



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Daily Discipleship Guide

Fall 2020 | CSB



...it
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them
of Ja'-cob,
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erit it, and my
e a fold of flocks,

...ch. 66-67;
...on. 36:15-
Prov. 1:24,
...Jer. 7:13;
Zech. 7:7; Matt.
21:34-43;
...Matt.
8:12; Luke 13:28
...See Jer.
29:22; Zech.
8:13
...ver. 9, 22
...ch. 62:2; Acts
11:26
...Ps.
72:17; Jer. 4:2
...ch. 19:18; 45:23;
Deut. 6:13; Ps.
63:11; Zeph. 1:5

Therefore thus saith the Lord God, hold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and ye shall leave your name unto "my chosen: for the Lord God thee, and "call his servants by another name. "That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; because the fables are forgotten, and because the lie is from mine eyes.

...people is enumerated in terms of the conquest of Canaan (Josh. 7:16-26) when some of the plunder from the city of Jericho was his theft, Israel was defeated at the city of Ai. sion of a restored remnant, Achor was a peaceful place. See Hos. 2:15 for a similar use of "Achor" in a positive prophetic context. Since

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U N D E R S T A N D

E X P L O R E

A P P L Y

Isaiah



LifeWay | Adults

JESUS

Seven centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah described Him in detail. Isaiah wrote about one who would be “despised and rejected by men” (Isa. 53:3), “pierced because of our rebellion,” and “crushed because of our iniquities” (v. 5). The one of whom Isaiah prophesied would die not as a martyr but as our substitute, “for the iniquity of us all” (v. 6). In other words, He would suffer the punishment that we deserve for our sins and suffer judgment in our place. He would do so willingly to provide the way of salvation for sinful people.

Jesus was no afterthought of God nor a “Plan B.” God made a plan for our salvation even before the foundation of the world and predicted it clearly through the prophet Isaiah. This salvation, however, is not automatic. Only the one who “calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER

In Acts 8, we find Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian official. As Philip approached the official, he heard the man reading from Isaiah, so Philip asked the official if he understood what he was reading. The official replied that he needed a guide.

Isaiah had told many years before of One who would be pierced and crushed for our sin so that we could be healed by His wounds (Isa. 53:5). The healing would be required because of sin. Isaiah pointed to a coming judgment against the Israelites because of that sin and the salvation God would provide to those who repented. That repentance would not come until after the Israelites were led away as captives. The exile was more than judgment; it was purposeful discipline designed to help people understand their need for God. That realization would lead to repentance and a restored relationship with God.

The Book of Isaiah is filled with insights about the nature of God and our relationship with Him. Part of this relationship includes the promise of God reconciling His people to Himself. The message of Isaiah continues to be echoed today. We are sinners facing sure judgment. The sovereign God disciplines us with a view toward repentance and relationship with Him through faith in His Son.

As we study the Book of Isaiah, we pray that each of us will discover the truth found by the Ethiopian official: we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness which is found only through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.

Humbly,

Dwayne McCrary



BIBLE READING PLAN

SEPTEMBER

- ☐ 1. Isaiah 1:1-15
- ☐ 2. Isaiah 1:16-31
- ☐ 3. Isaiah 2:1-11
- ☐ 4. Isaiah 2:12-22
- ☐ 5. Isaiah 3:1-15
- ☐ 6. Isaiah 3:16-26
- ☐ 7. Isaiah 4:1-5:7
- ☐ 8. Isaiah 5:8-30
- ☐ 9. Isaiah 6:1-13
- ☐ 10. Isaiah 7:1-19
- ☐ 11. Isaiah 7:20-8:10
- ☐ 12. Isaiah 8:11-22
- ☐ 13. Isaiah 9:1-21
- ☐ 14. Isaiah 10:1-19
- ☐ 15. Isaiah 10:20-34
- ☐ 16. Isaiah 11:1-16
- ☐ 17. Isaiah 12:1-6
- ☐ 18. Isaiah 13:1-22
- ☐ 19. Isaiah 14:1-23
- ☐ 20. Isaiah 14:24-32
- ☐ 21. Isaiah 15:1-9
- ☐ 22. Isaiah 16:1-14
- ☐ 23. Isaiah 17:1-14
- ☐ 24. Isaiah 18:1-7
- ☐ 25. Isaiah 19:1-15
- ☐ 26. Isaiah 19:16-20:6
- ☐ 27. Isaiah 21:1-17
- ☐ 28. Isaiah 22:1-14
- ☐ 29. Isaiah 22:15-25
- ☐ 30. Isaiah 23:1-18

OCTOBER

- ☐ 1. Isaiah 24:1-15
- ☐ 2. Isaiah 24:16-23
- ☐ 3. Isaiah 25:1-12
- ☐ 4. Isaiah 26:1-13
- ☐ 5. Isaiah 26:14-21
- ☐ 6. Isaiah 27:1-13
- ☐ 7. Isaiah 28:1-13
- ☐ 8. Isaiah 28:14-29
- ☐ 9. Isaiah 29:1-14
- ☐ 10. Isaiah 29:15-24
- ☐ 11. Isaiah 30:1-17
- ☐ 12. Isaiah 30:18-33
- ☐ 13. Isaiah 31:1-9
- ☐ 14. Isaiah 32:1-20
- ☐ 15. Isaiah 33:1-16
- ☐ 16. Isaiah 33:17-24
- ☐ 17. Isaiah 34:1-17
- ☐ 18. Isaiah 35:1-10
- ☐ 19. Isaiah 36:1-22
- ☐ 20. Isaiah 37:1-20
- ☐ 21. Isaiah 37:21-38
- ☐ 22. Isaiah 38:1-14
- ☐ 23. Isaiah 38:15-22
- ☐ 24. Isaiah 39:1-8
- ☐ 25. Isaiah 40:1-17
- ☐ 26. Isaiah 40:18-31
- ☐ 27. Isaiah 41:1-10
- ☐ 28. Isaiah 41:11-29
- ☐ 29. Isaiah 42:1-13
- ☐ 30. Isaiah 42:14-25
- ☐ 31. Isaiah 43:1-13

NOVEMBER

- ☐ 1. Isaiah 43:14-28
- ☐ 2. Isaiah 44:1-20
- ☐ 3. Isaiah 44:21-28
- ☐ 4. Isaiah 45:1-13
- ☐ 5. Isaiah 45:14-25
- ☐ 6. Isaiah 46:1-13
- ☐ 7. Isaiah 47:1-15
- ☐ 8. Isaiah 48:1-22
- ☐ 9. Isaiah 49:1-13
- ☐ 10. Isaiah 49:14-26
- ☐ 11. Isaiah 50:1-11
- ☐ 12. Isaiah 51:1-11
- ☐ 13. Isaiah 51:12-23
- ☐ 14. Isaiah 52:1-15
- ☐ 15. Isaiah 53:1-12
- ☐ 16. Isaiah 54:1-17
- ☐ 17. Isaiah 55:1-13
- ☐ 18. Isaiah 56:1-12
- ☐ 19. Isaiah 57:1-21
- ☐ 20. Isaiah 58:1-14
- ☐ 21. Isaiah 59:1-21
- ☐ 22. Isaiah 60:1-22
- ☐ 23. Isaiah 61:1-11
- ☐ 24. Isaiah 62:1-12
- ☐ 25. Isaiah 63:1-19
- ☐ 26. Isaiah 64:1-12
- ☐ 27. Isaiah 65:1-16
- ☐ 28. Isaiah 65:17-25
- ☐ 29. Isaiah 66:1-13
- ☐ 30. Isaiah 66:14-24

MEMORY VERSES

Session 1:

“‘Come, let us settle this,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool.’” — Isaiah 1:18

Session 2:

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me.” — Isaiah 6:8

Session 3:

“Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.”
— Isaiah 7:14

Session 4:

“The Lord of Armies has sworn: As I have purposed, so it will be; as I have planned it, so it will happen.” — Isaiah 14:24

Session 5:

“He will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face and remove his people’s disgrace from the whole earth, for the Lord has spoken.”
— Isaiah 25:8

Session 6:

“Therefore the Lord is waiting to show you mercy, and is rising up to show you compassion, for the Lord is a just God. All who wait patiently for him are happy.”
— Isaiah 30:18

Session 7:

“I will defend this city and rescue it for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.”
— Isaiah 37:35

Session 8:

“But those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.”
— Isaiah 40:31

Session 9:

“I will be the same until your old age, and I will bear you up when you turn gray. I have made you, and I will carry you; I will bear and rescue you.” — Isaiah 46:4

Session 10:

“Shout for joy, you heavens! Earth, rejoice! Mountains break into joyful shouts! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.”
— Isaiah 49:13

Session 11:

“But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds.”
— Isaiah 53:5

Session 12:

“The Lord will always lead you, satisfy you in a parched land, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden and like a spring whose water never runs dry.” — Isaiah 58:11

Session 13:

“For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind.”
— Isaiah 65:17

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

Isaiah, whose name means, “the Lord saves,” lived and ministered in Jerusalem from about 740–700 BC. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah’s father, Amoz, was the brother of King Amaziah, who ruled Judah from 821–767 BC. If so, the prophet would have been King Uzziah’s cousin. New Testament writers attribute the authorship of the Book of Isaiah to one person: Isaiah. (See John 12:37-41.)

Some modern scholars, however, have argued there were at least two writers. These scholars appeal to differences in style and emphasis between chapters 1–39 and 40–60, along with the varying perspectives from both the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods. Much of their issue with an eighth century prophet is their presupposition that predictive prophecy is impossible. They believe it impossible for an eighth-century prophet to predict the rise and fall of Babylon or to know the name of Cyrus over one hundred and fifty years before he lived. However, a major theme of Isaiah is God’s ability to know the future, reveal it through His prophets, and bring it to pass.

Isaiah’s public ministry occurred during the expansion of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians threatened Israel and Syria, so these kingdoms organized a coalition to stand against Assyria. When they tried to enlist Judah to join the coalition, Judah refused. Therefore, Israel and Syria invaded Judah. Upon Judah’s appeal for help, the Assyrians conquered Syria and subjugated

Israel. When Sennacherib became king of Assyria, Hezekiah of Judah withheld tribute to Assyria. Sennacherib invaded Judah, but in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord Himself defeated the invaders. Nevertheless, Hezekiah’s pride led to an ominous prophecy that dominates the second part of the book: the Babylonian invasion and exile. However, Isaiah also foretold Babylon’s defeat and Judah’s return home.

The themes of the Book of Isaiah include:

- God is the holy one of Israel, and Israel is His holy people who worship in Jerusalem, God’s holy city.
- God is incomparable; no one is like Him.
- The Servant of the Lord will bring salvation to Israel and the nations. He will establish justice, righteousness, and peace.
- The trustworthiness of God and the unreliability of all others;
- The demise of the wicked but hope and deliverance for the faithful; Isaiah’s message warns people of God’s judgment and exhorts them to trust in His salvation.

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

- I.** Rebuke and Promise from the Lord (1:1–6:13)
- II.** The Promise of Immanuel (7:1–12:6)
- III.** Coming Judgment upon the Nations (13:1–23:18)
- IV.** First Cycle of General Judgment and Promise (24:1–27:13)
- V.** Woes upon the Unbelievers of Israel (28:1–33:24)
- VI.** Second Cycle of General Judgment and Promise (34:1–39:8)
- VII.** The Greatness of God (40:1–48:22)
- VIII.** Peace Brought by the Servant-Messiah (49:1–57:21)
- IX.** The Program of Peace (58:1–66:24)



ON THE COVER

Miniature column base in the form of a human-headed winged animal, probably a part of a piece of furniture; Assyrian, 7th century BC, from Nineveh. The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of winged, angelic beings (seraphim) attending God's throne and offering praises to Him (Isa. 6:2).

USING THE **DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE**


Follower. Adherent. Loyalist. Attached. Allegiant. Zealous. Disciple. Jesus' call is the same to all people: to follow Him as a disciple. He expects more than a courteous nod. He deserves more than intellectual agreement. He calls us to be disciples—growing disciples. How do we do that?

In Brad Waggoner's *Shape of Faith to Come* (2008), he identified the discipline of “daily Bible engagement” as the number-one predictor of a person's spiritual growth. *Daily* implies a discipline much like exercising, brushing teeth, or eating a certain number of calories EVERY day. Should we be any different when it comes to our spiritual training? The focus is the *Bible*, God's Word. There is nothing wrong with knowing the thoughts of great philosophers, leaders, or theologians, but they must not replace God's Word. *Engagement* implies participating in the act of reading, studying, and reflecting. Engagement is active, requiring us to do something.

Your *Daily Discipleship Guide* is full of tools to help you grow as a disciple. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

- Use this resource when studying with a group. The first five pages of each session help the group leader introduce a Bible passage and move you toward acting on the truths discovered.
- Use the **Daily Exploration** pages to go deeper into God's Word, building on your group's study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.
- Use the **Talk It Out** section at the end of each session to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals (an accountability group). Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study.
- Use the resource every week even when you are unable to attend the group's Bible study. Missing a group Bible study does not excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word. Use the Daily Discipleship Guide to move forward in your spiritual growth.

Want this resource on your phone or tablet for when you are on the go? Purchase an eBook in the *Explore the Bible APP* (available through GooglePlay and the iTunes Store) or at LifeWay.com.



Getting the most from Talk It Out

Talk It Out, found at the end of each session, supports groups of three or four people who come together weekly to encourage, share, build up, and sharpen each other. While other issues may be addressed, the Talk It Out section provides a few directed questions based on the previous group experience and daily Bible engagement suggestions to start the weekly conversation.

These groups are made up of three to four people...

- Participants should be of the same gender.
- These groups should be smaller on purpose.
- These groups can meet at almost any location.
- These groups can easily accommodate each other's schedules.

...Who meet weekly...

- Life happens weekly, so meeting weekly is important.
- There is nothing like sitting across from friends over coffee, a meal, or dessert.
- In some cases, your smaller group may need to meet using technology that allows for video conferencing.
- You may find it best to meet face-to-face every other week or once a month and use virtual tools the other weeks.

...To hold each other accountable and encourage each other in their spiritual growth.

- Review the questions in Talk It Out.
- You may focus on one question more than others.
- Include time to pray for each other.

God Confronts

God confronts His people about the consequences of their actions.

