness and rebellion. Notice in verse 9, however, that the Lord chose to delay His wrath for the sake of His name. If He destroyed His people, who would praise Him? If He destroyed His people, as they deserved, who would understand His forgiveness and grace? God chose not to cut His people but to refine them instead (verse 10). Had God refined His people like the process for refining silver, there would have been nothing left of them, because their impurities were so many. Israel's purification was ongoing. The Lord afflicts His people for His own sake, so that ultimately He will be known and glorified (verse 11).

We need to understand that it is possible for us to resist the refining of God in our lives. We often have a hard time learning the lessons the Lord wants to teach us through affliction. God continues to work with us despite our stubbornness and rebellion. He will not let His name be dishonoured. He desires that His people enter a deep and personal relationship with Him and learn to worship and honour Him. He will not give up until He has accomplished what He intended to do (Philippians 1:6). What a wonderful promise this is. For those of us who long to become more like Christ, we can take great comfort in this verse.

In verse 12 the Lord reminded Israel that He had called her. He was the first and the last. He was there to create the universe, and He would be there in the end. He is an eternal and everlasting God. He laid the foundations of the earth with His own hands (verse 13). He spread out the heavens and called all the heavenly bodies to stand before Him. These heavenly bodies obey the voice of the Lord. He is in control of them all. This is the God who desired to refine His people and make them a holy.

How often have we wondered whether we will ever be able to overcome the temptations that come our way? Take a moment to look around you at the beauty and complexity of this universe. Look up into the skies and see the vastness of the universe in which we live. Realize that the God who has determined to refine and renew you is the same God who put the stars and the sun in place (verses 12-13). He is able to complete what He has begun in your life.

Isaiah called his people to come together and consider for a moment which of the idols were able to foretell the things that God foretold. The day was coming when the affliction that God's people would go through in their Babylonian exile would come to an end. God would raise up a servant who would bring an end to the Babylonians and the oppression of His people. No one would be able to stop this individual. (Cyrus of Persia would be this servant.) He would accomplish the purpose of God (verses 14-15).

Through Isaiah His prophet, God announced the defeat of Babylon. He made this announcement public so that when it happened, it would be further proof that the word of the Lord is true and that God is trustworthy (verse 16). Isaiah reminded all that what He spoke was directly from God. He spoke these words not on His own but under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. He wanted this to be clear so that when these words were accomplished, God would receive the glory.

In verse 17 the Lord reminded His people that their Redeemer and the Holy One of Israel promised to be with them and teach them what was best for them. He promised to direct them in the way they should go. Isaiah told them that if only they had listened to his word and paid

attention to what he commanded them, they would have had peace like a river in their lives and society. If they had listened to the word of the Lord, they would have experienced righteousness like the waves of the sea (verse 18). There is a powerful truth here we need to see. The secret to renewal and revival has to do with obedience to the Word of the Lord. If you obey, you will experience peace like a river. If you obey you will experience righteousness like a mighty wave of the ocean. Do you long for this peace and righteousness in your life? The secret is to take God's Word seriously. To know this peace and righteousness you need to plunge yourself into the truth of God and commit yourself to His way. We want to see great revival but are unwilling to surrender to God's ways. Only in obedience can we experience the fullness that God delights to bring.

In verse 19 Isaiah told God's people that they could have enjoyed the blessings promised to Abraham more quickly. Because of Israel's sin and rebellion, she would temporarily cease to exist as a nation (during the Babylonian captivity and after 70 AD). But God's promises to Abraham were unconditional and will be fulfilled. Verses 20-21 promised Israel redemption and provision from the Lord like their ancestors has experience when they left the bondage of Egypt. God would redeem Israel from Babylon and restore her fortunes.

Isaiah reminds us clearly that there is tremendous blessing in obedience to the Word of the Lord. The enemy will do all he can to cause us to downplay the importance of God's truth and revelation of Himself. The Lord has chosen to shower tremendous blessing on all who will simply take Him at His word and obey. But for the rebellious wicked, there will never be any peace (verse 22).

For Consideration:

- What role does the Word of God have in showing us that God is real and true?
- What is the connection between the Word of God and our blessing as a society?
- Is there evidence that the enemy is trying to take our attention away from the Word of God today?
- How has God revealed Himself to you through His Word? What role did the Word of God have in your coming to know the Lord as your personal Saviour?

For Prayer:

- Thank that Lord for His desire is to refine us and make us into a people who bring honour to His name?
- Ask the Lord to help you to accept the work He longs to do in you. Ask Him to help you learn the lessons He wants to teach you through the trials He sends your way.

39

ISRAEL, A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

Read Isaiah 49:1-26

In chapters 40-48 God dealt primarily with his promise to deliver Israel from the Babylonian captivity by a servant named Cyrus. In chapter 49 the Lord began to speak about deliverance by another servant—a Messiah would come and deliver Israel from the captivity of sin. This would indeed be a mighty work in their midst. Messiah's work would extend to the far corners of the earth. There is tremendous encouragement and hope in this chapter for Israel and also for us as God's children today.

As we begin, a prophet calls out to the islands and the distant nations to hear what he had to say. The word he was going to share with them was not just for Israel but for the whole world. He told these nations that before he was born, the Lord called him and made his mouth like a sharp sword (verse 2). The words he spoke would be as precise and effective in conquering enemies as a warri-

or's weapon. He would be hidden from view until the Lord needed him, like a polished arrow in a quiver.

In verse 3 this servant's name was identified as Israel. The nation of Israel would indeed be an instrument to display God's glory; however, the context is more clearly referring to an individual namely the Messiah.

Verse 4 can be somewhat difficult to understand: "I have laboured to no purpose." At Messiah's first coming, he was rejected by his nation and even died a criminal's death (John 1:10-11). The first part of this verse may be speaking to this aspect of the Messiah's appearance. However, what appeared to be a failure in the world's eyes would be rewarded with complete success (John 17:4-5). This applies to us as well. As God's servants we will not always be well-received as the mouthpieces of God. But we are called to be faithful to what the Lord has given us to speak. That faithfulness will not go unrewarded.

This servant's mission would be to bring Jacob back to her God (verse 5). A further mission was to be a light for the Gentiles, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth (verse 6). From the very beginning of time, it has been the heart of God to reach out to the ends of the earth. Israel and her Messiah would be the instrument Israel was not always the nation God wanted her to be. Often she fell and rebelled against Him. She was unworthy but the Lord chose to demonstrate His glory and power through her by sending the Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Verse 7 prophesied that this servant (the Messiah) would be both despised and rejected but also accepted and worshipped. All this would be accomplished by the Lord God, who is faithful. The ministry of the Lord Jesus was

characterised by these two elements. He was despised by many but there were those who gave their lives to Him and believed His message.

According to verse 8, the Lord would help this servant and make Him to be a covenant for the people. The Lord Jesus would establish a new covenant with His people (see Jeremiah 31:31; 32:40). Through this covenant, the Lord God would extend His favour to all nations. He would restore His people to the land He had promised them. That land would become desolate and abandoned, but in God's sovereign timing, it would be given back to them. The captives would be called out of their places of dark exile and they would be free again.

According to verse 9-11, those who returned from this future exile would be wonderfully blessed. Isaiah promised that they would feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. Those freed from their exile would neither hunger nor thirst. The desert heat would no longer drain them of their strength nor would the sun's rays harm them again. The Lord would guide and protect them. He would lead them beside springs of water where they would quench their thirst. God would go before them, levelling the mountain obstacles in their way. The valley paths would be raised so that they would travel on level ground. The apostle John used similar words to describe conditions for the Lord's people at the end of time (Revelation 7:16-17).

While the initial fulfilment of this prophecy would be seen in the children of Israel returning to their land after the Babylonian captivity, the ultimate fulfilment would be seen in Israel and the nations coming to the Lord for salvation. Through the Lord Jesus, an invitation would go forth for the world to come to Him and the salvation He

offered. Through the ministry of the Lord Jesus, captives would be called out of the darkness of their sin. The Lord would extend His blessings from Israel to the end of the earth.

In verse 12 Isaiah pictured the nations coming from afar. They would come from the north and the west and from the region of Aswan. It is unclear as to the location of this region. Suffice it to say that these people were not Israelites but were coming to the God of Israel. Isaiah described a time in which the nations would come to God.

Isaiah called the heavens to shout for joy (verse 13). The earth was to rejoice. The mountains were commanded to burst into song because the Lord would have compassion on those who were afflicted. He would extend His hand on them and bring them to Himself. His salvation would be extended to the ends of the earth.

The people of Israel did not fully appreciate or understand what the Lord God was doing in their midst. They did not see His hand working in them. They felt that the Lord had forsaken and forgotten them (verse 14). This grieved the heart of God. In verse 15 the Lord asked them:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you," said the Lord.

This is one of the strongest expressions of God's love in the Old Testament. You can sense the tenderness and love of God in this verse for His children, despite their rebellion.

God reminded His people in verse 16 that He had engraved them on the palms of His hands. Their names were engraved so that they would never come off His hand. He could not forget them. He told them that their walls (the walls of Jerusalem) were always before Him. He sees our problems as well. He is well aware of what we are going through and promises that He will not forget us. Through His servant Isaiah, the Lord made it clear that not only was He aware of what they were going through but He would also do something about it. The day was coming when Israel's sons would return to these broken walls. Those who had devastated the laid waste their land would be driven away (verse 17).

These words would encourage Israel in the days of her captivity and exile from her land—the day would come when full restoration would take place. The Lord declared on His own life that Israel's sons would be like ornaments around her. Like a bride, putting on her best clothes, Israel would rejoice at the presence of her children around her. In verse 20 Isaiah illustrated the extent of this blessing on God people: they would outgrow their land. They would be amazed at the number of descendants God would give them. They would remember the time of their exile and bereavement when they were barren and destitute and rejoice in God's renewed blessing.

According to verses 22-23, God promised that the power of Gentile nations would one day come to an end. These nations would become submissive to Israel and would assist in bringing Israelites back to their land. Gentile kings and queens were seen as servants, caring for and carrying the children of Israel back to their homeland. These Gentiles would even bow down to the children of God and lick the dust off their feet, showing a posture of submission. God would so dramatically elevate His

people in the midst of the nations that, when these things happened, Israel would know beyond any doubt that the Lord is their God. They would be reminded again that those who put their hope in God would never be disappointed.

In the last three verses of this chapter, the prophecy focused on the destiny of the nations that would plunder and oppress Israel. Usually, plunder and captives cannot be taken from fierce warriors, but that was exactly what the Lord said He would do in order to rescue Israel. God would contend with Israel's enemies and save Israel's children. Their oppressors would be forced to eat their own flesh. They would be drunk on their own blood. In those days all the nations of the earth would know that the Lord God of Israel is the one true God, and He takes care of those who belong to Him.

Though God's people would experience tremendous difficulty, God promised that He would not forget them. He had a wonderful plan for them. The day was coming when He would reach out to them in wonderful salvation and His blessing would be poured out on them again. He would defeat the enemies before them. The God of Israel is our God as well. He has never changed. The salvation and protection He promised Israel, He promises to His children from every nation. He will not forget us. He has engraved us on His hand and will care for us and our children.

For Consideration:

- What comfort do you take from this passage regarding your trial today?
- What does this passage teach us about the plan of God for the nations?
- What do we learn about the love of God for us as His children?
- What encouragement do you receive here in the prophecy about the coming of the Lord Jesus as Israel's Messiah? What does Isaiah tell us about the Lord Jesus and His ministry?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wonderful plan He has for your life.
- Thank Him that He promises never to forget you in your need.
- Thank Him for the fact that He will defend us and care for us in our time of trial.
- Thank the Lord for the way He spoke about the coming of the Lord Jesus way before it happened.

A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE

Read Isaiah 50:1-11

This chapter opens with the Lord asking His people a question: “Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce?” What we need to understand is that the people of God had been claiming that the Lord had forsaken them. We saw this in the last chapter (49:14). The Lord dealt with this accusation by reminding His people that it would be easier for a nursing mother to forget her child than for the Lord God to forget Israel.