ISAIAH 1:10-20



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... ace and acted on behalf of us all, o
... riminal head of the race and we were so
... 5:13-14 These verses support the second
... for verse 12 [see note there]. Sin "reign
... manity before the giving of the law eve
... sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's
... deliberate act that plunged the human
... and spiritual death. All humans, incl
... ants and young children who are incap
... and wrong and thus are not deliberate
... death's domain. All people now are b
... (Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin had this broad
... was to come, and represented all of hur
... would do on the cross.
... 5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
... but drastically different effect. One of
... manity into ruin, but God gave the gift t
... cation in spite of our many sins. What t



When have you ever taken a relationship for granted? How did it affect the relationship? Were you able to do anything to get the relationship back on track?

Paying bills, going to the grocery store, getting the car serviced—our days are filled with mundane tasks that we carry out on automatic pilot without much thought. Sometimes, church and devotions fall into a repetitive rut. Even relationships can become stale and fade into the background of routine. As a result, the failure of a relationship can catch us off guard.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah 1:1–4:6 lays the groundwork for Isaiah's entire message. Here, Isaiah contrasted the sin and rebellion of Judah in his day to their future of blessedness and holiness in the last days. After briefly mentioning the kings who reigned during his ministry, Isaiah described Judah's sinful ways like a prosecuting attorney with overwhelming evidence. We see a picture of a people who had abandoned God. Though God had raised them, provided for them, and cared for them in every way as a loving father would his children, with ingratitude they rebelled against Him (Isa. 1:2). They were worse than oxen or donkeys who at least know who feeds them (1:3).

God was using loving discipline to draw His people back to Himself, yet they stubbornly refused to return (1:5-9). Instead of trusting in the Lord, the people of Judah placed their trust in material things, military heroes, renowned leaders, and spiritual gurus. Therefore, God would remove their false sources of security so they might recognize their futility (3:1-3). Young and old, male and female, all would bear the consequences of their arrogant sin (3:5-26).

Such is the case with us. God never abandons His children but lovingly confronts us and, if need be, disciplines us so we will return to Him. Whatever God does to bring us to Himself is an act of loving kindness, no matter how difficult His discipline may seem.

The good news is that God's announcement of judgment was not His only message. Even though His people's present situation was dreadful, their future was bright. God was going to once again establish His temple, people from every nation would stream to it to worship the Lord and receive His instruction, and there would be peace (2:1-4). On that day, the Branch of the LORD, Jesus Christ, will be beautiful and glorious among them, the people of God will be called holy, and their names will be written in the book of life because the Lord has washed away their sin (4:1-6).

ISAIAH 1:10-20

10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of **Sodom** **A**! Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah! **11** “What are all your sacrifices to me?” asks the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed cattle; I have no desire for the blood of bulls, lambs, or male goats. **12** When you come to appear before me, who requires this from you—this trampling of my courts? **13** Stop bringing useless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of solemn assemblies—I cannot stand iniquity with a festival. **14** I hate your New Moons and prescribed festivals. They have become a **burden** **B** to me; I am tired of putting up with them. **15** When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. **16** “Wash yourselves. **Cleanse** **C** yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil. **17** **Learn** **D** to do what is good. **Pursue** **E** justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow’s cause. **18** “Come, let us settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are crimson red, they will be like wool. **19** If you are **willing** **F** and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. **20** But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Passage Outline

Empty Rituals
(Isa. 1:10-15)

True Followers
(Isa. 1:16-17)

Repentance Required
(Isa. 1:18-20)

Key Words

A. Isaiah compared Judah and Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities God had destroyed for their iniquity (Gen. 19:24; Ezek. 16:49-50).

B. In Deuteronomy 1:12 Moses stated, “How can I bear your troubles, burdens, and disputes by myself?”

C. To wash oneself from sin (Isa. 4:4).

D. To teach in the sense of training. In Hosea 10:11, Ephraim was trained like a heifer by a yoke and goad.

E. The children of Israel went to Moses to “seek” (ESV, NIV, NLT) the Lord’s understanding (Ex. 18:15).

F. Obedience requires our “consent” (NASB). David wasn’t willing to go with Absalom (2 Sam. 13:25).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah began with a scathing indictment in verse 10. By saying, *you rulers of Sodom and you people of Gomorrah*, Isaiah was communicating how utterly depraved Judah's ways had been and how serious the consequences of such sin were. Verse 9 reveals that were it not for the Lord's mercy, Judah might have been completely wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Gen. 19:23-25.) The Lord confronted His people about their sacrifices. He was quite clear about what He thought of their sacrifices: They meant nothing to Him; they added nothing to Him; and they did nothing for Him. When a person comes before the Lord with an insincere heart and selfish motives, it is unacceptable "worship" to God. Acceptable worship involves approaching the Lord on His terms. The Lord emphatically commanded the people to stop bringing their offerings to the temple because they were meaningless and detestable to Him.

BIBLE SKILL: Compare related passages. Compare Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What reasons are given for celebrating the Sabbath in these verses? How are the reasons different and how are they the same? What do these verses reveal about God's desires? How does this compare to what we find in Isaiah 1?

What are causes and ways believers today may fall into a pattern of unacceptable worship of the Lord? What warnings should we draw from Judah's mistakes?

Taken together, the three sets of commands signify authentic repentance and true devotion to the Lord. The washing and cleansing of themselves called for sincere repentance so that there no longer would be a disconnect between their hearts and their acts of worship. The authenticity of their repentance would be demonstrated by their actions: turn away from their sinful ways, learn what God's will is, and do it.

If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation, then why is it necessary for believers to be faithfully obedient to God?

KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God (Isa 55:7).

God invited His sinful people to come to Him in repentance and faith. He promised to cleanse them of all their sin. The Lord confronted His people with a choice: either repent, obey, and enjoy God's blessing, or *refuse and rebel* and suffer the consequences.

How does God take the initiative today to bring people into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Relying on religious rituals alone falls short when approaching the holy God.
- God expects His followers to demonstrate righteousness and justice.
- God offers forgiveness to those who repent.

Ask God to examine your heart and to reveal any sin in your life that might be hindering your worship of Him. What actions do you need to take in response to what God shows you?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being completed, how would you rate how well you do the nine commands found in verses 16 and 17? What do you need to do to more completely follow these commands?

Discuss as a group the difference it should make to believers as they go through their daily routine to remember that our sins are forgiven and have been made “white as snow.” Begin to memorize Isaiah 1:18.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: We must listen to God's instructions.

Read Isaiah 1:10, underlining the words hear and listen.

The words *hear* and *listen* both mean “hear and obey.” So the message is straightforward. The people needed to hear and obey the Word of God. Verse 10 contains several personal elements.

LORD, often denoted as Yahweh from Hebrew, is God’s personal, covenantal name. Israel was Yahweh’s treasured possession and holy nation, devoted for God’s personal mission of blessing all other nations. God chose Israel to be a conduit of blessing for every people group on the earth.

The expression *our God* emphasizes that while the other nations had a multiplicity of gods, Yahweh was Israel’s God, the one and only God.

The word *instruction* is the Hebrew word *tora*, and even though it is authoritative, it has the idea of affectionate personal instruction, such as what a parent would share with a son or daughter.

**Why do you think God started this passage with the firm instruction to listen?
In what areas of your life is God calling you to listen and heed His Word?**

Day 2: Insincere sacrifices are offensive to God.

Read Isaiah 1:11-12, noting God’s frustration with their sacrifices.

Sacrifices were meant to be outward expressions of true commitment to the Lord. God knows what is in the heart of every person, and He knows when a sacrifice is offered insincerely. Outward formality cannot hide degenerate hearts. This verse is reminiscent of 1 Samuel 15:22, “Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.”

The *fat of well-fed cattle* represents offering to God one’s best, and the *blood* represents devotion to God. But it was all a sham. The people were blemished with sin and absent of true devotion to God. It would be like offering a gift to a spouse who knows the one giving the gift is cheating on him or her. Instead of being a blessing, the gift would be offensive because of the infidelity. Similarly, their sacrifices were offensive to God.

Why didn’t God take pleasure in the Israelites’ sacrifices? How might our sacrifices be offensive to God?

Day 3: True worship is required for God's favor.

Read Isaiah 1:13-15, considering how their festivals may have become irreverent.

The New Moons festival consecrated each new month to the Lord by expressing to Him repentance, devotion, and fellowship. The institution of the *Sabbath* was so important that it was included as the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11). Israel was required to cease from all work and rest because the Lord rested on the seventh day of creation. The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant the Lord made with Israel (Ex. 31:12) and reminded the people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Keeping the Sabbath was meant to provide a designated, focused time to worship the Lord, as David demonstrated in Psalm 92.

Other prescribed festivals included Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. God instituted these holy days as times for Israel to celebrate God's wondrous acts and blessings upon them and to express their gratitude, love, and devotion to Him. Instead, they turned them into something repulsive. The people worshiped the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. (See Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8.)

Consequently, when the people *spread out their hands in prayer*, God would *refuse to look* at them. When the Lord shines His face upon His people and looks at them, it is a way of expressing His favor. To refuse to look at them was His way of saying He was withdrawing His blessing from them.

**What are ways you may fall into a pattern of unacceptable worship of the Lord?
What warnings should you draw from Judah's mistakes?**

Day 4: We demonstrate our love of God through faithful obedience.

Read Isaiah 1:16-17, numbering the nine commands listed.

The Lord gave nine commands for the people to correct their ways and demonstrate they were true followers of God. These commands were not given to secure salvation but to demonstrate the authenticity of their salvation. The first three deal with the inward removal of sin. The second three address outward devotion to Yahweh. The last three pertain to relationships with others, showing how true repentance would affect how they related to others. Instead of being the oppressors, they would oppose oppressors. Also, they would champion the cause of those who could not care for themselves, such as *the fatherless* and *widows*.

**If being devoted to God in faithful obedience does not earn our salvation,
then why is it necessary for you to be faithfully obedient to God?**

Day 5: God calls for sincere repentance.

Read Isaiah 1:18-20, identifying God's request.

The Lord takes no pleasure in disciplining His children. It is necessary for their correction, but He would rather enjoy them in sweet fellowship. If their sins are *scarlet*, they will be made *white*, non-existent. Here, the Lord made clear that He alone can cleanse us of sin. When He calls us to wash and cleanse ourselves, that washing and cleansing can happen only when we come to Him in sincere repentance (v. 16).

The Lord Jesus Christ graciously and mercifully calls to us: Whosoever will, come to Me, and I forgive you, cleanse you, and give you abundant, eternal life. Reject Me and spend eternity separated from Me. It is a choice every person must make. The Lord offers forgiveness and cleansing to all who repent—to the lost who needs salvation and to believers who seek restored fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:9).

How does God take the initiative to bring you into a relationship with Him? How does His approach today compare with the approach found in Isaiah 1?

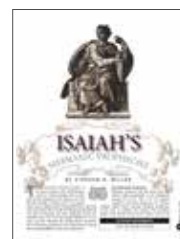
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 1, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the words *worthless, burdensome, and meaningless*? What thoughts come to mind when you hear these words as descriptors of worship?

When have you seen godly actions being well displayed in a person's life or in a church?

Through Isaiah God foretold the outcome of obedience and of rebellion. How can we correlate these outcomes to our daily choices?



For additional context, read “Isaiah’s Messianic Prophecies,” an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Fall 2020 Explore the Bible Leader Pack.

God Sends

God calls His people to recognize and declare His sovereign purposes.

ISAIAH 6:1-13



Reconciled to God,
salvation be now

his major discussion of
a complex, compressed,
showed that grace in justifi-
Christ much more than sin
Adam.

and entails either that Adam was
ace and acted on behalf of us all, o
riminal head of the race and we were so

5:13-14 These verses support the second
for verse 12 (see note there). Sin "reigns"
mankind before the giving of the law ever
sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's
deliberate act that plunged the human
and spiritual death. All humans, includ-
infants and young children who are incap-
and wrong and thus are not deliberate
death's domain. All people now are b
(Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin had this broad
was a type (Gk *typos*) or prefiguration of
was to come, and represented all of hum-
would do on the cross.

5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
but drastically different effect. One of
mankind into ruin, but God gave the gift of
culation in spite of our many sins. What

20

Why does God call and then use believers to carry out His purposes?

Each branch of the U.S. military has some form of saying, “Never volunteer for anything.” However, when Isaiah had an encounter with the King, the Lord of the Armies, he quickly volunteered to take on the mission God had for him. That’s what happens when a person experiences what Isaiah did. The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision, and in this vision Isaiah recognized his sin and need for a Savior. The Lord cleansed him of his sin and then called him to service. When the Lord reveals Himself to us and saves us from our sin, the proper and appropriate response is Isaiah’s response, “Here I am. Send me.”

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah concluded his introduction of the book with a song of indictment against the residents of Jerusalem and all the people of Judah, followed by six “woes” against these unfaithful people. The song is about Isaiah’s “loved one” who had a vineyard. This loved one worked hard to do everything he could to produce a productive vineyard. He expected a harvest of good grapes, but instead he got worthless grapes. Then, the Lord revealed He is the owner and vinedresser of the vineyard. He said He would remove everything He built as a protection for His vineyard and it would be laid waste as the Lord causes it to cease raining on it. The meaning of the song is the Lord’s vineyard in which He delighted is the people of Israel and Judah. He expected from them justice and righteousness, but all He saw was injustice, bloodshed, and cries of despair. Accordingly, these wicked people can expect divine judgment (Isa. 5:1-7).

Then Isaiah marshaled six woes against these unfaithful people. The word woe was spoken in times of mourning with the death of a loved one, expressing grief and bereavement. When the Lord’s prophets used this expression it was the foretelling of extreme divine judgment. Instead of being like the death angel of the first Passover in Egypt who passed them by, this time death was knocking at their door with no escape. The judgment of God is inevitable.

The sins that brought on these woes summarize God’s charges against His people: greed and socioeconomic oppression, careless carousing, spiritual blindness, the exploitation of others in the justice system, the perversion of morality, and the arrogance of thinking they are wiser than the Lord. Consequently, the Lord in His judgment would turn their sins back upon them (5:6-30).

ISAIAH 6:1-13

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. **2 Seraphim** **A** were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they **covered their faces** **B**, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. **3** And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the **LORD of Armies** **C**; his glory fills the whole earth. **4** The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke. **5** Then I said: **Woe is me for I am ruined** **D** because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen **the King** **E**, the LORD of Armies. **6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. **7** He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for. **8** Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me. **9** And he replied: Go! **Say to these people** **F**: Keep listening, but do not understand; keep looking, but do not perceive. **10** Make the minds of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed. **11** Then I said, "Until when, Lord?" And he replied: Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants, houses are without people, the land is ruined and desolate, **12** and the LORD drives the people far away, leaving great emptiness in the land. **13** Though a tenth will remain in the land, it will be burned again. Like the terebinth or the oak that leaves a stump when felled, the holy seed is the stump.

Passage Outline

God's Glory
(Isa. 6:1-4)

God's Forgiveness
(Isa. 6:5-7)

God's Call
(Isa. 6:8-10)

God's Persistence
(Isa. 6:11-13)

Key Words

- A. Literally "the burning ones," Isaiah envisioned the seraphim as agents of God who prepared him to proclaim the Lord's message to Judah.
- B. God's holiness can't be looked upon by His creation.
- C. This military phrase signifies God is actively warring against sin.
- D. As sinful humankind stands before Holy God, our sin becomes more evident (Gen. 3:7-8; Rom. 3:23).
- E. The King is God. Yet, it's unthinkable to see God (Gen. 32:30; Ex. 19:21; 33:20; Judg. 13:22).
- F. They had ears and eyes that didn't seem to work—for they continuously disregarded God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah described the scene of heaven revealed to him in a vision while in the temple. God's throne was encircled by angels declaring His holiness, a sound that shook the foundation of the temple.

DID YOU KNOW?: Isaiah 6 is the only place in the Bible that mentions the seraphim. Of all the angelic beings mentioned in the Bible, only the seraphim and cherubim (Ezek. 1:4-28) are described as having wings.

What should we learn about God in Isaiah's vision of God on His throne? How should God's holiness affect how we think about God and how we live for Him?

Isaiah's first response was, *Woe is me for I am ruined*. In other words, "I am about to die!" What is sure is that at the sight of God's throne, Isaiah became aware of his sin and unworthiness to be in the presence of God. Before Isaiah could faithfully serve the Lord by prophesying to a people who were unclean, he himself needed to be clean. So, no doubt at the bidding of the Lord, one of the seraphim took a glowing coal from the altar with tongs and touched Isaiah's lips as a way of cleansing Isaiah of his sin.

How should Isaiah's vision of God on His throne affect how we think about the holiness of God? What can we learn from Isaiah about God and ourselves when we stand before God to worship Him?

KEY DOCTRINE: Man Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God (Eph. 2:4).

Finally, God spoke and posed a question, asking who was willing to go on mission on His behalf. Isaiah's response was short and to the point: *Here I am. Send me*. He experienced the merciful and gracious cleansing of God from the penalty of his sin, which is death. In addition, because the Lord had forgiven him, Isaiah had a right standing before God. Consequently, Isaiah's quick reply was the only logical and appropriate one. God told Isaiah what his message would be, and He revealed to Isaiah what would result from his message.

Why is it important for believers who proclaim God's message to recognize that most who hear the message will not respond positively to it?

Isaiah asked the Lord how long he was to deliver God's message to people who were unwilling to repent. God directed Isaiah to deliver the message until His judgment was complete. God explained that He was going to use invaders to lay waste to Judah and take the survivors into foreign captivity. But God did not leave Isaiah hopeless; He pointed to a remnant who would return to God.

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is holy and chooses to reveal His glory to people.
- All humans are in need of God's forgiveness for sin.
- God invites willing followers to deliver His message to others.
- God's messengers are to be faithful throughout their lives regardless of the response.

God revealed His holiness to Isaiah in a vision. What does it mean to say God is holy, and what are various ways the Lord reveals He is holy?

As a group, read aloud Isaiah 6:8. Discuss how Isaiah's response to God's call upon his life is the logical and appropriate response for every believer. What might be said about a person who responds negatively to such a calling?

Why is it so important for believers to be faithful throughout their lives to God's commission to serve Him even when it can be difficult to do so?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah.

Read Isaiah 6:1-4, contemplating Isaiah's vision of God.

Isaiah's vision began with seeing the Lord. No one has seen God, yet the Lord graciously revealed Himself to Isaiah for the sake of His people. Isaiah saw the splendor of His majesty seated on a high and lofty throne, asserting Yahweh's power and authority over all creation. The Lord's robe filled the temple as His glory fills all the earth.

The seraphim, literally "the burning ones," are angelic beings who are heavenly attendants to the Lord. Isaiah witnessed them flying above the Lord with their three sets of wings, with one set covering their faces, one set covering their feet, and with one set they flew. Fire is often associated with the presence and glory of God. In reverence, submission, and awe for Yahweh, and because of the brilliance of His glory, these fiery heavenly beings covered themselves.

The sound of the seraphim calling out to one another shook the foundations of the doorways. The temple was filled with smoke that may have been from the altar in the temple. Smoke or a cloud is often associated with the presence of God and probably shielded Isaiah from seeing any more than his mortal eyes were able to bear.

What did you learn about God in Isaiah's vision of Him on His throne? How does God's holiness affect how you think about God and how you live for Him?

Day 2: We are unworthy of being in the presence of God.

Read Isaiah 6:5, considering Isaiah's response to seeing God.

Isaiah believed he was doomed to die—*ruined*. Perhaps God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33:20 flashed in his mind, "humans cannot see me and live." Isaiah gave three reasons for his response. The first reason is because he was overcome with the consciousness of his own sin and recognized he was unworthy to stand in God's presence. Isaiah knew he was completely unclean before God. He was unable to join the seraphim in praising God because his lips were unclean. The second reason for his response was because the nation of Judah was a sinful people too. In the middle of this overwhelming experience, Isaiah thought not only about his own situation but that of his people. The third reason for Isaiah's response was because he saw Almighty God arrayed in splendor and glory.

Describe an instance, situation, or circumstance in which God revealed His glory to you.

Day 3: God alone removes our iniquities.

Read Isaiah 6:6-7, underlining verse 7.

God sometimes used fire to purify something. (See Num. 31:22-23.) The purifying burning coal from the altar implies an acceptable sacrifice was made for Isaiah's forgiveness of sin and his reconciliation to God. Isaiah did nothing for himself. The removal of his iniquity and the atonement for Isaiah's sin was initiated and completed by the Lord. The removal of his sin meant that God's sense of justice was satisfied and Isaiah could now stand before God without fear. This is what the expression, *your sin is atoned for* meant. Isaiah's experience anticipated what the people of Judah needed done for their own iniquities to become the holy and blessed people God promised they would become in chapters 1-5. All of these actions anticipate the Lord Jesus Christ who is the one and only atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin.

What can you learn from Isaiah about God and yourself when you stand before God to worship Him?

Day 4: Most will not respond to His message.

Read Isaiah 6:8-10, understanding the warning given.

Verse 9 contains the oddest message one could imagine God giving to His prophet. It seems as if God didn't want them to understand the message. However, the mention of *minds, ears, and eyes* taken together is a poetic way of saying the people were so spiritually blind and deaf that when Isaiah preached to them, what he said would be incomprehensible to them. In fact, Isaiah would speak with such simplicity that the people would ridicule him for it (Isa. 28:9-10). The only way they could understand was to have a change of heart. Their hearts were hardened in rebellion against God, and they would become even more hardened as they heard and rejected God's Word through His prophet. The Lord did not commission Isaiah for the purpose of confusing the people; God called Isaiah to clearly proclaim His message while realizing most would reject it. Therefore, they would be without excuse when God's judgment fell on them because through Isaiah the Lord was giving them one more opportunity to *turn back, and be healed*.

Why is it important for believers who proclaim God's message to recognize that most who hear the message will not respond positively to it?

Day 5: God's mercy and grace will shine.

Read Isaiah 6:11-13, noting God's plans.

With graphic language, the Lord painted a picture of *cities that lie in ruins without inhabitants* and land that is *ruined and desolate*, describing what He was going to cause to happen to Judah. Jeremiah later prophesied that this exile would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Ezekiel prophesied that during that time God would purify His people (Ezek. 36:25). But God did not leave Isaiah hopeless; He pointed to a remnant who would return to God. A *tenth* of them would survive even though they too would suffer. The purifying burning would continue until only a *stump*, a *holy seed* would survive. Yet this holy seed was what would survive to spring forth as the holy and blessed people of God. Even though judgment must fall upon the wicked people of Judah because of God's justice, His mercy and grace would shine through as He would never completely eradicate His promise of salvation that would ultimately come through the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the first fruit of this holy seed promised to Abraham. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:22-23.)

What do these verses teach you about God's character?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 6, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How does Isaiah's vision give us a sense of God's greatness? His holiness? His power?

What's the correlation between self-evaluation and forgiveness? Explain.

How do we hear God's voice today?



For additional context, read "The Life and Times of Uzziah," available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay. com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God's Promises

Since God is sovereign, His people can trust His promises.

ISAIAH 7:7-17



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... made sinners, so by the
... many be made righteous

... and entails either that Adam was
... ace and acted on behalf of us all, o
... riminal head of the race and we were so

5:13-14 These verses support the second
for verse 12 (see note there). Sin "reign
manity before the giving of the law eve
sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's
deliberate act that plunged the human
and spiritual death. All humans, incl
lants and young children who are incap
and wrong and thus are not deliberate
death's domain. All people now are b
(Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin had this broad
was a type (Gk *typos*) or prefiguration of
was to come, and represented all of hum
would do on the cross.

5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
but drastically different effect. One of
manity into ruin, but God gave the gift
cation in spite of our many sins. What

...nciled to God,
salvation be now

...is major discussion of
a complex, compressed,
...owed that grace in justifi
Christ much more than sin
Adam.



3

Why are people sometimes prone to believe they can do better than what God offers them?

“Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth” is an odd idiom. A person can tell the age and quality of a horse by looking at its teeth. To look at the teeth of a horse given as a gift shows a lack of appreciation. The idiom means do not reject a gift someone gives you. In Isaiah’s day, God offered King Ahaz a gift, a sign guaranteeing God’s protection. But Ahaz thought it was better to trust in Assyria instead of God—a decision that would have devastating consequences.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The event that precipitated Isaiah’s message in Isaiah 7:1–12:6 was what biblical scholars call the Syro-Ephraimite War (735–733 BC). King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria posed a threat to the entire ancient Near East. Eventually, he would turn his attention west toward Israel and Judah. So Pekah, the king of Israel, joined Rezin the king of Syria with the hope of forming a coalition of all the kingdoms in the region to defeat the Assyrian invasion.

When King Jotham of Judah and his son, Ahaz, who succeeded him, were called to join the anti-Assyrian pact, they both refused. Therefore, Syria and Israel waged war on Judah in order to replace Ahaz with a Syrian/Aramean prince and secure Judah’s participation in the alliance against Assyria. Ahaz was shaken by the threat of invading Syrians and Israelites. So the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz with a message. The message was for Ahaz to stay calm and not fear the threat of Syria and Israel. Ahaz could trust in the Lord to defeat Judah’s enemies.

Even though the Lord promised to give Ahaz a sign to prove He would bring down the coalition, Ahaz refused to believe. Instead, Ahaz sent messengers with silver and gold from the Lord’s temple and the king’s palace as a bribe to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria and said, “I am your servant and your son. March up and save me from the grasp of the king of Aram and the king of Israel, who are rising against me” (2 Kings 16:7). Therefore, Judah became a vassal of Assyria as Tiglath-pileser took the bribe, deployed his armies and invaded Syria, capturing its capital Damascus, deporting the survivors into exile and executing King Rezin. They also began their invasion of Israel but stopped when the people of Israel overthrew Pekah. Tiglath-pileser installed Hoshea, a pro-Assyrian king on Israel’s throne and exacted a heavy tribute from them. Ironically, because Ahaz refused to believe God and instead turned to the Assyrians for help, the Assyrians would eventually turn on Judah and decimate its land and population.

ISAIAH 7:7-17

7 This is what the Lord GOD says: It will not happen; **it will not occur** **A**. **8** The chief city of Aram is Damascus, the chief of Damascus is Rezin (within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people), **9** the chief city of Ephraim is **Samaria** **B**, and the chief of Samaria is the **son of Remaliah** **C**. If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all. **10** Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: **11** “Ask for a sign from the LORD your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.” **12** But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.” **13** Isaiah said, “Listen, **house of David** **D**! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? **14** Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. **15** By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating curds and honey. **16** For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the **two kings** **E** you dread will be abandoned. **17** The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father’s house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria.”

Passage Outline

God Intervenes
(Isa. 7:7-9)

God Expects
(Isa. 7:10-13)

God Announces
(Isa. 7:14-15)

God Judges
(Isa. 7:16-17)

Key Words

- A. Damascus, a powerful city-state, wouldn't be able to stand against God. God's plans will come to fruition (Isa. 14:24; 46:10; Prov. 19:21). Damascus fell at the hands of the Assyrians in 732 BC.
- B. The Northern Kingdom of Israel; Ahab's wife Jezebel had him make Samaria the center for Baal worship. Many of God's prophets were killed in Samaria, and it fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.
- C. Pekah, Remaliah's son, assassinated King Pekahiah of Israel so he could reign (2 Kings 15:25).
- D. The Davidic dynasty includes Jesus (2 Sam. 7).
- E. Hoshea killed Pekah (2 Kings 15:30). The king of Assyria killed Rezin (2 Kings 16:9).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

By using His personal name, God communicated that the threat against His people was a personal affront to Him. Yahweh's message was clear and concise. The enemies said they would conquer Judah, but the Lord emphatically declared, *It will not happen; it will not occur*. The issue before Ahaz was clear: Would he listen to his enemies or would he listen to the Lord?

DID YOU KNOW?: Israel is sometimes referred to in the Old Testament as Ephraim, the northern kingdom's most prominent tribe. (See Isa. 11:13; Jer. 7:15; Hos. 5:9-14.) Consequently, the alliance formed between Syria and Israel to defend against the expansion of Assyria is known as the Syro-Ephraimite war.

By pointing out that *Damascus* was the *chief city* or capital of *Aram*, and that *Samaria* was the *chief city* of Israel (*Ephraim*), God was saying they would not have another capital in Jerusalem. Moreover, they would not have another king in Jerusalem. God had promised David that He would establish David's dynasty forever (2 Sam. 7:11-13). Consequently, God was not going to allow anyone to cut off David's line.