In chapter 50, in light of these accusations, God asked His people to produce the proof that He had abandoned them, as they claimed, by showing Him the certificate of divorce. God asked them to produce the names of the creditors to whom He had sold them. In Bible times when a person could not pay a debt, that individual was sold to a creditor as a slave to work off the debt. God’s people had no proof that He had forsaken them. The Lord, however, would give them over to a temporary captivity as punishment for their sins. By their sin and rebellion, they had walked away from God and His purpose. They

could not blame God for their situation. It was their sin that separated them from God.

“When I came to you,” asked God, “why was there no one?” (verse 2). Isaiah pictured the Lord coming to His people, but they were not there for Him, like a husband coming home to his wife only to find that she had left. Their hearts had been sold out to evil and to their idols. The Lord had not abandoned them, but they had abandoned the Lord. This is exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus. We read in John 1:10-11:

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Despite their condition, Isaiah reminded them that the Lord’s arm was not too short to ransom them. He did not lack the strength necessary to rescue them from the mess they had gotten themselves into. He is the God who, by a simple word of rebuke, can dry up the sea and turn rivers into a desert. He is the one who clothes the sky with darkness. If God can control nature, He can rescue His people.

The same is true for us as well. Maybe you have made a real mess of your life. Maybe because of your sin, you have separated yourself from God and His blessings. You wonder how you will ever get out of this mess you have made. God is able to reach down to you with His long and powerful arm and take you out of that mess. In His mercy and compassion, He will help if you will come to Him.

In verses 4-9 a faithful servant spoke. Unlike the rebellious people of God, this person knew the word of the Lord and obeyed it. He learned God's word by intimate fellowship with Him, and he shared that word with those in need. He was willing to suffer in his obedience. He was beaten, mocked, and spit on (verse 6). These sufferings identify this individual as the Lord Jesus (Mark 15:16-20). He knew that through His faithfulness and the Lord's help, he would not be disgraced or put to shame (verse 7). We should also have this trust. We may be mocked and rejected by others. We may suffer greatly at the hands of those who reject the Lord, but we will never be disgraced if we trust in the Lord. Only by disobedience and unfaithfulness can we be put to shame.

This servant, the Lord Jesus, knew that the God of Israel was near Him and would vindicate Him before any accusers (verses 8-9). This is true for us as well. Because the Lord is our salvation, no one can bring a charge against us (see Romans 8:33). The Lord had declared us innocent. There is no accusation that the enemy can bring against us. We have been forgiven and cleansed in the blood of Christ. How important it is for us to live in the reality of our forgiveness and cleansing. All too many people live with the reality of the awfulness of their sins but fail to live in the light of the forgiveness of those sins. When the sovereign Lord comes to our aid, who can come against us? All who try will wear out like a garment eaten by moths. They will ultimately fail.

In verse 10 Isaiah challenged those who feared and obeyed the Lord, as well as those who were walking in the dark, to turn to the Lord and trust in Him. He challenged them to rely on the Lord and His strength. He challenged all who would come to the Lord to take Him at His word and place their confidence in Him.

Isaiah concludes this section with a final word to those who persisted in rebellion against God (verse 11). They had been lighting fires in honour of their pagan gods. They had been carrying flaming torches in their celebrations. He reminded them that if they continued to rebel against the Lord God in this manner, the day would come when they would lie down in torment. God would judge them and they would experience the terrible torment of his wrath.

In this chapter the message of the gospel is presented very clearly. Isaiah told his people that sin had separated them from a holy God. That same holy God was willing to lay down his life for their forgiveness. He would be rejected by men and women and mocked by unbelievers, but He would give Himself for those who had rejected Him. All who would come to Him and receive what He had done for them could know His salvation and forgiveness. All who rejected Him would lie down in torment.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt abandoned by God? What separates us from God, according to this chapter?
- Have you ever felt the accusations of Satan causing you to doubt your forgiveness and cleansing? What is the challenge and comfort of this passage?
- What does this passage tell us about the ministry of the Lord Jesus for us?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even though we did not deserve it, the Lord reached out to us to bring us salvation.
- Thank God that through the ministry of the Lord Jesus, you can be declared forgiven and righteous.
- Thank the Lord that what He declares righteous, Satan cannot not declare impure. Thank the Lord for the forgiveness He offers you in the Lord Jesus.

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THE RANSOMED WILL RETURN

Read Isaiah 51:1-23

God's heart has always been for His people. In Isaiah 51 He promised to do wonderful things for them if they would listen to Him. Notice that He speaks to those who pursued righteousness. It is important that we notice this. These promises of God were not for those who turned their backs on Him but for those who earnestly sought after Him and His righteousness.

God called those who were seeking Him to look to the rock from which they were cut and to the quarry from which they were hewn. In particular, they were called in verse 2 to look to Abraham and Sarah who gave birth to the nation of Israel. From this couple, God created an entire nation of descendants. Have you ever looked to the rough rock from which you were taken? Have you ever looked back to the time before your salvation when you were living in sin and its darkness? Can you remember the time when you were a broken and hopeless

individual at the end of your resources? Can you remember the day that the Lord Jesus saved you and made such a radical change in your life? That hard and rough rock was shaped into something special. God is continuing to do a wonderful work in your life. God called His people to reflect on these things.

Isaiah reminded his people in verse 3 that the Lord would comfort and look with compassion on Israel in her ruins. The Lord would make the desert places like Eden and the wastelands like the garden of the Lord. He would pour on Zion His joy and gladness. He would produce in His people a heart full of praise and thanksgiving. The same God who miraculously fulfilled His promise to Abraham would also supernaturally fulfil His promise to Israel by converting her desolation into a paradise.

God would use the physical and spiritual restoration of His people as a lesson to the nations concerning His divine power and justice. This revelation would bring light to the world (verse 4). The righteousness and salvation of God would go forth to the ends of the earth, and the nations would put their hope in His strength. The salvation that the Lord was going to offer was a salvation that would last forever (verse 6). The heavens would one day vanish like smoke. The earth would one day wear out like an old garment. The inhabitants of the earth would die like flies. But the salvation of the Lord would last forever and his righteousness would never fail. What a wonderful hope we have in this verse. There is nothing that can take away the salvation the Lord God offers to you today. If you have come to Him and accepted this offer of salvation, be assured of one thing: this promise is forever. Nothing can take this salvation away from you. Satan and all his hosts cannot thwart the plan of God for the

salvation of His people. We can be secure in God's promise.

In light of this wonderful promise regarding salvation, Isaiah called all who knew what was right and knew the law of God in their hearts to take courage (verse 7). Those who loved the Lord and were living in obedience to Him were called not to fear what people might say to them because the salvation of the Lord would outlast the earth and the heavens. There was nothing that could take them from the salvation the Lord had brought. Isaiah told His people that those who insult and mock the righteous would be eaten like a moth eats a garment (verse 8). The righteousness of God, however, would last forever and His salvation would be for all generations.

In light of this wonderful assurance and promise, the call went forth for God to awake and move in strength as He had in the past (verse 9). Evil seemed to triumph. The righteous were being oppressed. He challenged the Lord to clothe Himself with strength. The image is that of the Lord putting on His armour like a mighty warrior to do battle with the enemy Rahab (Egypt, see 30:7). It is important that we understand that the word *rahab* means "insolent or proud." Rahab symbolised the pride and insolence of Egypt who had dared to mock the Lord and His ways. The Lord destroyed the monster Egypt and made a way for His people to escape (verse 10). The story of the deliverance from Egypt was a perfect example for Israel to remember as she faced the Babylonian captivity. God would come and bring His justice to the nations and salvation to His people. They did not need to fear, for the Lord had saved them out of a mighty nation in the past and would do so again.

The day was coming when the ransomed of the Lord would return to Zion with great singing (verse 11). The enemy would not be able to hold the people of God. The heaviness that His people would suffer would end, and they would be set free to praise and rejoice in their God.

God reminded Israel in verse 12 that He is the eternal God who comforts His people. Even though they were being tried and tested, they did not need to fear mortal men and women, who are as like grass—here today but gone tomorrow. How could God's people forget their Maker and live in terror of the oppressor (verse 13)? The Creator of the universe was on their side. He stretched out the heavens and laid out the foundations of the earth. The prisoners would soon be set free (verse 14). Israel would not perish in her exile because the Lord her God controls nature and nations (verse 15).

God had chosen Israel to be His. He put His words in her mouth and covered her as a people with the shadow of His hand, protecting her from ultimate harm (verse 16). The great God who set the heavens in their place and laid the foundations of the earth was the same God who said to Zion: "You are my people." This is an amazing thought. The creator God loves His rebellious people and reaches out to them, protecting them and committing Himself to them forever. We will never understand this, but Isaiah reassures us of the reality of this wonderful relationship.

In verse 9 Isaiah asked the Lord to awake and demonstrate His power in their midst. In verse 17 Isaiah called His people to awake in light of what the Lord was doing. He called Jerusalem to rise from her sleep. She had drunk from the cup of the Lord's wrath and had been forced to drain that cup dry. She knew what it was to

suffer the insults and mocking of the enemy. During her time of oppression, she had no one to guide her. Her prophets and priests had fallen. There was no king or political leader who could rescue her from the anger and wrath of the Lord in that day. Israel had suffered a double calamity: destruction of the land and death (verse 19). There was no one left in the land to bring comfort. All were exhausted by the wrath of the Lord.

In verse 21 Isaiah told his people that those who had been afflicted and made drunk with the wine of God's wrath would again experience the presence of the Lord. Their God would come to them and defend their cause. He would take that cup of wrath out of their hands and set them free from its affects (verse 22). Never again would they have to drink of that cup. The wonderful thing about the forgiveness of the Lord is that when He forgives us for our sins we will never again have to answer for those sins. They are covered and will never again be brought out against us.

God promised through Isaiah that He would take the cup of His wrath from His people and give it to their tormentors. These tormentors had walked all over God's people. They had treated them with the greatest disrespect, but the tables would be turned (verse 23).

In this chapter the Creator of the universe reminded His people that they faced His wrath because of their sin. However, His love for them was everlasting, and He would restore her land and her people. The Lord told them not to be afraid of those who would oppress them but to trust in His promises, no matter how difficult their trials became. God would reverse their condition, and their oppressors would drink from the cup of His wrath.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the salvation the Lord offers us?
- What causes you to be afraid? Is your fear legitimate? What does this chapter have to teach us about the Lord's presence in these times?
- What comfort do you find in this chapter in the fact that the salvation of the Lord lasts forever?
- Take a moment to consider the blessings the Lord has given you in the past. Consider how He has rescued you in your difficulty and worked out all things for good. How does this encourage you to face the struggles of the moment?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that, although He is the Creator of the universe, He desires to enter a deep relationship with us.
- Thank the Lord that He will bring justice to those who belong to Him and trust in His Word.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful promises He gives to those who will seek Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His past faithfulness to you in times of need. Thank Him that He will continue to be faithful to you in your future.

SHAKE OFF YOUR DUST

Read Isaiah 52:1-15

Isaiah promised his people a salvation that would be forever in chapter 51. He reminded them that the day was coming when the Lord their God would return to them and restore them to their former glory. They would be God's messengers to the nations. Through them the nations of the earth would come to know their God and worship Him as the one true God. In order for this to take place, God would send a Messiah who would come to establish justice and righteousness on the earth.

Isaiah called his people in Zion to awake and clothe themselves with strength (verse 1). At the time of the call, they would be asleep under the oppression of the enemy. Their city would be destroyed, but it would again be restored. God's people would be clothed with strength and be glorious people again. Isaiah referred to Jerusalem as a holy city. She would be holy because the uncircumcised and defiled would not enter her again. In some ways, this reminds us of what the apostle John prophesied in Revelation 21:27 concerning the holy city he saw in heaven:

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The ultimate fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy will be in the heavenly city that John saw. The day is coming when the Lord will completely deal with sin and rebellion. We too will experience that glorious victory in the city that both Isaiah and John foresaw.

God's people were called to shake off the dust and rise to sit enthroned. They were to free themselves from the chains that were around their necks. God's people had been oppressed and beaten. They had chains about their necks like common slaves. They had been lying in the dust. God was going to come and elevate them. He challenged them to respond to His deliverance. This was a time of victory. How many believers needed to hear this message? How many believers are living in defeat? They sit in the dust with chains around their necks, when the Lord has called them to rise in triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14).