How is God our source of hope? What might one conclude about people who appear to be without hope?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary. Make a list of the kings mentioned in Isaiah 7. Using a Bible dictionary, read the articles about each king listed and make notes on each. What lessons can you learn from what you read? How does each king's life illustrate the need for trusting in God and His plans?

God offered Ahaz an opportunity to see a sign from God that He was willing and able to protect His people. Ahaz's response was insincere piety. How could he be testing God if it was God who offered to give him a sign?

What do people who display a false piety to God reveal about themselves? What are some ways people try to disguise their unbelief?

Isaiah declared that God would provide a *sign* despite Ahaz's unbelief: a *virgin* would give birth to a child and *name him Immanuel*.

How does God's keeping His promise to send the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, affect our trust in God in other matters?

Isaiah revealed to Ahaz that God would bring a change in leadership because of the king's failure to trust in God. The Lord is faithful to all of His promises.

What sources of security do people turn to today as a substitute for trusting God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God's plans are a source of hope for His people.
- God expects His people to respond in faith.
- God is faithful to keep His promises, with the birth of Jesus Christ being the ultimate proof.
- God brings judgment on those who fail to trust Him.

As a group, discuss ways following God's plan produces hope. How can the group remind each other of the hope found in following God's plan when a person's faith is challenged?

In what areas of your life is God asking you to trust Him in a deeper way? How would you describe your response? How can you address any sources of hesitation you may be experiencing?

Memorize Isaiah 7:14. Reflect on the promise of God that He would be with us. How does the promise of God's presence instill hope in you? Thank God for sending His Son to "be with us" in this world.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: The Lord has a plan for His people.

Read Isaiah 7:7, identifying the Lord's declaration.

When King Ahaz of Judah refused to join the alliance formed by Rezin, king of Aram (also called Syria), and Pekah, king of Israel, to go to war with Assyria, the allied kingdoms decided to go to war with Judah. Rezin and Pekah's goal was to replace Ahaz with someone who would support the anti-Assyrian coalition. When this news reached Jerusalem, Ahaz and his people "trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind" (7:2). Consequently, God sent Isaiah to assure Ahaz that he was safe and he could trust in the Lord's plan. Second Kings 15:37 and 2 Chronicles 28:5 indicate that the Lord sent Rezin and Pekah against Ahaz because Ahaz "did not do what was right in the LORD's sight ... and made cast images of Baals. He burned his children in the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites. He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree" (2 Chron. 28:2b-4). Ahaz led Judah into committing spiritual adultery against the Lord by his idolatry and murderous sacrifices. So the Lord's message of deliverance to Ahaz through His prophet Isaiah was a demonstration of God's mercy and grace.

Contextualize verses 7-9 by reading verses 1-6. Why do you suppose God sent a message to King Ahaz?

Day 2: We must stand firm in our faith.

Read Isaiah 7:8-9, highlighting the last sentence.

It was just a matter of time before Aram would fall and Rezin would be executed. Also, Israel's time was short; the Assyrians destroyed Samaria in 722 BC and carried off the northern kingdom's survivors into exile, never to become an organized people again. If the *sixty-five years* refers to the following sixty-five years from this point, then the reference is to 671 BC when the Assyrians transported conquered foreigners into the region of the former northern kingdom. As a whole, the unholy alliance between Israel and Aram would be destroyed. Therefore, Judah had no reason to fear the coalition's threats. However, Isaiah's message served as a warning to Ahaz. Putting his trust in political alliances would be Judah's downfall. Ahaz sat on a throne that was established by the Lord, established on His promises to David and the people of God. David's sons who sat on the throne were to *stand firm* in the same *faith* that David had in the Lord. Judah's faith in God was the foundation of their very existence and essential to their identity. But Ahaz was at a point of no return. Therefore, Isaiah said, *If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all.*

How is God your source of hope?

Day 3: God shows patience toward His people.

Read Isaiah 7:10-13, considering Ahaz's sinful actions.

It is amazing God would make such a generous offer to such an ungodly king as Ahaz. And it is surprising the Lord spoke to Ahaz twice. This demonstrates Yahweh's patience, mercy, and loving kindness toward His sinful people. Since Ahaz failed to believe what he had heard of God's power, God was willing to show him. Ahaz didn't want a sign because he was unwilling to believe. He was trying to cloak his unbelief with a religious ruse. A sign would force Ahaz to openly admit his stubborn unbelief in Yahweh. Ahaz's mind had already been made up, having already chosen Assyria over the Lord. Isaiah saw through Ahaz's pious ploy. The Davidic kings were supposed to shepherd their people in faithful service to God. Instead, all of them fell short, and most of them violated their trust by using the throne as a means to feed their own appetites. God was faithful to His promise to David, but the house of David had not produced kings who shepherded His people as God intended. After hundreds of years and many generations, God's patience was wearing thin.

What do people who display a false piety to God reveal about themselves?

What are some ways people try to disguise their unbelief?

Day 4: God fulfills His promises.

Read Isaiah 7:14-15, noticing God's now-fulfilled promise.

Immanuel means "God is with us." The name of the child would be a reminder of God's presence, bringing comfort to those who trusted in God and destruction to those who failed to trust God. What could have served as a sign of God's tender mercy for Ahaz instead would serve as a sign of God's indignation.

Virtually all conservative, evangelical scholars affirm that verse 14 refers to the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary. They hold that Isaiah's prophecy pertains only to Jesus the Messiah based on Isaiah's other references to Immanuel. The "entire land" belongs to Immanuel (Isa. 8:8). Immanuel would be the reason the nations' plans to defeat God's people would fail (8:10). Immanuel would be named "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father," and His "reign on the throne of David" would never end (9:6-7). Based on these declarations, Immanuel would refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and no one else.

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son In His incarnation, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-23).

How does God's keeping His promise to send the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, affect our trust in God in other matters?

Day 5: God is our source of security.

Read Isaiah 7:16-17, noting what the Lord will bring.

In a short time, the Lord would eliminate the threats of Pekah and Rezin. The Aramean kingdom of Rezin was destroyed first in 732 BC. Tiglath-pileser reduced the size of the northern kingdom of Pekah in 733 BC, and the king was assassinated and replaced by Hoshea. Eventually, the northern kingdom was totally defeated in 722 BC which was about thirteen years after the Immanuel prophecy.

The Lord would also use *Assyria* as His instrument of judgment against *Judah*. Isaiah compared the judgment coming to the days when the Northern Kingdom separated from Judah in 928 BC. (See 1 Kings 12.) Rejecting the Lord and seeking help from Assyria would be Ahaz's downfall. God used Ahaz's source of security as the source of his demise.

What sources of security do you turn to today as a substitute for trusting God?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 7, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How did God challenge King Ahaz in verse 9? How does this verse challenge us today?

How did Ahaz's rejection of God's offer show a lack of faith?

In what ways can we actively demonstrate our faith in God's promises?



For additional context, read “The Syro-Ephraimitic War,” available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay. com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Reigns

God controls the rise and fall of nations and powers.

ISAIAH 23:8-18



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5:13-14 These verses support the second
for verse 12 (see note there). Sin "reigns"
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sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's
deliberate act that plunged the human
and spiritual death. All humans, includ
infants and young children who are incap
and wrong and thus are not deliberate
death's domain. All people now are b
(Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin **had** this broad
was a type (Gk *typos*) or prefiguration of
was to come, and represented all of hum
would do on the cross.

5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
but drastically different effect. One of
mankind into ruin, but God gave the **gift** t
cation in spite of our many sins. What



What are some things that may cause a person to question who is really in control?

Throughout history, we have seen dictators, despots, and other leaders seize control of a country or region. At the time, some of these leaders and the groups they led appeared to be invincible, carrying an unchecked arrogance as they gained more power. In Isaiah's day, Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea that had a vast and powerful financial empire. To the human eye, they seemed invincible, but they were no match for God. God is sovereign over every nation and human seat of power.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah's message revealed there will come a time when people from every nation will stream to the house of the Lord to worship Him (Isa. 2:2-4; 11:1-10). However, before this happens, the Lord would bring His purifying judgment on the nations. Hence, Isaiah 13:1-23:18 contains a series of judgment speeches against many of the nations in the ancient Near East, and these proclamations pave the way for Isaiah's message of universal judgment in chapters 24-27. One should recognize a number of things from these speeches:

- The Lord rules over all of the nations. They are all under His authority and will answer to Him.
- Even though Isaiah addressed the various nations in these judgment speeches, the audience who actually received these speeches was Israel. Primarily, their purpose was to inform God's covenant people of God's plans for the nations. God would keep the promises He made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3).
- These oracles serve as a warning to the people of God: if you act like the nations, then God will treat you like the nations. In fact, God would show greater severity to His people given all that they had witnessed God do for them. They should know better than to act like the pagan nations around them. With a greater knowledge of God comes a greater responsibility to God.
- Although, these judgment speeches speak of the destruction of nations and a warning to Israel, they also contain a message of hope for the people of God. Isaiah 14:32 exclaims, "The LORD has founded Zion, and his oppressed people find refuge in her." Therefore, these oracles of judgment against the nations are an exhortation for the people of God to turn away from foreign alliances and put their trust in Him alone. The Lord is their salvation.

ISAIAH 23:8-18

8 Who planned this against **Tyre** **A**, the bestower of crowns, **whose traders are princes** **B**, whose merchants are the honored ones of the earth?

9 The LORD of Armies planned it, to desecrate all its glorious beauty, to disgrace all the honored ones of the earth. **10** Overflow your land like the Nile,

daughter of Tarshish; there is no longer anything to restrain you. **11** He stretched out his hand over the sea; he made kingdoms tremble. The LORD

has commanded that the **Canaanite** **C** fortresses be destroyed. **12** He said, “You **will not celebrate**

anymore **D**, ravished young woman, daughter of **Sidon** **E**. Get up and cross over to Cyprus—even there you will have no rest!” **13** Look at the land of the Chaldeans—a people who no longer exist.

Assyria **F** destined it for desert creatures. They set up their siege towers and stripped its palaces. They made it a ruin. **14** Wail, ships of Tarshish, because your fortress is destroyed! **15** On that day Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years—the life span of one king. At the end of seventy years, what the song says about the prostitute will happen to Tyre: **16** Pick up your lyre, stroll through the city, you forgotten **prostitute** **G**. Play skillfully, sing many a song so that you will be remembered.

17 And at the end of the seventy years, the LORD will restore Tyre and she will go back into business, prostituting herself with all the kingdoms of the world throughout the earth. **18** But her profits and wages will be dedicated to the LORD. They will not be stored or saved, for her profit will go to those who live in the LORD’s presence, to provide them with ample food and sacred clothing.

Passage Outline

God is Just (Isa. 23:8-12)

God is Active (Isa. 23:13-14)

God is Honored
(Isa. 23:15-18)

Key Words

- A. Tyre was part of a group of maritime city-states. Ezekiel and Isaiah spoke against Tyre for its arrogance (Ezek. 28; Isa. 23). Tyre had great wealth.
- B. Part of a rhetorical question: How can the wealthy men of Tyre and Sidon, who were treated like princes one day, become poor the next day?
- C. The term is synonymous with Baal worship.
- D. Instead of prosperity, Tyre and Sidon would experience poverty.
- E. A city linked with Tyre.
- F. Known for extremely cruel and evil practices, Assyria defeated the North Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.
- G. Tyre was compared to a harlot. At the end of seventy years, Tyre would return to prominence, but this time to give money to the temple of the Lord.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah posed a rhetorical question about who would destroy Tyre. Given the fortifications and strength of Tyre, the notion that Tyre would be destroyed would have seemed far-fetched to anyone who heard it in Isaiah's day.

DID YOU KNOW?: The king of Tyre supplied cedar and pine logs and craftsmen for the building of the temple during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 5:8-9), approximately 280 years before Isaiah.

Then Isaiah pointed to the *LORD of Armies* being the One who would bring this notable city down. As impressive as Tyre was and as extraordinary as its inhabitants and those associated with them thought of themselves, Tyre would be no match for the Lord and His armies.

BIBLE SKILL: Compare references that use the same phrase or term. Isaiah referred to God as the Lord of Armies in verse 9. Look up 1 Samuel 1:3; 2 Samuel 7:26; Psalm 80:4; Amos 5:14-15; Haggai 2:6-9; and Malachi 1:11-14. Pay attention to the verses surrounding these verses as well. Note the main point being made in each passage. What attributes of God are most seen in this title?

Just as Tyre's influence spread across the ancient Near East, Africa, and Europe, so will the effect of God's judgment be on these lands as the Lord *stretched out his hand over the sea* to bring down Tyre's empire of extravagance.

How does Isaiah's pronouncement against Tyre reveal God's justice? How is recognizing that God is just in all He does as important as recognizing any of God's other attributes?

Isaiah pointed to Assyria's defeat of the early Chaldeans as evidence of God's power in the affairs of His creation. The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, had waged a war of total destruction on the land of Chaldea. The land was so devastated that Chaldea was no threat to anyone for several decades. What once was a land of formidable fortresses and magnificent palaces was turned into a ruin only fit for wild animals.

How does God demonstrate His power through the affairs of nations?

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Father. God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace (Jer. 10:10).

Isaiah closed his judgment speech by revealing even more of what will happen to Tyre after its destruction. Tyre would be erased from the thoughts of the world where it once had been so prominent. Even though Tyre would try to regain its prominence, it would only happen when the Lord decided to restore her after seventy years.

What can one conclude about the nations' relationship to God based upon Isaiah 23:15-18?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is just in all He does.
- God actively directs the affairs of His creation.
- God's plan includes all nations honoring Him.

List situations in your life that make you question God's justice. Ask God to give you insight, committing to trust Him as He carries out His plans.

What evidence do you see that proves God actively directs the affairs of His creation? How does seeing this evidence give you confidence to remain faithful to Him? What actions do you need to take to build upon that confidence in God?

How can you honor God this week? List one action you will take to specifically honor God and identify how that action will honor Him.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God does not have patience for arrogance.

Read Isaiah 23:8-9, noting Isaiah's description of Tyre.

Tyre and Sidon were ancient cities dating as far back as the third millennium BC. Both were coastal cities of the Mediterranean Sea located in Phoenicia west of the mountains of Lebanon and known as great cities of trade. They were the gateway for goods coming and going from the ancient Near East to places in North Africa and Europe. In many ways, they were the center of commerce for the world at that time. People everywhere knew them as opulent and prestigious cities. Isaiah acknowledged the city's power to establish rulers over their colonies. Tyre traded with princes, an indicator of pronounced power. Also, with the vast wealth amassed by Tyre's traders, these merchants were the most prestigious and honored ones of their day. In a materialistic culture where amassing wealth was the most prized accomplishment, these importers and exporters enjoyed renown wherever they went. Any who arrogantly look to their own accomplishments and attempt to glorify themselves while continually ignoring Almighty God, in due time will be brought low by the God they have disregarded. Verse 9 clearly reveals that God is in control of the nations. In His providential timing, He may allow them to last for a time, but His patience always comes to an end in regard to arrogant nations who thumb their nose at God and make themselves the objects of their own praise. He acts and brings destruction to all who would dare attempt to steal His glory.

How would you explain the difference between godly and ungodly pride?

Day 2: God is just in His judgments.

Read Isaiah 23:10-12, considering God's commands.

Tarshish was one of Tyre's many colonies spread out around the Mediterranean Sea in Cyprus, North Africa, Italy, and Spain. Tarshish appears to have been located northwest of the Strait of Gibraltar on what is today the southern tip of Spain. As a colony of Tyre, the people of Tarshish were under its rule. It was one of possibly two of Tyre's most western located colonies. So, when Isaiah addressed Tarshish, he appeared to be using it to represent all of Tyre's colonies from those closest to Tyre all the way to Tarshish. Isaiah compared the coming of refugees from Tyre to the waters of the Nile when unrestrained by its banks in the rainy season. The people who were under Tyre's rule would be free to live without its tyranny. Failure to control its colonies would be a sure sign of Tyre's demise.

How is recognizing that God is just in all He does as important as recognizing any of God's other attributes?

Day 3: The kingdom of God is eternal.

Read Isaiah 23:13-14, identifying God's power.

The *land of the Chaldeans* was southern Babylon where the Tigris River and Euphrates River meet, which is at the tip of the Persian Gulf in southern Iraq today. The Chaldeans at times had a powerful influence over all of Babylon. In fact, there were periods when Chaldeans were the kings of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean king who depleted Judah by taking most of its people into exile, including Daniel and Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar was the Chaldean king who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. For this reason, Chaldean became synonymous with “Babylonian” in the Old Testament. As Isaiah described the desolation that came to the land of Chaldea, his message was that the same fate awaited Tyre and Sidon by the hand of the Lord.

In the same way Isaiah began this judgment speech in verse 1, he concluded this section of it in verse 14, exhorting the *ships of Tarshish* to *wail* because their source of wealth would be no more. Tyre, their fortress and security would be destroyed. Isaiah goaded the merchants of Tyre's lucrative, expansive empire to lament in grief over the death of their beloved city. In grief and shock, these lords of luxury would witness the unimaginable happen to Tyre and Sidon. Human empires come and go, but only the kingdom of God is eternal.

How have you seen God demonstrate His power through the affairs of nations in today's world?

Day 4: Dishonoring God removes us from His blessings.

Read Isaiah 23:15-16, noticing the comparison to a prostitute.

Tyre would be forgotten for *seventy years*. Isaiah stated this is *the life span of one king*. This is likely referring to the lifespan of a kingdom (as the same word in Hebrew may refer to a king or kingdom). The kingdom Isaiah probably referred to was the Assyrian Empire. In 701 BC, Sennacherib marched his armies along the Mediterranean coast, and one of the cities he attacked was Tyre. From that time until the Assyrian Empire began to decline, Assyria maintained control of Phoenicia. Since Tyre would be irrelevant during that time, Isaiah provided no further elaboration on what would happen to it during the seventy-year period.

Isaiah then used a song about a prostitute to describe what would happen to Tyre. Since no one was any longer knocking at her door, she resorted to going out into the streets to play her *lyre* for people to remember her. Why did Isaiah use a prostitute as his metaphor for Tyre? Tyre's rise to prominence was fueled by catering to human desires.

How does comparing Tyre to a prostitute paint a vivid picture for us of what dishonoring God looks like?

Day 5: God restores His people.

Read Isaiah 23:17-18, underlining the word restore.

Every nation and every superpower is under the providential sovereign rule of Almighty God. At that time, Tyre would resume its past ways of *prostituting herself with all the kingdoms of the world throughout the earth*. However, there is a twist to Tyre's resurgence. Her profits would be *dedicated to the LORD* and go to supply the needs of the temple and its priests in Jerusalem when the exiles returned from Babylon. When the Persian King Cyrus gave his edict proclaiming that the exiled Judeans could return home after living in exile for seventy years, he said that God had appointed him to build His temple in Jerusalem. He also declared that the people in the region should assist the returned exiles with "silver, gold, goods, and livestock along with a freewill offering for the house of God in Jerusalem" (Ezra 3:2-4). The Lord turned what Tyre once used for its self-glorification into resources to be used for His own glory and the blessing of His people.

What do you conclude about the nations' relationship to God based upon Isaiah 23:15-18?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 23, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How would you explain the difference between godly and ungodly pride?

When have you experienced assurance that God is always at work?

Imagine a world in which all nations honored God. What would that look like? What contributions can we make to that end?

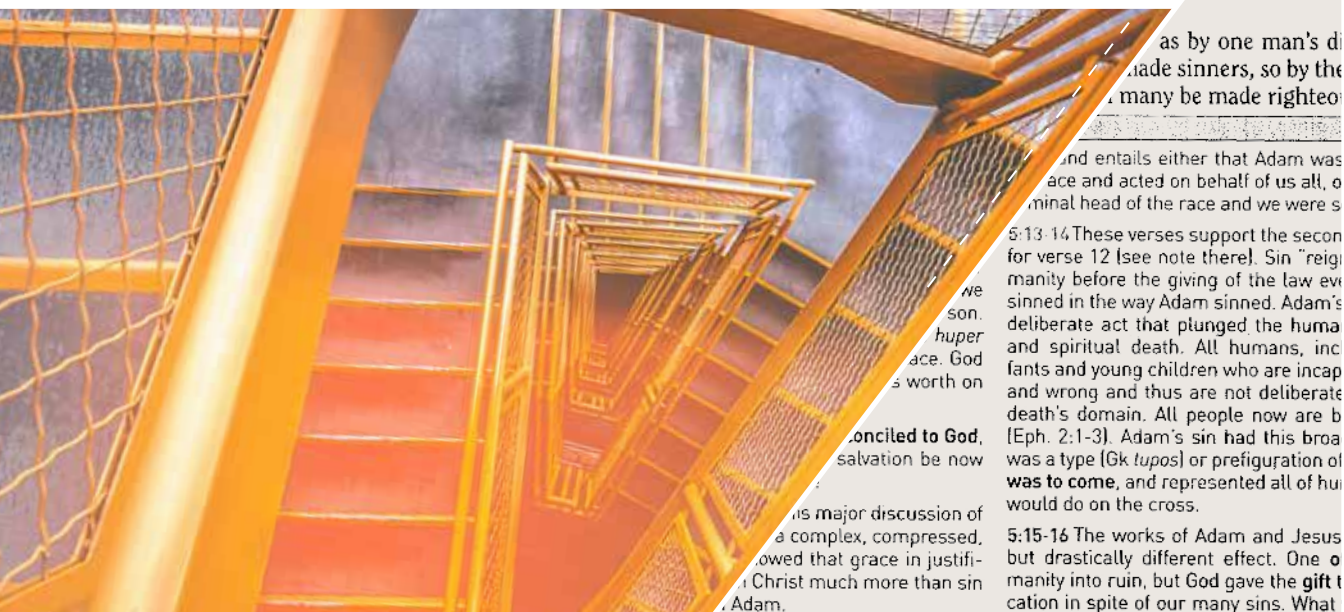


For additional context, read "Ancient Tyre," available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay. www.lifeway.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Saves

God's sovereign plan includes providing a way of salvation for those who believe in Him.

ISAIAH 25:1-10A



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sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's
deliberate act that plunged the huma
and spiritual death. All humans, inc
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... owed that grace in justifi
... Christ much more than sin
... Adam.

5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
but drastically different effect. One o
manity into ruin, but God gave the gift t
cation in spite of our many sins. What



What is the importance of having a plan to address a need?

People who have a plan for success and implement that plan are admirable. The Bible teaches that God has a plan. His plan includes redeeming creation and assembling a people out of every nation. Every nation will be represented when God prepares His inaugural feast, and everyone in attendance will be there because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Isaiah emphasized this truth as he anticipated the destruction of death and the celebration of the Lord's salvation before His throne.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah 24:1–27:13 serves as the climax to the previous chapters describing God's judgment of individual nations. Once Isaiah finished addressing the nations, his focus moved from regional judgment to universal reckoning, from the immediate time frame to a distant future, and from what is temporal to what is eternal. The section is distinctly eschatological, speaking of end times. After describing what God would do to the entire earth, Isaiah's main emphasis was on how it would affect the people of God. His message serves as a word of comfort to people as they face turbulent times.

Chapter 24 declares no one will escape the Lord's judgment. It is an apocalyptic picture of total destruction with the earth utterly laid waste and every inhabitant completely plundered. Isaiah indicates the reason for this cataclysmic judgment is that all the people have broken God's laws, overstepping God's decrees by making their own laws, and by disregarding every gracious act of God to make Himself known to humanity (24:5). Since humanity's sin brought the

curse to earth, the earth will become a curse to humanity, and everyone but a small remnant will perish as the earth shakes and fails to provide for people's needs. In that day, the Lord will destroy all earthly and heavenly opposition.

The people of God, however, will celebrate the Lord's judgment on the nations and declare Him their faithful stronghold. God will prepare a victory feast celebrating His rule and will include His faithful people from every nation. The victory the people celebrate will be the victory they anticipated for ages as they see God's intervention against the wicked and His vindication of those who trusted in Him. The bodies of the faithful who were dead will rise (26:19), and God's people will come and "worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem" (27:13).

ISAIAH 25:1-10A

1 LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you. I will praise your name, for you have accomplished **wonders** **A**, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness. **2** For you have turned the city into a pile of rocks, a fortified city, into ruins; the fortress of barbarians is no longer a city; it will never be rebuilt. **3** Therefore, a strong people will honor you. The cities of violent nations will **fear** **B** you. **4** For you have been a stronghold for the poor person, a stronghold for the needy in his distress, **a refuge** **C** from storms and a shade from heat. When the breath of the violent is like a storm against a wall, **5** like heat in a dry land, you will subdue the uproar of barbarians. As the shade of a cloud cools the heat of the day, so he will **silence** **D** the song of the violent. **6** On this mountain, the **LORD of Armies** **E** will prepare for all the peoples a feast of choice meat, a feast with aged wine, prime cuts of choice meat, fine vintage wine. **7** On this mountain he will destroy the burial shroud, the shroud over all the peoples, the sheet covering all the nations; **8** he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove his people's disgrace from the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken. **9** On that day it will be said, "Look, this is our God; we have **waited for** **F** him, and he has **saved** **G** us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." **10** For the LORD's power will rest on this mountain.

Passage Outline

Singing Praise
(Isa. 25:1-5)

Feasting Together
(Isa. 25:6-8)

Trusting God
(Isa. 25:9-10a)

Key Words

- A. When this word is used it predominantly refers to God's works.
- B. There are five aspects of fear: (1) emotional fear; (2) anticipation of something bad; (3) to "revere" (NASB, NIV); (4) behavior, or to "obey and glorify" (TLB); or (5) religious worship.
- C. Taking shelter reveals humanity's vulnerability.
- D. Receiving punishment is sometimes needed to humble people toward repentance (Deut. 7:23).
- E. Yahweh is the mighty Warrior King (1 Sam. 17:45), who is over all things.
- F. To look for something with great anticipation.
- G. A "saved" person is delivered by the Savior (Jesus Christ) from great distress (sin) so that he or she is completely free.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah 25:1-5 presents a hymn of thanksgiving that celebrates God and His salvation. From a human perspective, many of the nations God would lay low appeared invincible. The city represents the arrogant notion that humans can save themselves in their own self-sufficiency. They have concluded they do not need God. The fact that this city is fortified and called a fortress shows their resolve to defend their way of life. However, every attempt at salvation apart from the mercy and saving grace of God is doomed to fail. Isaiah was declaring that people who were once adamant enemies of God will become part of the saved people of God.

What is the importance of knowing that powerful cities come and go? What is the benefit of believers being mindful of their inadequacies?

DID YOU KNOW?: The word *honor* in Isaiah 25:3 comes from a Hebrew word (*kaved*) that means “heavy” or “weighty.” It carries the sense of “assign weightiness or importance,” thus “to honor” or “to glorify.”

Isaiah pits the hollow, counterfeit strength of the wicked against the strong wall of protection afforded the poor and needy by the Lord. The Lord is opposed to the proud but a champion of the weak. Thus, Isaiah shows how the Lord receives glory in two ways. First, He receives glory by showing Himself strong for the weak. Second, the Lord receives glory by opposing those who are arrogantly self-willed and self-assured of their own power with no need for God.

KEY DOCTRINE: Last Things

The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14-18).

In verse 6, the prophet continued declaring what the *LORD of Armies* would do. The Lord’s reign would begin with a coronation feast. In addition to preparing a feast for His people from every nation, God would do something even more spectacular: He would destroy death.

How does the defeat of death point to the peace God offers to His people?

Not only does Isaiah depict the Lord’s dwelling with His people, but we also get a glimpse of what it will be like for the people of God to dwell in the presence of God.

How is the hope of salvation realized in the phrases used by Isaiah? What role does faith play in waiting for God?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible

concordance. Use a Bible concordance to identify instances in Isaiah where he referred to a vineyard. How does the metaphor of a vineyard develop in the book? What are the elements in the imagery and how do they connect with God and His people?