The people of Israel had given themselves over to slavery (verse 3). Their enemies paid nothing to take them into bondage, stripping them of possessions and their lives. Isaiah told them that, as they had been taken into slavery for nothing, they would be redeemed without money. Their redemption would be a free gift from their God. This is something that many people fail to understand. The salvation that the Lord Jesus promises to us is a free gift. It is not for sale. You cannot buy it by being good. You cannot pay money to obtain it. It is freely given to all who will recognise their need and reach out for it.

Verses 4-6 describe for us the long struggle that the people of God had gone through. They had been in bondage in Egypt, and lately the Assyrians had reduced the northern kingdom and much of Judah to rubble. Notice in verse 5 that the Lord's name was being blasphemed all day long because of what had happened to His people. This blasphemy occurred in the nations who mocked God's people but also by the sin of His people. God was not going to stand by and watch His name be blasphemed on the earth. He told His people that they would again know His name. While He could have quickly destroyed His people because they had turned from Him, He chose to do something quite different. He chose to work in their midst and draw them back to Himself. The day was coming when they would again know the Lord and that the eternal One had saved them.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace" (verse 7). Isaiah prophesied that a messenger was coming on the mountains with this wonderful news of renewal and salvation and that their God reigned in Zion. For a long time the city would lie in ruins, but God would come to set up His throne in her midst. Watchmen would see the Lord coming and shout for joy. The ruins of Jerusalem would be asked to shout for joy in anticipation of the sure fulfilment of the prophecy that the Lord would redeem and reign in His holy city (verse 9).

Isaiah prophesied in verse 10 that the Lord God was going to lay bare His holy arm. He would roll up His sleeves and prepare to do battle to restore Israel from the devastation of her enemies. The result would be that the nations would see the wonderful salvation of the Lord God. We saw this happening in a very powerful way when the Lord Jesus came to this earth. He paved the

way by His death and resurrection for the salvation of God to be extended to the ends of the earth.

The redeemed people of God were called in verse 11 to leave their place of exile and be pure. Those who carried the vessels of the Lord were told not to touch anything unclean. God was going to do a wonderful work in their midst, and they needed to be obedient and faithful. This verse is very important. For this wonderful work of God to continue, God's people needed to live in obedience. Sin and rebellion on the part of God's people was what drove the presence of God from them in the first place. If they wanted the work of renewal to continue, they needed to live in moral purity before the Lord. This was especially true of those who carried the vessels of the Lord –the priests. As leaders, we need especially to live in obedience if we want to see the blessing of God poured on those among whom we minister.

God promised that He would restore His people to their land. Isaiah reminded them in verse 12 that they would not leave their exile in haste. Leaving in haste would indicate that their enemies were opposing what they were doing. This would not be the case for the people of God. The Lord their God would be with them as they left their captivity. His hand of blessing would surround them. He would go before them and be their rear guard. They could travel in ease. This is exactly what took place when King Cyrus of Persia made a proclamation that the people of Israel were to be allowed to return to their own land. Many possessions were returned to them, and the king financed the return out of his own treasury. For the people who had spent 70 years in exile, it would be hard for them to imagine that their oppressor would one day pay for them to return and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This is exactly what happened and it

proved beyond any doubt that the Lord God was behind what was happening that day.

Again, in verses 13-15 Isaiah spoke about a servant who would come and act with great wisdom. He would be highly exalted in their midst. His appearance would be disfigured, and people looking up to Him would be appalled at what they saw. In His disfigurement, however, He would sprinkle many nations. In the Old Testament context, sprinkling was a way of blessing or purifying. Blood or water would be sprinkled on an object to purify or to bless that object. This is what this servant, the Lord Jesus would do. He would come to bring tremendous blessing to the nations. The kings of the earth would shut their mouths because of Him. The shutting of the mouth indicated that they were silent before Him. This was a silence of awe and admiration. These great kings of the earth would see for themselves the wonderful work that had been prophesied from long ago. They would see in this man, whose face was marred and whose appearance was nothing particular to look at, the answer to the needs of the world.

There can be no question that the ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy was to be found in the work of the Lord Jesus. He was beaten, mocked, and ridiculed. He did not come with pomp and great earthly glory. There would be nothing about His physical appearance that we would admire, but He would come in the power and anointing of the Spirit of God to provide salvation through His death. We are seeing the wonderful fulfilment of this in our day as the spiritual kingdom of God is extending to the whole world.

We are called in this chapter to rejoice as the people of God. We are called to pull off the chains that bind us. We

are to cast off the dust and sit up on our throne. The Lord Jesus has come. His kingdom is extending to the ends of the earth. We, as His servants, are called to enter this wonderful blessing, cast off our sin, and live in the purity of His law. He will reign in Zion, and His kingdom will never end.

For Consideration:

- What chains have you been wearing in your Christian life? What is the challenge in this chapter for you?
- What is the connection between obedience to the Word of the Lord and the blessing God wants to extend to us today?
- Could the picture of Zion chained and laying in the dust be a challenge for the church today? Explain.
- Isaiah painted a picture of a Messiah who would not come with external glory and pomp. Why do we seek attention for ourselves in ministry when the Lord Jesus demonstrated such humility?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord He offered His wonderful salvation to you personally.
- Ask the Lord to give you something of the humility of Jesus in your life and ministry.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any chains in your life that you should cast off in His name.
- Ask the Lord to allow you to rise up to be a victorious servant of the King of kings. Ask Him to make your life a testimony of His glory and power.

A MAN OF SORROWS

Read Isaiah 53:1-12

There are few passages in the Old Testament that speak with such clarity about the life of the Lord Jesus as does Isaiah 53. Down to many small details, this passage describes for us how the Lord Jesus would come as the promised Messiah.

Isaiah began with two questions: "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Isaiah looked ahead prophetically to the time when Israel's Messiah would come to this earth as a suffering servant of God. The prophecies that the Lord Jesus fulfilled and the miracles He performed confirmed that He was this suffering servant and Messiah, but the people of Israel refused to believe that the Lord Jesus revealed the powerful arm of God while He was on this earth.

The Lord Jesus came to this earth as a simple man. He grew up like a tender shoot (verse 2). Like a root sprouting out of dry ground, He grew up mostly unnoticed. He

did not come in the glory and splendour of His deity. He laid aside His external splendour and lived as a humble human being. In terms of His physical appearance, there was nothing distinctive that would have especially attracted anyone to Him.

I find it interesting that the Lord Jesus would come in this way. He did not seek to draw attention to Himself. He had no interest in having people focus on Him in a physical way. He could have chosen to be the most handsome and physically strong man who ever walked on the surface of the earth. He could have chosen to come as a majestic king in splendour. Instead, He chose to come quietly, without much attention being drawn to Him. Why do we feel that we need to attract people when our Lord didn't? Why do we have such a need for people to notice us and our ministry, when our Lord chose to do everything so that the attention would be focused on the Father? May God give us this same humble attitude.

According to verse 3, the servant would be despised and rejected by men. His life would be characterised by sorrow and suffering (see Luke 13:34). He would not be esteemed as He deserved but would be dismissed as worthless (see John 12:37; Mark 10:33). Despite how much people rejected and despised Him, Isaiah prophesied that God's servant would willingly take our infirmities and carry our sorrows (verse 4). In fact, the Lord Jesus willingly came and lived among sinful humans on this cursed earth, suffering human grief and weaknesses like sorrow, hunger, thirst, and weariness. Jesus also carried our sins to the cross and suffered God's wrath for them. He stood in our place of judgement. Notice, however, that Isaiah prophesied that people would look at the suffering He endured and believe it was *His* just punishment from God (see Luke 23:33-35).

Notice the extent of the servant's suffering for our sin. He would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (verse 5). The only reason the Lord Jesus bore those nails in His hands was to pay the penalty for our sin. He took the punishment for our rebellion so that we could have peace with God the Father. Because He was wounded and killed for us, we can be restored to a right relationship with God. Because He died for us, we can be healed and forgiven.

Isaiah tells us that like wandering sheep, we have all gone astray (verse 6). We have turned our backs on God and wandered from His path. We deserve to perish because of our sin, but instead God the Father laid all our evil on the Lord Jesus, who died as a sacrifice in our place.

For us the innocent Lord Jesus was mistreated (verse 7). He endured extreme suffering without complaining. Like a lamb quietly led away to the slaughter, the Lord Jesus was submissive and did not open His mouth to oppose what His enemies were doing to Him. He was intent on carrying out the plan of God for the salvation of our souls, being obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Verse 8 prophesied that the suffering servant would not be given a fair trial but would be the victim of a corrupted legal system. He would be treated as one so threatening that a legal trial was denied Him. He would be killed, cut off from the land of the living. To die with no descendants was considered a curse from God.

God's suffering servant would be assigned a grave like a common criminal (verse 9). He would be killed as a lawbreaker even though He was not violent or deceitful. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life but was

murdered as a criminal. From a human perspective, this was a horrible tragedy. This whole process, however, was according to the plan and will of God (verse 10). It was the purpose of God to crush His servant and punish Him as an innocent substitute for guilty sinners. The Lord Jesus became a guilt offering to satisfy God's anger against sin. Through this sacrificial work, many would be born into the kingdom of God. After Messiah's death, He would rise to an endless life and see the salvation of multitudes. The Lord Jesus would accomplish the will of God for His life (John 17:4). If you have come to be part of the family of God, it is because of this sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus on your behalf. Each day more and more people are coming to know the Lord Jesus and accepting the wonderful work of forgiveness He completed on the cross.

Notice that not only does Isaiah prophesy that the servant would die for our sin but He also tells us that after He had suffered, He would see the light of life (verse 11). Death would not be able to hold Him in its grip. The one sacrifice of the Lord satisfied all divine wrath against sin. The Lord Jesus knew exactly what was needed to justify many.

By His divine knowledge and power, He bore the iniquities of sinners and accomplished their salvation. Because this servant offered His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, His name would be lifted high (verse 12). The servant was pictured as dividing the spoils of victory, as would other conquerors. The Lord Jesus will forever enjoy the rewards of His redemptive work with all His spiritual children (Romans 8:16-17). God promised to make this servant great because He poured out His life and pleads the sinners cause.

This passage is quite clear. Isaiah prophesied that a servant of God would come and offer His life for the salvation of God's people. This servant would be despised, rejected, mocked, and killed. To all outward appearances, this would be a terrible tragedy, but the Father would take the wrath and anger of humankind and bring great honour, blessing, and redemption from it. Many years before He came to this earth Isaiah spoke in great detail about Him and His ministry. This alone is proof of the validity of his prophecy.

If the Lord God can take the evil of humans, as it was directed towards His Son, and use it for great good, can He not do the same for us as well? Can He not take those stressful circumstances and trials that you are going through and redeem them for His own good purposes?

For Consideration:

- Take a moment to consider how people planned such evil against the Lord Jesus and how the Father changed it to good. Can the Lord do the same thing in your particular situation?
- What does Isaiah teach us about the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf?
- How was Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in the Lord Jesus?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He willingly offered Himself completely for your forgiveness.

- Ask God to give you the gentleness and meekness that the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His ministry. Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have been tempted to draw attention to yourself and not to the Lord God.
- Do you know someone who has not accepted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour? Take a moment to pray that this person's eyes would be opened.

THE SONG OF THE BARREN WOMAN

Read Isaiah 54:1-17

The last two chapters of Isaiah's prophecy announced that God's servant would accomplish the divine plan of salvation for Israel and the Gentiles. The prophecies of chapters 54 and 55 extend invitations to respond to the promise of this great salvation.

The prophecy of chapter 54 began with an invitation to respond to the Lord's work of salvation with joyous shouting and singing. Isaiah called a barren woman to break out in praise for fruitfulness. Israel in her exile would be like a destitute, disgraced woman with no children. Because of her rebellion, Israel would be spiritually barren and unproductive for the Lord. However, the Lord promised that when she repented and returned to Him, she would again be fruitful. Through the Lord's miraculous work of restoration, desolate Israel would become more spiritually fruitful than other nations (verse 1).

What we need to understand from this is that God is able to take the sufferings we face and accomplish wonderful things. Fruit can be born out of that suffering that would never have been born in any other way. We should not be afraid of the difficult times we must endure. Instead, we can be confident that the Lord will use our circumstances to accomplish His glory and our good in the end.