APPLY THE TEXT

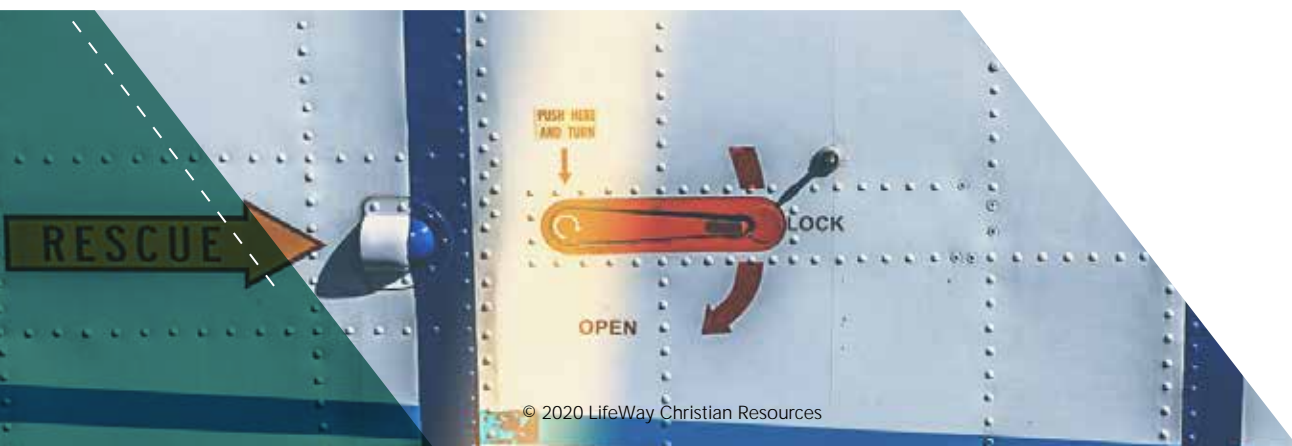
- God's salvation leads to praise of Him.
- God's peace will be enjoyed by all who trust in Him.
- God's salvation comes through faith in Him.

Reflect on the salvation God provides through faith in His Son. Write a prayer thanking God for His salvation.

Discuss as a group ways of enjoying God's peace today. How does the promise of a future complete with peace impact how your Bible study group functions? What changes need to be made to make your group a more peaceful place?

How would you rate your ability to whole-heartedly proclaim "look this is our God"? What needs to change in your life to more confidently make this declaration?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: People are not equal to God.

Read Isaiah 25: 1-2, examining why Isaiah is praising God.

Isaiah began his hymn with a short but very profound declaration: *LORD, you are my God.* In chapter 27, the prophet clearly indicated the nations of the earth would undergo terrible judgment because they had rejected the Lord as their God. However, the Lord will save those who can truthfully proclaim, “Yahweh is my God.” Personal knowledge of the Lord is the characteristic of those who will be saved. Next, Isaiah declared he would exalt the Lord and praise His name because of what He has done. *Wonders* speaks of things only God can do. From a human perspective, many of the nations God would lay low appeared invincible. But God is in perfect control; He methodically and faithfully carries out His purposes.

Isaiah elaborated on the wonders God accomplished. The *city* to which he referred is “the city of chaos” in Isaiah 24:10. It is not a specific city but a metaphor to represent human strongholds of wickedness. Just as the Lord came down and rendered impotent the people at the Tower of Babel as they attempted to elevate themselves to be equal with God, He will bring down this arrogant city. As invulnerable as the wicked city of human self-sufficiency and self-will may appear, God Almighty easily lays it to waste.

Why is it beneficial for you to be aware of your own inadequacies?

Day 2: God’s plan is salvation.

Read Isaiah 25:3, underlining the word honor.

Isaiah described the salvation of the *nations*, known as the Gentiles in the New Testament. He mentioned this in Isaiah 24:16 when he stated: “from the ends of the earth we hear songs: The Splendor of the Righteous One.” Part of the Lord’s “plans formed long ago” (v. 1) was to save for Himself a people from every nation. God revealed this plan to Abraham when He chose Abraham and his descendants for the purpose of blessing all the peoples on earth (Gen. 12:2-3; 18:18-19). Paul made this clear when he wrote, “Now the Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed through you’” (Gal. 3:8). Isaiah was declaring that people who were once adamant enemies of God will become part of God’s people.

Why should you honor God?

Day 3: We find security in God's strength.

Read Isaiah 25:4-5, identifying where true strength is found.

The *poor* and the *needy* are the opposites of the strong and self-sufficient citizens of the city of chaos and meaninglessness which the Lord has destroyed. Yet, the poor and needy are better off because the Lord is a *stronghold* for the poor and needy and a *refuge* from the storms and heat of the violently wicked who seek to harm the weak. Those who thought they were strong have become weak, but those who are weak are secure because the Lord is their refuge and strength. Thus, Isaiah shows how the Lord receives glory in two ways. First, He receives glory by showing Himself strong for the weak. Second, the Lord receives glory by opposing those who are arrogantly self-willed and self-assured of their own power with no need for God. This is a motif throughout the Scriptures. One witnesses this motif in the lives of people like the Israelites whom God saved from Egypt; one of the greatest and most powerful nations ever known. The Book of Judges demonstrates it in the life of Gideon who was the least in his tribe and yet led 300 men to victory over 135,000 Midianites. Also, David was but a boy and yet defeated the mighty Goliath.

Why is it appropriate for believers to praise God in advance of seeing His promises fulfilled?

Day 4: God will defeat death.

Read Isaiah 25:6-8, considering what the feast is celebrating.

In addition to preparing a feast for His people from every nation, God would do something even more spectacular: He would destroy death. *The burial shroud* covers every person of every nation. We have a 100 percent death rate. However, the Lord *will destroy death forever*—not just death per se but the cause of death. Adam and Eve incurred the curse of death on themselves and their descendants as consequences for their sin. Nevertheless, the apostle Paul revealed that just as death came to all through Adam, the resurrection of the dead comes through faith in Christ. What's more, the last enemy Christ will abolish is death (1 Cor. 15:23-26). Jesus bore the curse and conquered the grave by His death and resurrection. As Paul wrote, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). Such a statement is fitting for Isaiah's message as he anticipated the celebration feast of this victory over death. The Lord personally will do for His people what they cannot do for themselves. The new nature of God's people will be given full expression in Christlikeness and holiness. Isaiah declared it will not be a time of sorrow but a time of rejoicing, *for the LORD has spoken*. Isaiah comforted God's people with the assurance that God will defeat all of their enemies when He begins His reign in Zion, and that they will then experience blessings like those that the world has never known.

How does the defeat of death point to the peace God offers you?

Day 5: God will reward those who trust Him.

Read Isaiah 25:9-10a, underlining the phrase “we have waited for Him, and He has saved us.”

Not only does Isaiah depict the Lord’s dwelling with His people, but we also get a glimpse of what it will be like for the people of God to dwell in the presence of God. What a glorious day it will be when the people of God see Him face to face and exclaim, “Look, this is our God.” God will reward those who trust in Him and patiently wait on Him. Those who trust in the Lord will be saved, and the natural response of people who have been saved is to rejoice and sing the praises of the One who has saved them. On Mount Zion, the place where the Lord resides, rests the power of God unto salvation because He alone is the Savior. Salvation comes from God alone through faith alone.

What role does your faith play in how you wait for God?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 25, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What hymn or song is especially meaningful as we consider God’s faithfulness?

How does waiting for God to act reflect trust in Him?

How should the knowledge that Christ will return motivate us to share our faith in the Lord with unbelievers?

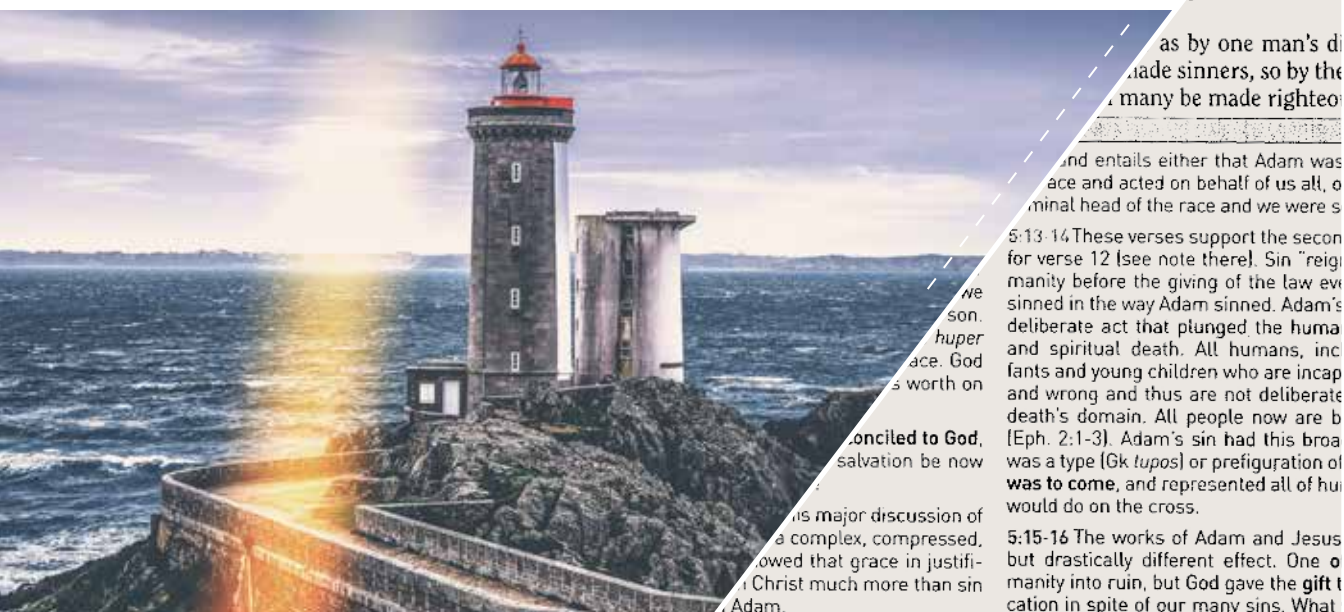


For additional context, read “Banqueting in the Ancient Near East” in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Protects

God is able to protect His people from enemies.

ISAIAH 31:1-9



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How does a crisis reveal a person's true character and beliefs?
Why does a crisis bring out the best and worst in a person?

Gold requires fire to be refined and purified. Melting the ore provides a means for separating the gold from other elements included in the raw material. The process also serves as a means for testing the gold. We too must face some type of fire for our faith to be tested, refined, and purified. This fire can come in all kinds of shapes and forms. For the Israelites, the threat of war served as a test of their faith, revealing their true character.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Much of this section is interspersed with messages of judgment and hope. The messages of judgment begin with the word “woe.” “Woe” is an exclamation denoting an intense outburst of grief, indignation, and alarm. When the prophets used this type of message, it was usually accompanied by an accusation or threat immediately followed by an announcement of judgment. The focus of the woes in this section was the self-confident people of Judah. They needed to learn from what God was going to do to their rebellious brothers in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was going to send the Assyrians against Samaria, Israel’s capital (Isa. 28:1-7). Isaiah warned Jerusalem’s leaders to realize their sense of invulnerability was false because their covenant with foreign rulers would lead to disaster unless they returned to the Lord (28:14-29).

The Assyrians would be God’s tools to carry out His judgment against His people; they would lay siege to Jerusalem. But God promised to defeat the enemy, and told of a future restoration of God’s people.

In chapters 30–31, the prophet warned of the consequences of seeking an alliance with Egypt instead of looking to the Lord for deliverance from their enemies. Their failure to trust in the Lord would lead to defeat and humiliation. Only their repentance and faith in God could save them. If they would humble themselves before God in repentance and faith, not only would He save them but also give them direction, bless their land, and prosper them. Moreover, they would witness God’s glory as He defeated their enemies and put an end to the Assyrian threat. Finally, Isaiah pointed to the coming reign of the Messiah and the pouring out of the Spirit on the people in the far future. However, the immediate future for the people of God would be difficult, except for the righteous who will experience security and prosperity under their divine King (chaps. 32–33).

ISAIAH 31:1-9

1 Woe to those who go down to **Egypt** **A** for **help** **B** and who depend on horses! They trust in the abundance of chariots and in the large number of horsemen. They do not look to the Holy One of Israel and they do not seek the LORD. **2** But he also is wise and brings **disaster** **C**. He does not go back on what he says; he will rise up against the house of the wicked and against the allies of evildoers. **3** Egyptians are men, not God; their horses are flesh, not spirit. When the LORD raises his hand to strike, the helper will stumble and the one who is helped will fall; both will perish together. **4** For this is what the LORD said to me: As a lion or young lion growls over its prey when a band of shepherds is called out against it, and is not terrified by their shouting or subdued by their noise, so the LORD of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. **5** Like hovering birds, so the LORD of Armies will protect **Jerusalem** **D**; by protecting it, he will rescue it; by passing over it, he will deliver it. **6** Return to the one the Israelites have greatly rebelled against. **7** For on that day, every one of you will reject the silver and gold idols that your own hands have sinfully made. **8** Then **Assyria** **E** will fall, but not by human sword; a sword will devour him, but not one made by man. He will flee from the sword; his young men will be put to forced labor. **9** His rock will pass away because of fear, and his officers will be afraid because of the signal flag. This is the LORD's declaration — whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

Passage Outline

False Hope
(Isa. 31:1-3)

True Faithfulness
(Isa. 31:4-5)

Repentance Demonstrated
(Isa. 31:6-9)

Key Words

- A. Southeast of Israel, Egypt played a significant role in the social, political, and economic life of Israel.
- B. Of the 80 times the word is used in the Old Testament, it generally means military assistance.
- C. The children of Israel received disastrous news. God wouldn't lead them into the promised land because of their evil (Ex. 33:4).
- D. Jerusalem was built on a mountain plateau and became a Hebrew city under David. The new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2) will be where the Messiah will exist in eternity.
- E. The Assyrians were a polytheistic society who were known for their savagery. They conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

In Isaiah 30:1-5, the prophet denounced Judah for turning to Egypt to save them from the invading Assyrians. Here, he warned them a second time about turning to Egypt for help. The first denouncement focused on Judah's rebellion against God by turning to Egypt, but this one focuses more on their lack of trust in the Lord.

Why is it so tempting to look to something or someone else besides the Lord for help?

BIBLE SKILL: Review earlier passages for context. Review Deuteronomy 17:14-20, noting the expectations for the king. Compare the expectations communicated in Deuteronomy with what you find in Isaiah 31. Which expectations were met and which were not? What does this passage tell us about the need for a better King? How does Jesus fulfill that need?

Any attempt to get help from Egypt was futile *because the LORD* is wise and brings disaster on His enemies. By looking to others, the Judean leaders not only called into question the power of God but also His wisdom. What they did was offensive to God.

Isaiah reminded his audience that he was the Lord's messenger. God's message to His people was the promise that He would protect Jerusalem and prohibit the Assyrians from having total victory over Judah—even though Judah had been rebellious.

DID YOU KNOW?: "Mount Zion" (Isa. 31:4) is a poetic name for Jerusalem and specifically designates the area where the temple stood (see Isa. 2:3). The first biblical mention of Zion occurs in 2 Samuel 5:6-9. Although a specific place, Zion also became a symbol of God's presence and rule.

How can one explain the display of God's judgment and God's mercy happening at the same?

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Father
God is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Heb. 12:9).

On the basis of God's promised deliverance, Isaiah challenged the people of Judah to repent and turn back to the Lord. Even though they had sinned against God, He was ready to forgive and welcome any who would turn back and place their trust in Him. Note that their repentance was not a prerequisite for God's protection of Jerusalem. God would spare and save them in order to motivate them to respond with grateful repentance.

Isaiah's message was straightforward: God Himself would defeat the Assyrians. Judah thought it needed the horses, chariots, and trained horsemen of Egypt to save them, but God needed no help. Judah would realize the grave mistake they made in turning to Egypt for help instead of the Lord.

What does Isaiah's message communicate about God's love for His people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Trusting in human strength rather than God's power will ultimately lead to defeat.
- God remains faithful even when we are not.
- Trusting in God will ultimately lead to victory.

Ask God to reveal to you things you trust other than Him for your security. What changes do you need to make as a result of what He tells you?

Reflect on times in your life when you were not faithful to God yet He remained faithful to His promises. Take time to thank Him for His faithfulness. With whom can you share about God's faithfulness?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 30:18. Discuss what it means to wait on God. What makes waiting on God such a challenge and a test of our faith? How can the group help each other better wait on God?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Our help comes from the Lord.

Read Isaiah 31:1, identifying from whom Judah's army was seeking help.

What did they see in Egypt? They saw an impressive military force made up of multitudes of horses and chariots, readied for war against the invading Assyrians. Judah's army was basically all infantry; therefore, the speed of cavalry and chariots logically seemed to be a big improvement to Judah's military forces. *Horses* would bring them speed, *chariots* would provide them with strength, and *horsemen* would give them trained warriors. The Judean leaders chose to disobey God's law that stated their kings should not acquire horses from Egypt (Deut. 17:16). What's more, they should have listened to Isaiah's prophecy that the Assyrians would defeat the Egyptians and take them into exile (Isa. 20:2-6). They should have known that trusting in Egypt to save them was a foolish mistake. The Judean leaders relied more on what they saw in Egypt than what they heard from the Lord's prophet. Furthermore, they saw what they wanted to see instead of what Isaiah told them to see. If Judah looked to the Holy One of Israel, they would have seen their only true Protector and would have sought Him.

Why is it so tempting to look to something or someone else besides the Lord for help?

Day 2: We must trust in God to help us in difficult times.

Read Isaiah 31:2-3, considering how God's wisdom should affect our choice to trust Him.

Unlike the leaders of Judah who had treacherously disobeyed the Lord by going to Egypt for help, and unlike the Egyptians who could only be depended upon to look out for their own self-interests, the Lord *does not go back on what he says*. Regarding Judah, what God said He was going to do was grim. Judah's attempt to get help from Egypt would backfire, and God would rise up against the wicked Judeans and anyone such as Egypt who would lend them assistance.

Next, Isaiah pointed out a stark contrast between the Egyptians and the Lord. Man is frail, temporal, and mortal. The Lord is the Creator, the Eternal God, holy, and awesome in power. Horses are mere flesh and blood, but the Spirit of God is divine, omnipotent, and eternal. Therefore, when the Lord *raises his hand to strike*, the *helper* and those *helped* will perish together. Judah's snubbing of the Lord and looking to Egypt was an insult to God. The monumental collapse Isaiah prophesied would be the consequence of Judah's refusal to trust in the Lord.

How does God remind us today of His wisdom?

Day 3: God will fight for us and protect us.

Read Isaiah 31:4-5, highlighting the two examples given.

The promise began with the picture of a *young lion* growling over its prey. A lion *growls* or roars for a number of reasons, but often it is to warn others to stay away from what is his or they will regret it. The word *shepherds* in the Old Testament often is a reference to kings. Isaiah was saying that when the king of Assyria and the kings of its vassal nations come against *Mount Zion* (Jerusalem), they will be unable to intimidate the Lord as He fights for Jerusalem. As a young lion set to fight to protect its prey, the Lord was prepared to fight those coming to take Jerusalem. Continuing the picture of God's protection, Isaiah compared the Lord's protection of Jerusalem to *hovering birds* protecting their babies. This picture of God's tender care is common in the Old Testament. (See Pss. 17:8; 61:4; 91:4.) Isaiah chose a familiar expression associated with Passover and the Exodus to make his point. The words *passing over* describe what God did when He executed the tenth plague on Egypt and "passed over" the children of Israel who had blood on their doorposts in Exodus 12. Now, He was promising to spare them again. Verses 4-5 form a complete picture of how God would save Jerusalem. God would not only zealously save His people, He would protect His children with merciful compassion. The foolishness of Judah, the arrogance of Egypt, and the fierceness of Assyria could not stop Him.

**What is the significance of God's unwavering faithfulness to you?
Consider times when you have not been faithful to Him.**

Day 4: We must repent and turn to God.

Read Isaiah 31:6-7, underlining the word return.

This was the people of Judah's moment of decision. Even though they had *greatly rebelled* against the Lord, He was prepared to forgive their sin. *On that day*, the day of the Lord when He comes in power and glory and establishes His throne on Mount Zion, He will destroy all wickedness and pride (Isa. 2:1-22). However, for Isaiah's audience it would be too late. Therefore, Isaiah's urgent message was the Judean's need to repent while they had the opportunity to do so. There will come a day when everyone will reject their gods and recognize the Lord alone is God and that there is no other. Nevertheless, when that day comes, it will be too late for those who trusted in idols and failed to turn to God. Isaiah's message is reminiscent of what God proclaimed on Mount Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments: "The Lord—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:6-7).

**In what ways is Isaiah's message to the people to cast away their idols
and turn to God relevant to the church today?**

Day 5: What God says will happen.

Read Isaiah 31:8-9, noting the outcome for Assyria.

In 701 BC, King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah and captured all of its cities except Jerusalem. Second Kings 18:13–19:37, 2 Chronicles 32:21-22, and Isaiah 37:36-38 each describe what happened as Sennacherib laid siege on Jerusalem. In the night, the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrians, causing Sennacherib, probably the rock in verse 9, to return home to Nineveh in fear and disgrace. The rock who was the shelter and protector of this seemingly unconquerable empire fled before Almighty God. When the Lord raised His banner, the Assyrians who survived ran for their lives. Furthermore, shortly after his return to Nineveh, two of Sennacherib's sons assassinated him. The prophet Nahum foretold in vivid detail the fall of Nineveh which occurred in 612 BC. By the end of 605 BC, Assyria was no more. The end of verse 9 recognizes that whatever the Lord declares will happen will indeed come to pass. The fire of the wrath of God would burn against all who questioned His glory and sought to destroy His people. Such a display proves the wisdom of those who put their trust in God.

What does Isaiah's message communicate about God's love for you?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 31, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How does Isaiah 31:1-3 serve as a reminder that God is our only true hope?

How does God's faithfulness motivate us to be faithful to Him?

How should evidence of the consequences for rebelling against God persuade unbelievers to repent and trust in God?



For additional context, read "'Zion' as a Place and a Symbol," available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Listens

God hears the prayers of His people and acts to fulfill His purposes for them.

ISAIAH 37:14-20,30-35



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... owed that grace in justifi-
... Christ much more than sin
... Adam.

07

**Share about a time when you needed someone else to help you.
What made you turn to that person for help?**

Most people are familiar with the saying, “If you want something done, do it yourself.” The statement usually comes to mind when you have asked someone to do something, only to be let down. People sometimes approach God in this way, thinking it’s better to take matters into their own hands than to trust God with the situation. Such thinking is not only arrogant but also wrong. Recognizing one’s inadequacy and seeking God’s help is a sign of wisdom. Hezekiah realized this truth when he was confronted with a crisis.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


Isaiah’s description of judgment on the nations contains cataclysmic imagery to display God’s power and wrath (chap. 34). All of creation will be affected. Isaiah singled out Edom as representative of what would happen to the nations. The Edomites had a history of taking advantage of Judah when vulnerable. Therefore, the Lord “has a day of vengeance, a time of paying back Edom for its hostility against Zion” (34:8). This message once again proved God’s faithfulness to keep His promise to curse anyone who treats His people with contempt (Gen. 12:3).

In contrast to His plans for the nations, God’s plans for His people are good (Isa. 35). He will turn the dry, wilderness lands of Judah into well-watered, lush lands that will surpass the most fertile lands in the region (35:1-2). As a result, the people of God will witness His salvation. Eyes that were blind will be opened, and ears that were deaf will be unstopped (35:5). Jesus alluded to this passage to reveal to John the Baptist that He is the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-6). Isaiah



prophesied that the people of God will travel the “Holy Way” in the joyous return to Zion (35:8-10).

Isaiah 36-39 serves as a historical bridge to transition from the first section of Isaiah to its final section. Here, Isaiah turned his attention to three events in the life of Hezekiah that are also recorded in 2 Kings 18-20: (1) the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians who invaded Judah and laid siege on Jerusalem (Isa. 36-37); (2) Hezekiah’s life threatening illness, his plea for God’s healing, and God’s promise to add fifteen years to his life (Isa. 38); and (3) Hezekiah’s prideful act of showing the treasures of Jerusalem to envoys representing the king of Babylon, Merodach-baladan (Isa. 39). These events are not in chronological order, but they serve to show that even the most godly people, such as Hezekiah, failed in their commitment to the Lord in spite of God’s goodness to them. The Lord dispensed of the Assyrian threat, but Babylonian exile would be inescapable for Judah.

ISAIAH 37:14-20,30-35



14 Hezekiah  took the letter from the messengers' hands, read it, then went up to the LORD's temple and spread it out before the LORD. **15** Then Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: **16** LORD of Armies, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you are God—you alone—of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth.

17 Listen closely, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see. Hear all the words that

Sennacherib  has sent to **mock the living God** .

18 LORD, it is true that the kings of Assyria have devastated all these countries and their lands.

19 They have thrown their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but made from wood and stone by human hands. So they have destroyed them.

20 Now, LORD our God, save us from his power so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are God—you alone. [...] **30** “This will be the **sign for you** : This year you will eat what grows on its own, and in the second year what grows from that. But in the **third year**  sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. **31** The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward. **32** For a remnant will go out from Jerusalem, and survivors from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.’ **33** “Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria: He will not enter this city, shoot an arrow here, come before it with a shield, or build up a siege ramp against it. **34** He will go back the way he came, and he will not enter this city. This is the LORD's declaration. **35** I will defend this city and rescue it for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.”

Passage Outline

The Request (Isa. 37:14-20)

The Sign (Isa. 37:30-32)

The Answer (Isa. 37:33-35)

Key Words

- A. The king of Judah, the son and successor of Ahaz, began his reign at 25 years of age. He brought religious reform. Shortly after becoming king, he was challenged by the Assyrian army.
- B. The Assyrian king who took the throne during widespread revolt, he took back control of Babylon, Phoenicia, and Judah, where Hezekiah had been preparing to face the king in battle (2 Chron. 32).
- C. Sennacherib believed that because he had been successful in war that his gods had defeated the other gods of the kingdoms that he faced. Thus, he mocked Almighty God.
- D. God responded to Hezekiah through Isaiah, giving “the proof” (TLB) that He would defeat the Assyrians and protect His name and His people.
- E. In three years the Judean agriculture would return to normal.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The report Hezekiah received from his officials of the royal spokesman's message terrified him. He sent a message to Isaiah asking the prophet to pray to the Lord for help. Isaiah replied, saying the Lord heard the Assyrian king's spokesman and would deal with the Assyrians. However, Assyria's king, Sennacherib, sent a letter to Hezekiah stating that the gods of other cities he conquered were unable to save their people, and Hezekiah's God would not be able to rescue him either.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary for background. Read articles about Sennacherib in a Bible dictionary. Read some of the Bible passages listed in the article to gain a more complete picture of this king. What accomplishments did you discover that may have contributed to Sennacherib's feelings of invincibility? How might his traits and accomplishments have influenced Hezekiah to seek God's help?

What might keep a person from turning to God first? How does the urgency of a situation impact who a person turns to for help?

Hezekiah's use of five imperatives in verse 17 demonstrates the urgency of the situation. Hezekiah's first and foremost concern was not his personal well-being or the security of his people but the glory of God. Sennacherib thought that the Lord was weak like the other gods who failed to defend their peoples

when the Assyrians conquered their cities. But Hezekiah knew the truth. Hezekiah realized that this moment of Judah's extreme inadequacy and vulnerability was the perfect opportunity for the Lord to glorify Himself before the nations. The glory of God was Hezekiah's primary concern.

KEY DOCTRINE: God There is one and only one living and true God (Jer. 10:10).

What does Hezekiah's prayer teach about priorities when praying to God?

Upon promising that He would frustrate Sennacherib's plans, the Lord promised He would restore Judah. Hezekiah would know this by a sign.

How important is expressing trust when praying to God? How does trusting in God's promises affect the mindset of believers when praying?

The Lord gave Hezekiah two reasons He would save Jerusalem. First, He would save Jerusalem for the sake of His reputation. Fundamentally, God's purpose for His people is to use them as instruments of His glory and to make Himself known in all the earth. Second, the Lord would save Jerusalem to keep His promise to David to establish his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16). This promise to Hezekiah was ultimately fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do verses 33-35 convey about the purposes and character of God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can approach God with bold requests because of who God is.
- God calls on believers to trust Him as He responds to our prayers according to His will and purpose.
- God responds to our prayers in ways that demonstrate His power and are in accordance with His plans.

What situations have you hesitated to take to God in prayer recently? Take time to boldly approach Him, following Hezekiah's lead. Record your thoughts after having done so.

Review your recent prayer requests. How do you need to adjust your requests so that the requests reflect God's purposes?