Isaiah challenged his people to enlarge the place of their tent and stretch out their curtains. Notice in verse 2 that they were not to hold back. They were to boldly prepare for a work of the Lord in their midst. One day Israel's numerous descendants would expand beyond her borders and require a larger dwelling space (26:15; 49:19-20). Israelites would take over the land of other nations and settle in their desolate cities.

In verse 4 Isaiah challenged his people not to be afraid. Israel's sins had brought the barrenness of God's judgement. However, this time of punishment would pass, and she would forget the shame caused by her youthful ways and the pain of her discipline.

The reason for her redemption and elevation above the other nations would be that her husband is the Lord Almighty, the Holy One of Israel, and the Lord over the whole earth. The day would come when God would call Israel back to Himself (verse 5). For a moment in time, God would withdraw from her because of her sin (verse 7). Verse 8 reminds us that in a surge of holy anger, God would hide His face from His unfaithful wife, Israel. But He promised to have compassion on her and with everlasting kindness restore her to a place of honour.

According to verses 9-10, God vowed that when He redeemed Israel, her restoration would be permanent,

and He would never be angry with her again. The Lord compared this vow to the one He made in the days of Noah. After unleashing His judgement on the earth, He promised never again to devastate the whole earth with a flood (Genesis 9:11). Similarly, God promised never to rebuke Israel again. As in any marriage contract, the Lord vowed that His love for His people would never end. The Lord would have compassion on them forever. These verses lead us to believe that the Lord God will yet do a redemptive work in Israel. (See Romans 11:25-27.) We should also see this verse as an assurance of God's eternal and unchanging love for all His children.

The promise of God in verse 11 was that this afflicted city (Jerusalem), lashed by storms would be comforted. God would build her with turquoise stones. Her foundations would be of sapphires. The battlements of her protection would be of rubies and her gates of sparkling jewels. Her walls would be of precious stones. The apostle John also described such a city in Revelation 21:18-21. It seems that the ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy of Isaiah will be seen in the heavenly Jerusalem that the Lord is preparing for all who accept His Son and the offer of forgiveness that comes through Him.

Verse 13 emphasised the spiritual blessing of God in a restored Jerusalem: the children would be taught by the Lord and be at peace. Righteousness would prevail, and tyranny and its terror would be kept far away (verse 14). Verse 15 indicates that there would not be perfect peace at this time but that Israel would prevail in any attack by an enemy.

The God who created the blacksmith who fanned the flames and forged the weapons was also the God who created the destroyer (verse 16). God does not create

evil but changes the evil of humans into good to accomplish His purposes. He promised that there would not be a single weapon that would prevail against His people. The tongues that accused them falsely would be quickly silenced. God's people would live in victory and blessing. God's vindication of His people, said Isaiah, was the heritage of the servants of the Lord (verse 17).

What wonderful encouragement we see in this passage. Maybe you have felt abandoned and deserted by the Lord. The promise is that the Lord will return and have compassion on you. This time of trial will prove to be for your good. God will not abandon His own forever. The barren woman will have cause for great rejoicing.

For Consideration:

- According to this passage, what caused the Lord to turn His back on Israel for a time?
- Can you remember a time in your life when the Lord seemed to be distant? What comfort do you find in this passage?
- What does this passage teach us about the heart of God for His children?

For Prayer:

- What are some of the promises of the Lord for His children in this passage? Thank the Lord for these promises.
- Ask the Lord to give you the boldness you need to declare His name without fear.

- Take a moment to pray for those who are presently facing tremendous obstacles in life. Ask the Lord to minister to them comforting them with the assurance that He loves them and is in control.

A CALL TO THE THIRSTY

Read Isaiah 55:1-13

Chapter 55 is a real source of encouragement to the people of God. Isaiah challenged *all* who were thirsty to come to the waters of refreshment. Notice, however, that it was necessary to come to these waters. These waters would not be of any help to those who refused to come to them to drink. There is refreshment for all who will come to the Lord. What is your particular need today? The Lord has the answer. He will bring refreshment and renewal to you in that area of your life, but you must come to him.

Notice also in verse 1 that this call was extended to those who had no money. This water was not for sale. This renewing and refreshing would be freely given to all who wanted it. Those who had no money were called to come and buy and eat. They were to buy wine and milk without money and without cost. What the Lord had to offer them could not be purchased with money. The blessings he had to offer them were a free gift extended to all who would come to Him. These blessings had been purchased by the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and He offered them freely to all who would come to Him.

The prophet asked a very important question in verse 2: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?" How many people in our day do just that? They spend their resources and energy on those things that cannot satisfy their souls. They search for peace, joy, and contentment and spend their money on the things this world has to offer only to find that it does not satisfy their true hunger. They push themselves in their daily routine and labour for more and more of this world's goods only to find that they are left empty and dry in the end. Why would people do this, wondered Isaiah, when the Lord offers what is good? What the Lord has to offer us will delight our souls. All you need to do is to come to Him and eat.

Through Isaiah, God called His people to listen to what He had to say. He pleaded with them to come to Him so that their souls could live. God would commit Himself to love them faithfully, as He had promised David.

According to verse 4, David was a leader and witness to the people of the wonderful power and love of God. The nation of Israel rose to its height in power under his administration. He, more than any other king, seemed to love the Lord and praise His name. David wrote many of the psalms we have in the Book of Psalms today. He was considered to be a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). While David was indeed a great leader and witness, he was also a symbol of one who was to come from his line. The Lord Jesus, as a descendant of David, would be an even greater leader and witness. He would lead Israel into even greater blessing. He is the water of life. Anyone who drinks the water that the Lord Jesus gives will never thirst again (John 4:14). He is the bread of life, and anyone who eats the bread that He gives will

never be hungry again (John 6:35). The Lord Himself is the feast. He satisfies all the deepest longing of the soul.

Because the Lord would be with them, God's people would summon other nations to their God (verse 5). These nations would see in Israel the wonderful splendour of the Holy One and desire that for themselves. Isaiah was prophesying that the day would come when from Israel a call would go forth to the whole world to come to their God. God would particularly empower Israel to reach out in evangelism to the entire world.

In light of this wonderful promise, the call went out in verse 6 to seek the Lord while He could be found and to call on Him while He was near. The day of salvation had come but this salvation would not always be available. The time had come for the wicked to forsake their evil ways and to turn from their malicious thoughts and plans. If the unrighteous would turn to the Lord, He would have mercy on them and forgive their sin. What a terrible thing it would be to refuse such an offer. God's mercy and forgiveness were freely offered but would not be available forever.

This offer of forgiveness and pardon is hard to understand. As human beings, we do not extend this forgiveness so freely to others. Why would a holy God offer this forgiveness to those who had turned their hearts away from His generous goodness? God reminds us in verses 8 and 9 that His thoughts and ways are very different from ours. What are your natural thoughts toward those who have offended you? What are you tempted to do to those who have mocked you? Praise the Lord that His thoughts and ways toward us are different.

God reminded His people that He was going to do a wonderful work. He told them that His word was going to go forth like rain and snow to water and refresh the earth (verse 10). Even as the rain comes down to water the earth and make it produce fruit, so it is with the Word of God. The Lord blesses His Word so that it accomplishes wonderful things in the land. It produces the fruit the Lord desires. It does not return to Him without accomplishing what was intended (verse 11).

How important it is for us to understand what Isaiah is telling us: God is pleased to bless His Word and use it to accomplish His purposes. In our day we are seeing an increasing de-emphasis on the teaching of Scripture. We need more churches in which the Word of God is being powerfully taught and obeyed. Through His Word God calls people to Himself. As His people live in obedience to Scripture, He pours out His blessing.

Notice in verses 12-13 the promise of God to those who would listen to His Word. He promised that they would go out with joy and be lead forth with peace. The mountains and the hills would burst into song before them. The trees of the field would clap their hands. This is a picture of wonderful joy and praise. When God sent out His word and His people chose to live in obedience to it, His blessings would come in abundance. Instead of the thornbush, the pine tree would grow. Instead of briers, the myrtle tree would grow. The hand of God would be very powerful on His obedient people and provide them with a blessing that would never be destroyed.

In this chapter an offer was extended to all who would take it. Isaiah tells us that the Lord God is calling the world to eat from the wonderful banqueting table that He has spread out before them through the sacrificial work of

the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. The Lord Jesus offers us all that our souls could ever desire. He is the answer to everything our hearts could ever want. Isaiah also reminds us of the power of the Word of God. The Lord promised that those who would surrender and live in obedience to that word would experience a blessing that would last forever.

For Consideration:

- If you know the Lord today, can you testify to the blessings He spoke of in this passage?
- Are their blessings we have missed because we have never received them? Do we miss blessings in the Christian life because we do not take what God wants to give?
- What does Isaiah tell us about the importance of the Word of God? Is the Word of God given the place it should have in our lives and our churches?
- What is the connection between the Word of God and the blessing of God in our lives?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He does not deal with us as our fellow human beings deal with us.
- Ask the Lord to reveal to you any way in which you have not been faithful to the clear teaching of the Word of God.
- Ask the Lord to give you a deeper love and appreciation for the Word of God.

- Consider some of the blessings He has offered you in Christ. Take a moment to thank Him for those wonderful blessings.

MY SALVATION IS CLOSE

Read Isaiah 56:1-12

The prophecies of chapters 56-66 dealt with the necessity of living righteously as servants of the Lord. Israel had been redeemed from captivity (40-48) and redeemed from sin (49-55). In chapter 56 the Lord challenges His people in view of their great salvation.

God promised His people in this chapter that His salvation was close. What an encouragement this would have been. In light of the coming salvation (Israel's return from captivity, the atoning work of the suffering servant, and final glory), God's people were to maintain justice and do what was right (verse 1). They needed to act on their belief in God's wonderful promises of salvation. Those who are redeemed have a duty to live in obedience to God's ways. "Blessed is the man who does this" (verse 2). An example of refraining from work on the Sabbath is given. The Israelites expressed faith in the Lord's provision and worthiness by observing this special day.

This wonderful offer of salvation was not just for Israel. Isaiah prophesied that even foreigners and eunuchs who bound themselves to the Lord would experience these blessings (verses 3-7). According to the Law of Moses, foreigners and eunuchs were restricted in Israel's public worship (Deuteronomy 23:1-8). Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when anyone who sincerely sought the Lord would find salvation (55:1, 6). The salvation that God was bringing through Israel would welcome people who had previously been excluded from public forms of worship.

Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when the blessing of the Lord would fall on all who truly sought the Lord by being obedient to His word. If a eunuch turned to the Lord and chose to please Him by holding fast to the Lord's covenant, the Lord promised to give him a memorial and a name within the walls of the temple (verses 4-5). He would be permitted entrance into the temple wall, even though under the Law of Moses he would have been forbidden entrance. Although a eunuch could not have sons and daughters to carry on His name due to his physical handicap, God would be his reward and give him an everlasting name.

Isaiah prophesied in verse 6 that foreigners who bound themselves to the Lord God to serve Him, to love His name, and to worship Him by living in obedience to the word of the Lord would be brought up to the holy mountain. Again, under the Law of Moses, foreigners were forbidden access to the temple. If they sought the Lord and committed in their hearts to serve and honour Him, however, the Lord would give them the joy of entering the house of prayer. God would accept their offerings and be pleased with them. Isaiah prophesied that God's house would be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*.

It was the desire of the Lord God to see the nations come to Him. Even from the days of Isaiah the prophet, the Lord God had a plan to see the nations join with Israel in the knowledge and praise of His name. We were not an afterthought as Gentile believers. God had a plan from the beginning of time to see us grafted into the vine of His true people.

The day was coming when the Lord God would gather Israel from the far corners of the earth where they were exiled. Isaiah promised that the Lord would also gather many others out of exile (verse 8). Those of us who have come to know the Lord Jesus are part of those who have been gathered to the Lord God. We have been set free from our captivity and given the freedom to become the children of God and to enter into the worship and praise of Israel's great God. We are being gathered from every nation and tribe to become children of the Holy One of Israel.

In verses 9-12 Isaiah returned his focus to the wickedness of the leaders of Israel in his day. These people who should have been leading Israel in righteousness were condemned for leading Israel astray. The call went out in verse 9 for the beasts of the field and the beasts of the forest to come devour the flock of Israel. Isaiah compared the watchmen of Israel to mute dogs who should have barked to warn of the coming danger. Instead, they lay sleeping while the enemy ravaged the land. It should be noted that, in mind-set of the Israelite, the dog was an unclean animal. This is how the Lord saw the prophets and priests of Isaiah's day. They were unclean. The shepherds of Israel were self-serving and proud. They did not warn the people of the evil in the land that was causing God's judgment. They did not draw their flock

back to God for protection. For this reason God called on the beasts of the field to devour them.

These wicked spiritual leaders were compared to dogs with mighty appetites. They never had enough to eat. They continued to fill their bellies and satisfy their appetites but did nothing to minister or protect the people of God from harm. They filled themselves with wine and beer. They lived for their luxuries and pleasures but they forgot the people of God.

In Isaiah's day the people of God were facing judgement (Assyrian oppression and Babylonian captivity) because they did not live in obedience to the Lord their God. The prophets and the priests had a vital ministry in leading the people into the knowledge of the ways of God. That knowledge and obedience to God's laws would bring the blessing of the Lord. The spiritual leadership of the day, however, had fallen short of what God desired for them. Isaiah prophesied that God's blessing would fall if they would only seek Him and turn from their evil ways. The salvation of the Lord was always close, but the hand of God could be turned away by rebellion and disobedience.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection in this passage between the presence of the Lord being revealed in a society and the obedience of God's people to His Word? How important is obedience if we want to experience the fullness of God's blessing?

- Take a moment to let the Lord search your heart and reveal to you any area of your life that is not in tune with Him.
- What is the connection between desiring God and obedience? Can we say that we truly desire God if we are not living in obedience to His word?
- What does this passage teach us about the responsibility God has given to spiritual leaders?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He rewards those who truly seek Him.
- Ask the Lord to reveal to you anything in your life that would keep His presence from becoming more real to you.
- Ask God to bless those in spiritual leadership. Ask Him to raise up a generation of spiritual leaders who understand the importance of seeking God through His Word.

NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED

Read Isaiah 57:1-21

There are times when it is very difficult to understand the ways of the Lord. We see the righteous perish and the wicked prosper. We wonder where the Lord is in times like these. Does He see what is happening around us? Is He really in control? Is it advantageous for us to live for the Lord and seek His ways? In this chapter Isaiah addressed these important questions.

In verse 1 Isaiah by spoke to the issue of the righteous perishing. There are certainly times when we wonder why a person who loves the Lord has to suffer so intensely. Isaiah tells us that devout believers are taken away to be spared from evil. God in His wonderful plan knows what is ahead. He knows the evil of our day. In love, He spares some of His children from terrible wickedness by taking them to be with Himself. What a comfort this is. How often we see death as the enemy. Isaiah reminds us that this is not the case. Isaiah tells us in verse 2 that these who walk uprightly enter into peace when they lie down in death. They are spared from the trial and terror that surrounds those who remain. This is true for those of us

who know the Lord Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour. Death is not our enemy. The sting of death has been removed and we are now able to face it with confidence because our Lord has conquered.

While death is not something to be feared by the child of God who walks in the light of His word, this is not the case for those who live in disobedience. Notice in verse 3 that Isaiah called them “sons of a sorceress.” This referred to their love for foreign gods. These individuals turned their backs on God to serve the gods of the nations. As a sorceress called on pagan gods, so these children called on their gods instead of trusting the Lord God of Israel. Isaiah’s language was strong. He called them offspring of adulterers and prostitutes.

In verse 4 Isaiah called these wicked people a brood of rebels and an offspring of liars. They did not care for the truth and loved to live a lie. They mocked and sneered at those who sought the Lord. These rebels practised fertility rituals and child sacrifice. In verse 6 Isaiah said that they offered drink and grain to idols of stone in the ravines. These wicked behaviours would hasten God’s judgement.

Everywhere in Israel there were indications of pagan worship. This land had been consecrated to God. He had given it to them as their inheritance for the glory of His name, but they had given it over to their idols. Israel had committed spiritual adultery with her idols (verse 7). Instead of putting Scripture on their doors and doorposts (Deuteronomy 6:9), the Israelites had inscribed pagan symbols. The Lord’s wife had gone to bed with other lovers (verse 8).

According to verse 9, Israel had sent ambassadors to faraway places to learn the ways of the nations and make alliances with unbelievers, things God had told them not to do. In making these alliances, Israel descended to the grave (some translations use the word *hell*). God's people descended as low as they could possibly go.

Notice in verse 10 that they were wearied by all their ways. Their idolatrous pursuits brought them no peace in their hearts and no security for their land. They were beating the wind. They were burning themselves out for nothing. They were tireless in their pursuit of evil but it brought no satisfaction.

Isaiah had an important question to ask these individuals in verse 11: "Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to me?" What was it that had taken them away from their God? What did they fear that would cause them to turn their backs on such an awesome and holy God? These people had lost their fear of the Holy One of Israel. For a long time, the Lord had been patient with them. He had not destroyed them because of their sin. There were no lightning flashes hitting them, and the earth had not opened up to swallow them. Had they mistaken His patience for a lack of holy anger at sin? God reminded His people that He would expose their works (verse 12). In that day of judgement, they would cry out to their idols for help, but find none. The wind would carry off all their idols, and the mere breath of the Lord would blow them away. All their sins would be out in the open. They would have no one to defend them on that day against the holy wrath of God. In that day of judgement only the people who made the Lord God their refuge would inherit God's land and possess God's holy mountain.

Verses 14-21 introduced the solution to Israel's wickedness. Her merciful and gracious God was going to do a wonderful work in her midst. The day was coming after her judgement when God would restore Israel. A call went out to build up and prepare the road (40:3). The obstacles that were on that road were to be removed. God's people were to be given free and unhindered access to return to the land of their blessings. God would do this because of who He is (verse 15). Although He is the high and lofty One, He also lives with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit, to encourage and enable them.

God promised that He would not accuse His people forever (verse 16). If He did remain angry, what hope would they have? Through their sinful greed, they had enraged the Lord (verse 17). He would punish His people and hide His face from them for a time. Despite this discipline, His people would persist in their evil ways.

God saw the evil and sinful ways of Israel and, while His anger was aroused, He promised to restore His people in grace and compassion (verse 18). He would comfort them in their suffering and trials. The day was coming when the Lord would heal His people. He did not have to do this. In His holiness, He could have destroyed them. Many did perish because of their persistence in sin, but God is a Saviour. He would create praise on the lips of His people (verse 19). Peace would fill the hearts of both those who were far away and those who were near. God promised to heal them. The phrase "those far away and near" could refer to those in exile. God's people would be scattered and spread out across the known world, but His grace would find them and renew them.

Peace again would fill the land of Israel as the Lord moved in their midst. Isaiah concluded by reminding his listeners that, while God would do this wonderful work in the lives of the contrite, the wicked would be like the sea that could not find rest. This pictured a turbulent sea, crashing against the shore and stirring up debris. Those who rejected the Lord would have a life of upheaval filled with debris. They would not be able to find peace, for only in the Lord is there true peace that satisfies.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the reason why the righteous are sometimes taken away?
- What warning do we find about living in sin from this passage?
- How easy is it to misunderstand the patience of the Lord and think that He will never judge our sin? Do you know people who are living with this deception?
- What is the connection between living for the Lord and experiencing His peace? Can those who are not in a right relationship with God experience true peace?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He remains in control and will one day judge sin.
- Thank the Lord that He offers peace to those who remain in Him.

- Ask the Lord to increase your peace and trust in Him and His purposes in your life.
- Thank the Lord for His patience and forgiveness without which we would all be condemned.

RELIGIOUS BUT LOST

Read Isaiah 58:1-59:21

In chapters 58 and 59 Isaiah confronted Israel with three issues: the difference between true and false religion, the people's failure in righteousness, and God's saving action on behalf of His people. In Isaiah's day the people of God faithfully practiced their religious rituals. They often cried out to God and wanted to see His wonderful work in their midst. To all outward appearances, these people were truly seeking God. They seemed eager to know Him and His purposes for their lives. There was a problem, however, which Isaiah addressed in chapter 58.

In verse 1 the Lord called Isaiah to shout out loud the message that Israel was rebellious. These people were trying to manipulate God's blessings, as had their forefather Jacob (Genesis 27:19).

To all appearances Israel seemed to seek after God. They appeared to be a nation of people who were seeking to follow His commands (verse 2). They seemed eager for God's presence and for righteous decisions. In

verse 3 we discover that they even sought the Lord in fasting. They humbled themselves, but the Lord did not seem to notice. They were going through all the right religious motions, but God seemed distant and did not answer their prayers.

God reminded them that on their fast days, they still did as they pleased. He saw the employers of the land exploiting their workers, not giving them what they deserved. The people were quarrelling and fighting with each other. On the one hand, they were seeking God, but, on the other hand, they did not love each other. God told them that they could fast and pray all they wanted, but, if they were not willing to deal with the problems among themselves, the Lord would not hear their prayers (verse 5). This is exactly what the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 5:23-24:

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

There is a time for us to stop praying and begin acting on what God has already revealed to us. Sometimes the answers we seek are not to be found in more prayer but in simple obedience to the clear teaching of the Lord.

What was God looking for in His people? He was looking for those who would loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the oppressed (verse 6). The Lord wanted to set people free from bondage. Along with the fasting, He wanted a people who would share their food with the hungry and provide the poor stranger with shelter and clothing.

This is a powerful reminder to us in our day. The people of God were fasting, praying, and crying out for God to come near. As they did, their own families, the poor, and the oppressed were crying out in despair. Instead of pleading with God for more blessings, they needed to live in simple obedience to His clear commands by opening their hearts and hands to the needs around them. Why ask for more when they had what was necessary to meet the need themselves if they would only submit to God's purpose in being generous and compassionate?

God promised that if they dealt with their selfishness and religious hypocrisy, their light would break forth like the dawn (verse 8). Their sin had caused them to live in darkness, and the light of God's presence was hidden from them. Obedience would restore that light. They would be healed, and the glory of the Lord would protect them.

In verses 9-11 Isaiah promised that when the people dealt with their sin and lived in obedience to God's ways, then God would answer them when they called out to Him. Isaiah told them how to make their faith practical. They needed to relieve the yoke of oppression, stop spreading malicious talk, and feed the hungry. Then the Lord would make their paths bright, and He would guide them and satisfy all their needs. Their sun-scorched land would become like a well-watered garden with crops that would not fail. They would be like a spring whose water never failed.

Notice in verse 12 that the repentant and faithful of God's people would rebuild the nation's ruins caused by sin. This would be partially fulfilled at the restoration from the Babylonian captivity (Nehemiah 2:17; Amos 9:11).

Chapter 58 ended with a promise from the mouth of the Lord. If God's people would keep the Lord's commandments (symbolised as keeping the Sabbath), they would find their joy in the Lord. If they would focus their lives on God and others, instead of pursuing selfish blessings, the Lord would cause them to be fully blessed in their land. They would celebrate the inheritance handed down to them from their forefathers.

Isaiah began the prophecy of chapter 59 by reassuring his people that the arm of the Lord was not too short to save them. He was able to meet their every need. His ears were sharp enough to hear their requests, but He was not answering their prayers. In chapter 58 the Lord said He was not responding to His people because of their empty religious rituals and broken relationships. In this chapter Isaiah focuses more on the sins of God's people, especially injustice (59:2-4).

Isaiah reminded the people that their sin had separated them from God. Their hands were stained with blood and their fingers with guilt. In the whole land, no one called for justice or pleaded a legal case with integrity. They used lies and devious arguments to get their own way.

Isaiah told his people that their deeds were like the eggs of a deadly snake, killing those who were victims of their crimes (59:5). Their deeds ensnared others instead of providing what was promised. Evil deeds and acts of violence characterized God's people. They rushed toward sin, shed innocent blood, had evil thoughts, were bent on destruction, and knew no peace or justice (59:7-8).

Notice the result of their sinful lifestyle: justice and righteousness was far from them. Their society was being destroyed by wickedness. People did what was right in

their own eyes, with no respect or concern for others. They sought light but walked in deep shadows, groping along like the blind. They had rejected God and His light and were living in the darkness of sin. They were lifeless (59:10). Because of the people's sinful ways, the justice of God was absent (verses 12-15). Righteousness stood at a distance. Truth stumbled in the streets, and honesty was given no place. In this corrupted society, those who shunned this evil system became its prey.

The Lord saw the terrible condition of His people. He was appalled that there was no one to intervene and remedy the situation (59:16). All were helpless, and no one could bring the victory over sin His people needed. The Lord's own hand would work salvation. Isaiah used the image of a warrior preparing for battle, putting on his breastplate, helmet, and clothing. The apostle Paul used this same image in Ephesians 6: 14, 17. The Lord Jesus was the means by which God would ultimately do something about the problem of sin. He would come clothed in the righteousness of God as a perfect man to conquer the forces of evil. He did this by willingly taking our place and dying for us. His zeal for victory was so intense that not even death on a cruel cross would stop Him.

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would exercise judgement on His enemies (59:18). He would repay them for what they had done. That day of judgement would come, and no one would escape it. Even the remotest islands would know the judgement of God.

God's deliverance of His people from sin and from their enemies would result in the whole world revering God's glory (59:19). God promised to send a Redeemer to those in Jacob who repented of their sins. To those individuals, God promised to make an everlasting cove-

nant. His Spirit would come to them and give them His law. That Spirit and that law would never leave them. The true people of God would carry the words of God with them and pass them on to their children.

Sin had devastating consequences among God's people. They were religious but lost in sin and separated from God and His blessings. The challenge of Isaiah was to return to God and seek His face. God longed to bless His children, but their iniquities were a barrier. God saw the inability of His people to achieve victory over sin. He had mercy and became the conquering victor over sin so His people could return to Him and walk in the power of His Spirit. In these New Testament times, we can understand this in a way those of Isaiah's day could not. The Spirit of God has come to dwell in us, enabling us to live the life Israel could not live in the flesh.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection between obedience and blessing in this passage?
- What do we learn about the connection between disobedience and unanswered prayer?
- How important is it that we deal with sin in our lives? What was the result of sin in the nation of Israel?
- Is it possible to be religious and not in a right relationship with God? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you any area of your life that blocks His blessing.
- Thank the Lord that He does desire to bless His people. Thank Him that He does not abandon us in our sin.
- Thank the Lord that He provided a way for us to be forgiven of sin. Thank Him that He gives us His Spirit so that we can walk in obedience. Ask God to help you to walk in the power of His Spirit.

YOUR LIGHT HAS COME

Read Isaiah 60:1-22

In chapters 60-62 Isaiah prophesied of Israel's complete restoration to God and her effective witness to the nations. In chapter 60 the prophet spoke of a time when Israel would rise to a position of prominence among the nations.

Isaiah began by telling his people to arise and shine for their light had come. Like the morning of a new day, they were to arise from their sleep and step into the glory of the Lord that had risen around them. While darkness covered the earth and its people, the light of the Lord's glory would come to Israel, and the Gentile nations would be drawn to her because of her God. The dawn of a new age was approaching, and, through this tiny nation, the Lord would reach out with the light of His salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah challenged his people to lift up their eyes and look around them (verse 4). He prophesied that the day was coming when their sons would come from afar and their

daughters would be carried on their arms. They would again be radiant as a people, and their hearts would swell with joy. The wealth of the nations would come to them—livestock, gold, and incense—and the nations would praise the Lord. God is interested in human hearts and lives bringing Him honour and glory. He would raise up a people who would embellish His temple with praise and obedience (verse 7). In other words, the nations would come to know and worship the Lord God of Israel.

In verse 8 Isaiah saw an image of clouds flying along like peaceful doves to their nests. These clouds represented ships of Tarshish, which were large merchant vessels of Isaiah's time. These ships were seen bringing Israel's sons and daughters home from afar and also gold and silver as an offering to the Lord God. The wealth of nations would come to Israel because she would be the vehicle of the knowledge of God on the earth.

Isaiah promised that foreigners would rebuild Jerusalem's walls, and kings would serve Israel (verse 10). This is exactly what happened when the children of Israel returned from their exile. Cyrus of Persia paid for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. While Israel was under discipline in exile, God seemed far away. The day was coming, however, when the Lord would restore the blessings of His people and have compassion on them.

Isaiah told his people that the gates of their city would always stand open (verses 11-12). The reason for this was that the nations would come to them day and night with their wealth. They would come to bring their offerings to Israel's God. Those nations that refused to serve God would ultimately perish.

Isaiah prophesied that Lebanon's famous trees would be used to beautify the Lord's sanctuary in Israel (verse 13). The descendants of Israel's former enemies would bow down in respect of God's chosen people. The nations would acknowledge that Jerusalem was the true city of the Lord.

Verses 15 and 16 recognised that, although Israel had been abandoned and despised, the Lord would make her the pride and joy of the world forever. Through this experience of complete restoration and exaltation, Israel would come to know that it was the Lord, the Mighty One of Jacob, who saved her.

The Lord promised to bring a whole new level of blessing into the lives of His chosen people. The Lord God would make peace their governor and righteousness their ruler. They would no longer experience violence in their land, and ruin and destruction would be banished from their borders (verse 18). Instead they would be surrounded by the walls of salvation and gates of praise.

Isaiah made it clear that the day was coming when the sun would no more provide the light of day (verse 19). The brightness of the moon would no more shine on the earth. Instead, the glory of the Lord God would provide the light, and the people of God would constantly dwell in His presence. They would no longer experience sorrow and pain (verse 20). All the people of Israel would be righteous, and they would possess the Promised Land forever. Israel would be a people who displayed the incredible splendour of the Lord. The Lord promised to multiply Israel beyond number (see Genesis 15:5). The least of them would become a thousand, and the smallest a mighty nation. God guaranteed all these promises in their proper time.

There is a surprising similarity between what Isaiah described in this chapter and what the apostle John wrote in the Book of Revelation.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." . . . There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 21:1-4; 22:5)

The similarities of the passages in Isaiah and Revelation lead us to believe that the prophet Isaiah was describing the New Jerusalem that all believers look forward to seeing one day. This prophecy did have some earthly significance for the people of God when they returned from their exile. But the prophecy seems to go beyond this to a future fulfilment that has yet to be seen.

For Consideration:

- What encouragement do you take from the promise of God to Israel? How does this apply to the believer today?
- What does this passage tell us about the heart of God for His people?
- What blessings has the Lord showered on you personally? What promises does He give you in this passage?
- Describe the New Jerusalem as seen by Isaiah and John in the book of Revelation.

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wonderful hope we have of an eternity in His presence.
- Thank the Lord that he came and shone His wonderful glory into your life and heart.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the blessings He has given you personally.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live daily in the light of His glory and wonderful kindness toward you.

THE MESSIAH'S MINISTRY AND DELIGHT

Read Isaiah 61:1-62:12

The context of these chapters is a time when Gentiles would come to Israel seeking salvation from her God. In chapter 60 Isaiah prophesied that the glory of the Lord would shine in Israel. This everlasting light would be a person—Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus. The prophecy of Isaiah 61 begins with a clear description of the call and work of this anointed servant who would come to Israel to bring His light to the earth.

Isaiah prophesied that the Spirit of the LORD would be on this servant (or Messiah). He would be empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to accomplish His particular role. His ministry would not be accomplished in human strength but through the wisdom and capacity of the Spirit of God.

Notice what the Spirit of God was anointing His servant (the Lord Jesus) to do. First, He anointed Him to preach

good news to the poor. That good news was the fact that He had come to set them free from the bondage of sin. These *poor* were individuals who knew that they had nothing to offer to the Lord. They were broken by their poor spiritual condition.

Second, the servant's mission was to bind up the broken-hearted. It is one thing to speak the good news, and it is another to bind up the broken-hearted, which implies personal contact with people. To bind up in this context meant to dress a wound. It had to do with reaching out to those who were broken and covering up wounds so that they could heal. The Messiah would bring healing to those who were broken by the effects of sin in their lives.

Third, the Anointed One was to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. The enemy has us all bound in the prison of sin and darkness. Jesus came to release us and to set us free by the truth of His word. The lies of the enemy have led many to despair and hopelessness. Jesus came to set us free from that hopelessness and give us life.

According to verse 2, this servant would proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of God's vengeance. His message would be two-fold. On the one hand, it was a message of hope and comfort to all who would accept His offer of favour. On the other hand, however, it was a message of condemnation and terror to all who would turn from His offer of salvation and freedom from darkness. The servant would comfort all who mourned over their sin.

It should be noted that in Luke 4:18-21 the Lord Jesus quoted this passage from Isaiah in order to identify himself as the servant Isaiah spoke of. It is interesting

that the Lord Jesus did not quote the part about the day of God's vengeance, indicating that in his first advent He was fulfilling his mission of proclaiming the Lord's favour. When the Lord Jesus returns to earth, He will fulfil His mission of bringing God's vengeance on His enemies.

Notice in verse 3 how the anointed servant would provide for those in Zion who grieved. He would give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes. Ashes were sometimes smeared over the mourner as a symbol of grief. The enemy would love to keep God's people in that condition of defeat and devastation. However, Isaiah prophesied that the people of Israel would become as strong as oaks in their righteousness so that they would display the Lord's splendour.

While there are times when the Lord will break us, it is never His intent that we remain broken. It is His desire to place a crown of beauty on our heads. He comes to place the oil of gladness on our heads instead of those ashes we have been wearing. It is his desire that we take off that spirit of despair and put on the garment of praise. This is the ministry of the Lord Jesus to all who will receive it. If you find yourself living in despair, covered with the ashes of mourning and grief, you can be assured that these garments are not from the Lord but from the flesh and from the enemy. Jesus wants to clothe you in His garments of praise and beauty.

Isaiah prophesied that the rebuilding of Israel's devastated cities would be part of God's future plan of complete restoration (verse 4). Flocks and crops would again flourish in the Promised Land, and Gentiles would serve as Israel's field hands. The Israelites would serve as priests and mediate the relationship between the Lord and Gentiles. In this way, Israel would become the

kingdom of priests that God had intended (see Exodus 19:6). In compensation for priestly service, Israel would live off the contributions from the nations (verse 6).

God would turn the former shame of the people of Israel into joy in their inheritance (verse 7). Israel would enjoy the double portion of blessings given to the firstborn and favoured son in a family in ancient times (see Exodus 4:22). Israel would be assured of all these blessings because the God of justice would make an everlasting covenant with her (verse 8). The Lord promised that Israel's descendants would be known among the nations and recognized as a people who were being blessed by the Lord.

Isaiah spoke for the people of God as they responded to these wonderful promises of a glorious future. They delighted greatly in the Lord and their soul rejoiced in Him. He had given them salvation and righteousness (verse 10). Israel would be the soil from which a rich garden of praise and righteousness would spring. From Israel, the message of God's love and holiness would be sent to the nations. We see the clear beginning of this on the day of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit anointed the Jewish apostles to go with the message to the gospel to the whole world. From Israel has indeed sprung up a wonderful garden of honour and holiness to our God.

In chapter 62 the prophet Isaiah continued to expand on the theme of God establishing Jerusalem as the crown of the Lord's splendour and the praise of all the earth. In verse 1 we see the heart cry God through Isaiah:

“For Zion's sake, I will not keep silent, for the Jerusalem's sake, I will not remain quiet till her

righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.”

It is the heart cry of God that Israel be restored to a right relationship, experience wonderful salvation, and know the fullness of blessing. God committed Himself to this end.

Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when the nations would see the righteousness of Israel. The day was coming when Israel would be called by a new name. The apostle John says the same thing in the Revelation 3:12:

Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

In Bible times a name represented the character of the individual who bore the name. A new name represented a new character. Those who bore this new name would have a different purpose in life. There are times in Scripture when an individual would have a new name to indicate a new focus or direction in life (see Genesis 32:28). The day was coming when the people of God would be given a new purpose and focus in life. Their hearts would be changed. The righteousness that Isaiah spoke of would be showered on them, and they would become a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand (verse 3).

Isaiah told Israel that the day would come when she would no longer be deserted (verse 4). Instead, Israel

would be called Hephzibah and Beulah. The word *Hephzibah* means “my delight is in her,” and the word *Beulah* means “married.” These words reflected the heart of God for His people. He delighted in them and wanted to enter into a marriage relation with them. His delight was so great that He wanted to give Himself to them forever.

Notice what verse 5 tells us. God promised that just as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so would the Lord their God rejoice over Israel. This sort of love is difficult for us to imagine. It is a love that Israel did not deserve and neither do we. It is also a love we dare not turn our backs on. We do not understand why our Creator would so love us that He would enter such an intimate and personal relationship with us. What is even more amazing is that he *delights* to enter that relationship with us. God delights in you and me. It is one thing to love someone. It is another to delight in them.

In verse 6 Isaiah spoke of watchmen being posted on the walls of Jerusalem. They were to petition the Lord of heaven and cry out to Him, giving Him no rest until He established Jerusalem and made her the praise of the whole earth (verse 7). Is this your heart? Do you have this sort of passion and burden burning in your bones? Does the passion for the glory of God though the salvation and restoration of His people burn so deeply in you that you will not rest until this happens? Perhaps we can become one of these watchmen interceding for His people to be restored to Him.

Isaiah prophesied in verse 8 that never again would God give Israel's grain as food for her enemies. Foreigners would never again take her new wine. When God restored Israel, she would have victory over her enemies

and be able to safely eat of God's blessings as an act of worship (verse 9). Her blessing would not be taken from her and used to feed her enemies. Instead, she would enjoy the fullness of that blessing herself.

The call went out in verse 10 for a people to build up a highway and remove the obstacles so that a pathway would be clear for God's people to return to Israel. They were to raise up banners for the nations to see that God was going to do a wonderful work for Israel. In verse 11 Isaiah reminded his people that their God was coming to them. He was coming to them as their Saviour, and His reward was with Him. The Lord Jesus tells us the same thing in Revelation 22:12:

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

Isaiah prophesied that on that day when the Lord restored His people, the nations would acknowledge that the people of Israel are a holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, those sought after by God (verse 12). The Gentiles would see that Jerusalem was no longer deserted. This would happen because the Lord had a wonderful plan for the people of Israel. The new names they received would be because the Lord delighted in them and chose to marry them and give them His name.

What encouragement we find in this passage. The Messiah would be anointed to minister to His people. He would come to restore them to Himself. He would come to give His people a new name and a new character. He would delight in entering a wonderful and intimate relationship with them and they would be His forever.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the desire of God for joy and praise to fill our hearts?
- If the unbelieving world were to look at you or your church, would they see a clear demonstration of the love and splendour of God? Explain.
- Isaiah tells us in this chapter that those who belonged to God and experienced His work in their lives would move out to rebuild and renew the ancient ruins. To what extent is this happening in your life? What role do you have in renewing and building up the broken church of our day?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to enable you to be a clear demonstration of His power and splendour.
- Ask the Lord to fill your heart with praise and righteousness.
- Ask the Lord to reveal the role that He has for you in the building up of His church.
- Thank the Lord for the way He delights in you and provides all you need.

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RETURN, O LORD

Read Isaiah 63:1-64:12

While chapters 60-62 emphasized the glory of Israel's future restoration among the nations, the prophecies of chapters 63-66 returned to the theme of Israel's need of divine enablement to live righteously. In the last chapter we saw the heart cry of the Lord for the restoration of His people. The Lord declared that He would not be silent until His salvation blazed like a fire in the presence of His people. The Lord would surely accomplish all He promised to the nation of Israel. The prophecies of chapter 63 opened with a description of a mighty warrior conquering Israel's enemies.

In verse 1 this warrior was returning from Bozrah, the capital of Edom. His garments were stained crimson, the colour of blood. He was returning victorious, with the blood of many enemies staining His garments. This warrior was one who spoke in righteousness and was mighty to save. There can be no questioning the identity of this great warrior. He is the servant of Isaiah 61:2 who would bring vengeance on Israel's enemies—the Lord Jesus.

Isaiah questioned the Lord regarding His garments stained red. Isaiah compared these garments to those of one who had been treading the grapes in the winepress (verse 2). The Lord replied that He had worked alone in the winepress. This winepress represented the nations that were being judged. No one assisted Him in His punishment of His enemies, and the victory was bloody.

The Lord reminded the prophet that the day of vengeance was in His heart and that the year of His redemption had come (verse 4). He would freely offer redemption from the judgement of sin, but those who refused would face His awful wrath.

In verse 5 the Lord reminded Isaiah that He would execute salvation and judgement by Himself. The Lord took it on Himself to save the world and to deal with the question of sin and evil once and for all. This task was well beyond any human ability. He went to the cross alone. He paid for your sin and mine on that cross. No one helped him. No one was worthy. The Lord Himself would judge the earth. He would trample down sin and evil in His wrath and judge sinners, pouring their blood on the ground (verse 6).

In the next section of verses (63:7-64:12), Isaiah reviewed the Lord's compassionate care of Israel despite her unfaithfulness. In verse 7 Isaiah cried out in praise and rejoicing because of the tremendous kindness and undeserved mercies of the Lord. God had created Israel and chosen her to live with integrity. The Lord was Her Saviour. The Lord had rescued His people from their affliction, redeemed them, and carried them throughout their history (verse 9).

It is important that we understand that God feels our pain and distress. We are not alone in our suffering. It is an amazing thing that when the Lord Jesus came to this earth, He came as an ordinary human. He experienced every type of temptation, trial, and pain that you and I feel. He knows exactly what we are going through. In wonderful compassion, the Lord stretches out His hand, lifts us up, and carries us through.

Isaiah reminded his listeners in verse 10, however, that despite this wonderful work in their lives, the people of God rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. They fought against God and turned their hearts over to foreign gods. The Lord had to punish them and for a time. Notice, however, how Isaiah recalled the days of Moses when God had fought for His people and not against them (verse 11). He recalled how God's glorious arm of power had divided the Red Sea to save them from the Egyptians. The Lord guided them and gave them rest by His Spirit in order to proclaim His name in the earth (verse 14).

As these individuals looked on their own lives, they lamented the loss of God's presence among them (verse 15). They were not experiencing His power anymore. The reality of His power was only in the stories they heard. Perhaps you can identify with their heart cry. Perhaps you feel that sense of powerlessness in your own life. Can you sense that you too need to see afresh the touch of His power and compassion? The heart cry of the people of God in Isaiah's day is not unlike that of our own.

In verse 16 Isaiah appealed to God as the Father of Israel who would not forget His own children. He alone was Israel's hope. Isaiah recognised that the hearts of

the people had been hardened and that they had wandered from the ways of the Lord. Notice in verse 17 that he asked God why He made them wander and why He hardened their hearts so that they did not revere Him. It appears that Isaiah was blaming the Lord for Israel's spiritual condition.

We need to understand that while God cannot be blamed for sin and rebellion, He will not always keep us from wandering. He gives to us the freedom to choose Him and to live for Him. He does not force us to obey. We alone are to blame for the condition of our spiritual lives. God will allow us to experience the consequences of our choices. He allows us to harden our hearts against Him. He gives us freedom but calls us to seek Him alone.

Isaiah asked the Lord to return to His people. He recognised the inability of the people of Israel to save themselves. This was a prayer of intercession, and Isaiah was passionately asking God to intervene on behalf of his sinful people. Isaiah appealed to God on behalf of His trampled sanctuary to return to His people and rule those who were called by His name (verses 18-19). Notice the results of the freedom God gave His people. They chose to wander and ended up in a situation they could not get out of. Their only hope was to call on God to rescue them from their own rebellion and disobedience. Many people have found themselves in this situation. How we need to praise God that, in His grace, He rescues us from such situations.

Isaiah continued his intercessory prayer in chapter 64. The prophet cried out for Almighty God to reveal His presence to His people. He asked Him to rend the heavens and come down. Isaiah wanted God to burst forth and bring judgement on Israel's foes (64:2). Isaiah

was reminded of the days of old when the Lord did move in awesome power and majesty. In the days of Moses, the Lord revealed His presence on the mountain, which shook and trembled at His approach (Exodus 19:18). Through such awe-inspiring signs and wonders, God demonstrated to the earth that there was no God like Him, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him (verse 4).

In verse 5 Isaiah acknowledged that God's people had turned their backs on Him and wandered from His path. They had rejected Him despite the obvious demonstrations of His power and might. Isaiah asked an important question: "How then can we be saved?" That same question is relevant to us today. There is no salvation apart from God. We dare not turn our backs on Him and His grace. How could Israel be saved if she turned her back on her only Saviour?

As Isaiah looked at the heart of Israel, he realized just how evil it was (verse 6). All of God's people were unclean. Their most righteous acts were like filthy rags. In other words, even the good they did was contaminated by sin and evil. The best they could do still came from evil motives and sinful hearts and was unacceptable to God. Israel was as spiritually lifeless as a dead leaf on a tree, ready to be blown away by the wind.

As Isaiah looked around him, he saw no one who called on the name of the Lord (verse 7). No one really strived to lay hold of God. It was as if the whole society was unconcerned about spiritual matters. God had hidden His face from them. They wasted away because of their sin and rebellion against God.

What hope was there for such a people? How could they be saved? What would happen to them if the Lord did rip open the heavens and descend? Isaiah reminded God in verse 8 that He was their Father. He had created them, and they were the works of His hand. Isaiah cried out to God in verse 9 not to be overly angry with them although they deserved to perish. He pleaded with God not to remember their sins forever but to have compassion on them. He asked God to look down on them as His people.

Instead of judgement, Isaiah asked God to show compassion and mercy (verses 10-12). Through prophetic revelation Isaiah foresaw the coming desolation of Judah and Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the deserted cities. Isaiah pleaded with God not to punish them beyond measure but to show compassion to Israel again. As a people, they were helpless to change. Like the faded leaf in the windstorm, they were being swept away by their sin and rebellion. They could not stop themselves. They had no ability to change their ways. Isaiah knew that the only solution was for the God of his fathers to come and do a mighty work of renewal and restoration in their midst. Isaiah confessed their sin and rebellion. He cried out for God to come and renew His work and refresh them. He called for God to come and deal with the enemies that had devoured them. This ought to be the cry of our own hearts for ourselves and for our society. God alone is the solution for all needs. Oh, that He would come and heal our present society.

For Consideration:

- Can you identify with the people of God in this chapter who were no longer experiencing His wonderful power and joy in their lives? What keeps you from experiencing this today?
- What does this chapter teach us about the ministry of the Lord Jesus on our behalf?
- What does this passage teach us about the spiritual condition of human beings without God?
- Does God give us a free will? What does this chapter teach us about this?
- What will it take for the heart of mankind to be changed? Were signs and wonders enough to change the hearts of God's people in the days of Isaiah?
- What was Isaiah's heart cry in these two chapters? Is this your heart cry? What does this tell us about our need of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord Jesus that when there was no one to rescue us, He came to set us free.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have wandered from Him, despite what He has done for you.
- Ask the Lord Jesus to renew your experience of Him and to heal you of the effects of your own sin in your life.
- Thank the Lord that, despite the hardness of our hearts, He came in compassion to forgive and cleanse us of our sins.

GOOD GRAPES

Read Isaiah 65:1-25

In the last two chapters, Isaiah called out to God to rend the heavens and come down to His people. Isaiah recognized that God's people had turned their hearts away from God and His blessing in their lives. In chapters 65 and 66 the Lord responded to Isaiah's intercessory prayer by repeating His warnings of judgement.

In verse 1 Isaiah prophesied that God would reveal Himself to those who had not been seeking Him and to a nation that had not called on His name. To whom was God referring in this passage? The apostle Paul applied this verse to the Gentiles (Romans 10:20). These people never claimed to know or seek the Lord. Gentiles sought their own gods and served their own idols. They were not interested in the Lord God of Israel. However, God was going to do a wonderful work in the lives of these foreign nations. He was going to reveal Himself to them so they could be saved.

God reminded Israel in verse 2 that all day long He had held out His hands to an obstinate people who walked in sin and rebellion, pursuing their own ways and imaginations. The Israelites had provoked God to His face and were unashamed of their evil deeds. They offered sacrifices to idols in gardens, burned incense on pagan altars of brick, sat among the graves to consult the dead and consumed food forbidden by Mosaic Law (verses 3-4). Despite the terrible evil they were doing, these individuals claimed to be holy. They had the arrogance to feel morally superior to others. Instead of their sacrifices being a pleasant aroma to the Lord, they were an endless irritation to Him (verse 5).

Israel's sins would not go unpunished (verses 6-7). God would deal with these people in His way and in His time. He would not remain silent forever. For the moment, they were getting away with their sin, but this would not last. God would pay them back in full for their evil. They had defiled the mountains and the hills with their terrible pagan practices. The day was coming when the penalty for this would fall into their laps.

In verse 8 Isaiah painted a picture of some grape clusters that still had some good grapes in them. The picture was of God's people. Most were bad, but not all. For the sake of the good grapes, the cluster was not thrown away. We see a similar principle in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. For the sake of ten righteous people, the Lord would have spared the cities (Genesis 18:32). Because He could not find even ten righteous people, both these cities were destroyed. We do not understand the impact we have as believers on our society. Could it be that we are the only thing keeping God from completely destroying our society? Could it be that we are the last preserving influence in our nation?

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would preserve a righteous remnant in Israel (verses 9-10). The region of Sharon would again be pasture for flocks. The Valley of Achor would again be a resting place for their herds and for all who would seek the Lord. These two areas represented the whole land of Israel. This offer of renewal would be extended to all who would seek the Lord. To those who refused Him, however, the terms were very different (verses 11-12). Those who neglected the Lord's holy mountain and temple and turned to paganism (Fortune and Destiny) would be destined for the sword and for slaughter. God had called out to them, but they had not listened. He had given them every chance to repent and return to Him, but they had refused. Because of this, God would make a clear distinction between those who loved and served Him and those who rejected Him.

In verses 13-15, God told Israel that His servants would eat, but those who rejected Him would go hungry. God's servants would drink, but those who abandoned Him would go thirsty. God's servants would rejoice, but those who turned from Him would be put to shame. The individuals who turned their backs on the Lord God would be remembered as a curse on their society. The Lord would put them to death. Those who loved the Lord, however, and served Him would receive a new name. This new name would be a reflection of their new character.

In that day of God's renewal, those who invoked a blessing on the land would do so by the God of truth (verse 16). Whoever took an oath would do so in the name of the Lord God of Israel. The names of the foreign gods would no longer be spoken in the land. The Lord alone would be worshiped. In that day Israel's troubles would be over. The people would not even remember what had happened in the past. God promised to create a

new heaven and a new earth (verse 17). The things of the old earth would no longer be remembered or even come to mind. God's people would rejoice so much in the truth and beauty of the new earth that they would no longer show any interest in the past. Isaiah's use of the term new heavens and a new earth similar to that of the apostle John in Revelation 21:1.

Isaiah called his people to be glad and rejoice forever in what God was going to do (verse 18). The Lord promised to make Jerusalem a delight. He would rejoice over His holy city and take delight in His people. In that city there would be productivity and security. God's people would build houses and live in them. They would plant vineyards and harvest the fruit of those vines. The Lord would give them victory over their enemies. God's people would live long and prosperously in the land and enjoy the fruit of their hands (verse 22). Their labour would not be futile or frustrating, and their children would lead productive lives. Isaiah prophesied that Israel would enjoy an intimate relationship with the Lord. The Lord would answer their prayers before they prayed (verse 24).

In those days nature would not be hostile (verse 25). The wolf and the lamb would feed together. The lion would eat straw like the ox. There would be no more killing. In those days all of creation would be changed, and animals would neither harm nor destroy anything on God's holy mountain. Notice, however, that the serpent would still eat dust. The serpent was symbolic of Satan who, in the Garden of Eden, tempted Eve to sin. Satan's curse would never be reversed.

This prophecy would have been a great encouragement to Israel. The Lord promised to restore and rejoice over Jerusalem and her people. A time would come when the

curse would be reversed and productivity and peace would prevail. This city with its blessings is for those who seek God and His ways. This will be the reward of a holy God who delights in blessing His people. It is something we still look forward to in our day.

For Consideration:

- To what extent do believers have a preserving influence on their society?
- What do we learn about how willing God is to answer prayers? (See verse 24.) What is the hindrance to our prayers being answered?
- What comfort do you receive from the words of Isaiah about the New Jerusalem? What similarities are there here in Isaiah with what John saw in Revelation?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wonderful hope that you have of heaven as a believer.
- Thank the Lord that He desires our good and that He longs to enter an intimate fellowship with us.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live in obedience to Him. Ask Him to show you any areas of disobedience in your life that hinder His blessing.

TREMBLING AT THE WORD

Read Isaiah 66:1-24

What does God seek from us as His creation? The heavens are His throne. They belong to Him. The earth is His footstool, and everything in it belongs to Him as well. What kind of house would you build for an almighty and all-powerful God who owns everything? There is nothing we can give Him that He has not made. Our very existence comes from His hands. What could we ever offer Him that would please and honour Him?

Verse 2 tells us what the Lord seeks. Listen to what He says:

This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

This is what we can give the Lord. This is what delights His heart. He is thrilled to see one who comes before Him in humility with a deep respect and honour for His word. To come before God in humility is to recognise who He is and to fall before Him in respect. To tremble at His word

is to believe it and obey it. This is what the Lord desires more than any other offering. When King Saul offered a sacrifice in disobedience to the word of the Lord, the prophet Samuel said:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams (1 Samuel 15:22).

Saul had to learn that day what the prophet Isaiah was trying to tell his people. God delights in our obedience more than any sacrifice we could ever make.

Because God's people were not living in obedience to His commands, even their legitimate sacrifices were an abomination to Him. The people of Isaiah's day were offering empty ritual without sincerity of heart. All their sacrifices were repulsive to the Lord. They were as repulsive to Him as murder and the same as pagan worship (verse 3). The people had chosen to go their own way instead of the way of the Lord, and He would harshly judge them (verse 4).

In verse 5 the Lord spoke to those who trembled at His word. The context tells us that these individuals were hated by those who had no regard for the Lord's word. Those who feared the Lord were being excluded. They were being persecuted because of their faith. The Lord promised to shame the scoffers. Already a great noise could be heard from the temple (verse 6). This was the sound of the Lord repaying His enemies what they deserved. Notice that the enemies were in the temple. We have already seen that those who mocked the Lord

continued to offer their sacrifices to Him. It was here in the temple that the Lord began His judgement.

In verses 7-14 the mood of the prophecy reverts to hope. For those who honoured God and trembled at His word, there would be real blessing. In contrast to all the sorrow that Israel would suffer because of her sin, her ultimate future was bright. Isaiah pictured Zion giving birth before she had labour pains—blessing without pain. God promised to complete the work He had begun in Zion. In verse 9 He asked His people if He would bring them to the moment of birth and close the womb, not bringing delivery. This would go against God's purposes. Even so, the Lord who began to work in the lives of their fathers would complete the work He began in their lives. He would be faithful to His promises.

Isaiah called his people to rejoice and be glad (verse 10). Though for the moment they mourned over Zion's condition, God had not abandoned her. He would not bring her to the moment of birth and not give delivery. He would complete the work He began in her. There is tremendous encouragement we can take from this verse. Maybe you have a loved one who is wandering from the truth. Maybe you are waiting for the Lord to complete His work in you. God will be faithful to complete what He begins in you and your loved ones. This is cause for great rejoicing.

The day was coming when God's people would nurse and be satisfied in the glory of their nation (verse 11). They would drink deeply from overflowing abundance in Zion. There would be no limit to these blessings of God. The day was coming when the storehouses of heaven would open. God promised to extend peace to Israel like a river (verse 12). The wealth of the nations would come streaming into Israel from afar. Like a little child, she

would be nursed and held on the knee. She would have no worries or concerns. Israel would rest in the abundant provision and protection of the Lord. As a mother lovingly comforts her child, so the Lord would comfort Israel.

In those days, God's people would recognise His supernatural hand in the restoration of Israel and rejoice in the Lord's works. God's servants would flourish like the grass, but His enemies would experience His wrath (verse 14). Isaiah foresaw the chariot of the Lord's judgement coming like a whirlwind in anger, fury and flames of fire. Many would be slain by the Lord in that day (verse 16).

Isaiah showed a real contrast between those who loved the Lord and trembled at His word and those who rejected the Lord. Those who loved the Lord were compared to a little child cared for and nursed at the breast of a loving mother. Those who refused the Lord were a people who would be slaughtered by the fiery sword of God's judgement.

Isaiah spoke in verse 17 to those who had no intention of keeping themselves for the Lord. These were Israelites who offered sacrifices to idols. They went into pagan gardens with those who ate the flesh of pigs, rats, and other abominable things. Isaiah reminded these individuals that they would meet their end. God saw what they were doing and their judgement was coming.

In verse 18 Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would gather all nations and tongues so that they would see His glory. God's purpose was to see the whole world come to Him. Even in the Old Testament days of Isaiah, it was the heart of God to reach out to the whole world with the message of salvation and blessing.

God would give a sign to confirm that this was indeed His heart (verse 19). Perhaps this sign referred to the cross of the Lord Jesus. Isaiah said that some of those who survived would go to the nations to share the message of the glory of God with those who had never heard. These survivors would be a faithful remnant of Israel who would escape persecution of their enemies and the judgement of God against those enemies (see verse 16). In the book of Acts, after a great persecution broke out against those who loved the Lord, believers were scattered to many different parts of the earth where they shared the message of the gospel. Revelation 7:1-8 also speaks of 144,000 from the tribes of Israel who would be set apart during a great tribulation period to be witnesses for the Lord. These messengers would go to the regions of Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians, to Tubal and Greece. These areas are located in the modern day regions of Spain, Africa, Asia Minor, and Greece. These nations would hear of the glory of God. Even the distant islands who had never heard of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would hear.

The Gentiles who accepted the message of the gospel would bring dispersed Israelites back to God's holy mountain on horses, chariots, and wagons (verse 20). As an offering to the Lord, redeemed Gentiles would aid in the return of God's people to their homeland. We know that during the Babylonian captivity, Cyrus of Persia would pay for the return of Israel to her homeland. There may be a deeper sense to this as well. Isaiah may also be saying that the day was coming when the Lord would use Gentiles to reach out to the people of Israel and bring them to faith in the Lord Jesus. God would select some of these Gentiles to be their priests and Levites (see 56:5-7). He would raise up a new generation of priestly servants. God would put His hand on Gentiles and call them

to be His servants in expanding His kingdom. They would minister not only to the far corners of the earth but also to His people.

In verse 22 Isaiah prophesied that Israel would have a place of prominence. The descendants and name of Israel would remain forever before the Lord. These promises to Israel would come to pass as surely as the creation of a new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah also prophesied from one New Moon celebration to another and from one Sabbath to another, all of humanity would come and bow down before the Lord.

The worshippers of the one true God would see the corpses of people who rebelled against the Lord. John speaks of a similar thing in Revelation 16:16; 19:15-17. The sight of these corpses would serve to remind worshippers of the terrible consequences of rebellion against the loving and gracious salvation of the Lord. The souls of those who rebelled against the Lord would be in a place where the worm would not die and where the fire would not be quenched. Unbelievers would be sentenced to an eternal punishment.

Hell is a very real place. Verse 24 tells us that those who love the Lord will live forever in His presence, and those who reject the Lord will live in a place of eternal pain and suffering where the fire of their torment will not diminish. This is a very serious matter. How important it is that we be sure that we are in a right relationship with the Lord God today.

Isaiah opened this chapter by recognizing that those who trembled at the Lord's word were being persecuted and mocked by unbelievers. Isaiah spoke, however, of the tragic destiny of those who rejected the Lord. This was

indeed a very fitting conclusion for his whole book. He challenged his readers to consider where they stood with the Lord. He prophesied of the wonderful hope for those who loved the Lord and trembled at His Word but warned of the terrible danger of rejecting the Lord's great salvation. Make sure you know today where you stand with the Lord.

For Consideration:

- Are those who tremble at the Word of God despised in our day as they were in the days of Isaiah?
- What does this chapter teach us about the missionary heart of God?
- What comfort do you find in this section of Isaiah as you face persecution for your faith?
- What does this chapter teach us about the destiny of those who reject the Lord Jesus?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the wonderful hope He gives us of an eternity in His presence.
- Ask the Lord to give you a deeper respect for His Word and greater heart to honour Him in all you do.
- Take a moment to pray for someone you know who does not know the Lord. Ask the Lord to draw this person into His presence forever.

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