As a group, discuss God's commitment to His reputation and to keeping His promises. What affects should these divine commitments have on believers and the life of your group? Hold each other accountable for memorizing Isaiah 37:35 this week.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Prayer aligns us with God and what He is doing.

Read Isaiah 37:14-16, considering how you pray to God in times of distress.

Hezekiah's actions displayed his faith in God as well as his passion for the glory of God. One might surmise that anyone in Hezekiah's situation would turn to the Lord in prayer. However, the vast majority of Israel and Judah's kings were self-willed and independent. How much people pray to the Lord indicates how much they recognize their own inadequacy and need for Him. True humility means trusting in God. Hezekiah recognized that God fights for His people. The Lord was the true leader of all of Israel's armies as well as His heavenly hosts. The *cherubim* were the powerful angelic figures carved out of olive wood and covered in gold that spread their wings over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in the temple. The mercy seat represented God's throne and the presence of God with His people. Thus, Hezekiah recognized the Lord was with His people. Moreover, Hezekiah maintained that as Creator, God alone has complete sovereignty and power over all the nations to do with them whatever He pleases. What Hezekiah said about the Lord served to remind the beleaguered king of the reality of who God is. Prayer does not inform God of anything. What prayer does is remind us of what we already know, adjusting our hearts and heads to be in line with whom God is and what He is doing.

What might keep you from turning to God first? How does the urgency of a situation impact who you turn to for help?

Day 2: The Lord is the one and only true God.

Read Isaiah 37:17-19, identifying what Hezekiah believes about God.

Hezekiah acknowledged the truth of what Sennacherib asserted in his letter concerning his conquests. The Assyrians had conquered all of the countries Sennacherib mentioned by name and devastated the inhabitants and lands of those countries. In addition, when the Assyrian kings seized the nations in the region, they burned up the gods of those nations. The flames destroyed and consumed their idols of *wood and stone*. This was the Assyrians' way of communicating that their god, Ashur, was greater than the gods of these other nations. The conquests were understood to be as much a battle between gods as they were between armies on the ground. Hezekiah faced the brutal reality of his situation. He knew that Sennacherib actually did not defeat any gods because the Lord is the one and only God. Sennacherib overestimated his accomplishments and underestimated the Lord. The Assyrian monarch thought Yahweh was just another god, but Hezekiah knew better.

How does approaching God with a bold request reflect confidence in His character?

Day 3: God's glory shines through our weaknesses.

Read Isaiah 37: 20, underlining the phrase "you alone."

Hezekiah's honest assessment of all that had transpired—of his present predicament and of everyone involved—led to his petition in verse 20. The word *now* carries the idea of "based upon all that has transpired and everything I have brought before You." Sennacherib had conquered many nations and now threatened to seize Jerusalem. This heathen king had the audacity to challenge Yahweh. Therefore, Hezekiah prayed that the Lord would save His people from this juggernaut so that all the nations might know that He is God and that there is no other. Hezekiah realized that this moment of Judah's extreme inadequacy and vulnerability was the perfect opportunity for the Lord to glorify Himself before the nations. The glory of God was Hezekiah's primary concern.

DID YOU KNOW?: When King Hezekiah became seriously ill, he prayed that God would intervene. God answered by adding fifteen more years to Hezekiah's life (Isa. 38:1-6).

**What does Hezekiah's prayer teach about priorities when praying to God?
How can your prayers reflect these same priorities?**

Day 4: We must trust God to fulfill His promises.

Read Isaiah 37:30-32, understanding God's promise.

Upon promising that He would frustrate Sennacherib's plans, the Lord promised He would restore Judah. Hezekiah would know this by a *sign*. The sign would be that in two full years the land would be completely restored. No doubt, Sennacherib waged war on the actual land of Judah when he invaded. This was a common practice of ancient warfare, leaving a conquered enemy vulnerable for years to follow. However, God promised that the people would not do without and that after two years everything would be back to normal. God called upon Hezekiah to trust Him as the two years passed.

How important is expressing trust when praying to God? How does trusting in God's promises affect your mindset when praying?

Day 5: We have security in God through crises.

Read Isaiah 37:33-35, highlighting verse 35.

God promised to defend Jerusalem without a single *arrow* being shot, without a single infantry charge, and without even a single *siege ramp* against the city. Before Sennacherib could lift a finger against Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in the middle of the night. God answered Hezekiah's prayer. The Lord saved His people and received all the glory by how He did it. Devastated by his losses, Sennacherib did just as Isaiah prophesied and fled back home only to be assassinated by two of his sons.

The Lord does not always deliver His people from physical crises as He delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. However, the people of God may be assured they have the security of His presence in crises. They can trust in God's love, power, and wisdom as He ultimately does what is best for them and for His glory. Sometimes the Lord's salvation comes by eliminating a difficulty; at other times He delivers believers as they go through the crisis. (See Heb. 11, especially vv. 35-40.)

What do these verses tell you about the character of God?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 37, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How does Hezekiah's prayer serve as a model for us?

Compare and contrast these verses to those discussed in Isaiah 7:10-12, 14a (Session 3). How are the circumstances similar? How are they different?

How can you grow in your prayer life?

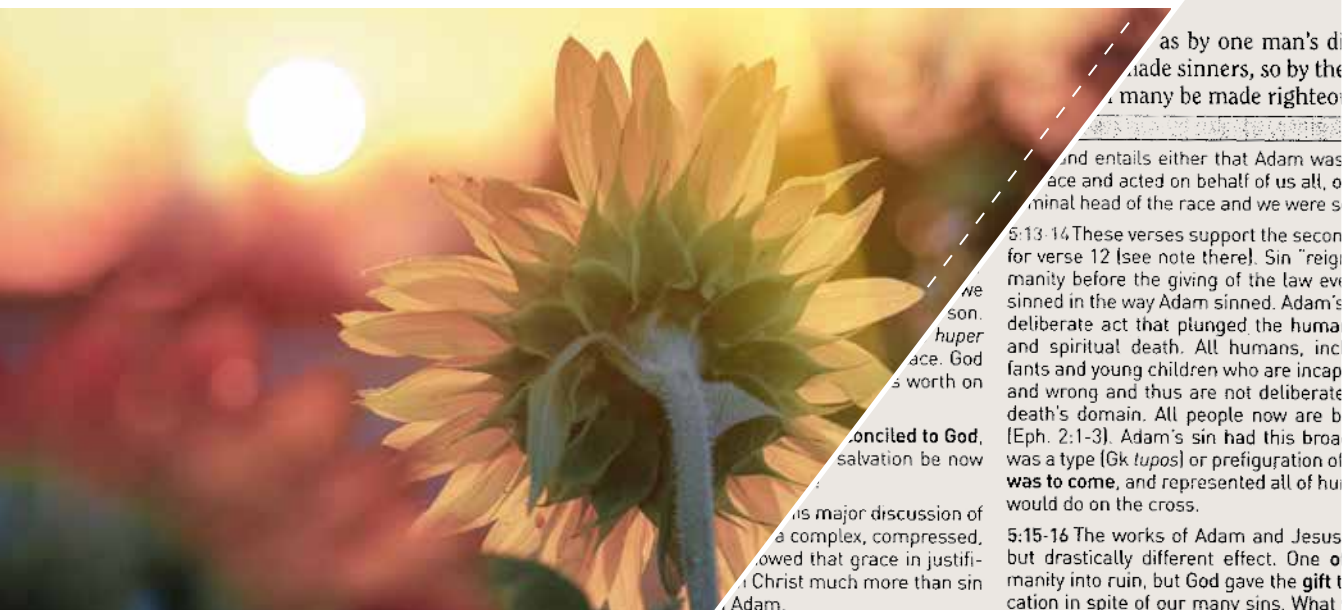


For additional context, read "Sennacherib, King of Assyria" in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Renews

God provides strength for those who trust in Him.

ISAIAH 40:18-31



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**Who is someone you have been compared to? How can a comparison be flattering?
How can a comparison lead to trouble?**

People like being compared to someone who is well respected in their given field. For example, a person who plays a sport usually appreciates being compared to an accomplished player in that sport. However, no one likes being compared to someone or something beneath him or her. Isaiah understood this truth and proclaimed that because everything is beneath God, nothing compares to Him. God alone is worthy of worship and trust, and the one who trusts in the Lord will not be disappointed.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah 40:1–41:29 is foundational for the Book of Isaiah. As the people of Judah faced the future hardships of Babylonian exile, this eighth century prophet exhorted them to remember who God is. He is the God who chose them and would be with them (41:8–10). The people of God must remember that the Lord is their Deliverer and Comforter. He is all powerful and able to save them from any threat, vindicating and rewarding those who remain faithful to Him. Their enemies would fade away and perish (40:7; 41:11–12).

As Creator, God has both the ability and authority to do with His creation whatever He pleases (40:12). He demonstrates His supremacy over the nations by His knowledge and wisdom. He knows what is right, does what is right, and does it in the right way, at the right time, to the right extent (40:13–14). God is superior to the nations because He is superior to their idols. God created the stars and calls them by name (40:26). What have the gods of the nations done? Nothing. Their gods have done nothing and can do nothing

because they are nothing; those who choose to worship them are deluded (41:21–24). Everything Isaiah said he premises on the truth that there is only one God, “the Holy One of Israel” (41:20). The Lord establishes His supremacy over the nations by pointing out they are temporal while He alone is eternal (40:21). He has not abandoned His creation, especially His people. The day is coming when God will bring down the arrogant nations and exalt His people.

As a shepherd cares for his sheep, the Lord will tenderly attend to the needs of His people (40:11). God will manifest His sovereignty over all of humanity by love and not by compulsion. God’s faithful love will compel His people to respond to Him in faithful obedience. This display of loving kindness and powerful deliverance of His people will show God’s love for His people. Those who reject Him will fall but those who trust in the Lord will soar on wings like eagles (40:31).

ISAIAH 40:18-31

18 With whom will you **compare** **A** God? What **likeness** **B** will you set up for comparison with him? **19** An idol? — something that a smelter casts and a metalworker plates with gold and makes silver chains for? **20** A poor person contributes wood for a pedestal that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not fall over. **21** Do you not **know** **C**? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not considered the foundations of the earth? **22** God is enthroned above the circle of the earth; its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like thin cloth and spreads them out like a tent to live in. **23** He reduces princes to nothing and makes judges of the earth like a wasteland. **24** They are **barely planted** **D**, barely sown, their stem hardly takes root in the ground when he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind carries them away like stubble. **25** “To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal?” asks the Holy One. **26** Look up and see! Who created these? He brings out the stars by number; he calls all of them by name. Because of his great power and strength, not one of them is missing. **27** Jacob, why do you say, and, Israel, why do you assert: “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my claim is ignored by my God”? **28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding. **29** He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless. **30** Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, **31** but those who trust in the LORD will **renew their strength** **E**; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.

Passage Outline

Living
(Isa. 40:18-20)

Sovereign Creator
(Isa. 40:21-26)

Tireless Source
(Isa. 40:27-31)

Key Words

- A. In various passages of the Old Testament, God asks if there is a comparison to Him (Isa. 40:18, 25; 43:11; 46:5; Ps. 50:21)
- B. People were made structurally, relationally, and functionally to “resemble” (NLT) God (Gen. 1:26).
- C. God created humans, so He knows our ways (Isa. 48:8), how we hunt (Gen. 25:27), how we learn (Isa. 29:11), and how we play an instrument (1 Sam. 16:16). People have those traits because God established humans.
- G. No human prince or ruler compares to God. Each will see an end to their power and can be removed by God.
- K. If we rely on our own strength, then we’re sure to fail. But those who trust in God will find that all things are possible with Him (Matt. 19:26).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah challenged the people as he raised the question: *With whom will you compare God?* The Lord created all things, so who or what could compare to Him? The inescapable conclusion is that there is no other God but the God of Israel.

KEY DOCTRINE: God To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience [1 Tim. 1:17].

The idols of the nations are no comparison to God, since an *idol* is nothing more than a human creation without power even to stand on its own. In verse 20, Isaiah described a *poor person* who could not afford to have someone construct him an expensive gold-plated idol. Therefore, this person looked for a skilled craftsman to carve an image out of a hard *wood* that would not rot. It would have required a great deal of effort to carve.

Why are people often more impressed by the work of human hands than all that God has done?

BIBLE SKILL: Compare passages with a similar theme. Compare Isaiah 40:21 with Job 12:7-9 and Romans 1:20-23. How do these passages point to the reality of God? What are the common themes found in these passages? What can we learn about God from His creation?

The two central questions of verse 21 get to the heart of the matter: the people's unwillingness to listen to God's message. Since God created the heavens and the earth, the people not only

saw evidence that God is the Creator, but also the Lord's prophets repeatedly told them God is the Creator. Nevertheless, Isaiah's audience refused to listen.

DID YOU KNOW?: Religions in the ancient world believed that the stars in the sky were gods. Even some Israelites during the time of Isaiah's ministry "bowed in worship to all the stars in the sky" (2 Kings 17:16).

God is not only greater than the gods of the nations, He is also over all the nations. God sits on His throne above the earth. The rhetorical questions of verses 18-20 contrasted God with the idols the people worshiped. The questions of verses 25-26 contrast God with the heavenly hosts many of the people worshiped. Both sections communicate one truth: the Holy One is incomparable.

How should knowing that God is the Creator and is directing the affairs of His creation affect a believer's daily life?

One might expect the Lord's response to the people's complaint to be harsh. Instead, God points out they needed to acknowledge what they already know. The God of Israel is Eternal God. God is capable of strengthening the failing and empowering the powerless.

Why are the people of God prone to forget what they have heard and know about the Lord?

APPLY THE TEXT

- All idols are human creations and fall short in comparison to the one true God.
- God alone is the Creator of the universe, directing the affairs of His creation.
- God strengthens those who place their trust in Him.

Examine your life, looking for potential idols—things you place more trust in than you do God. Confess your idolatry to God as you discover each idol. What actions do you need to take to keep God first in your life?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 40:31. Discuss what difference it makes in the lives of believers when they completely place their trust in God for both the present and future. How can the group help each other to continue to place their trust in God?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God is incomparable.

Read Isaiah 40:18, identifying the questions that are asked.

The questions of verses 18-19 arise from the truths about God in the preceding verses. The Lord comforts His people. He forgives and restores them as a loving Father who disciplines His children. The Lord will intervene for His people, and all humanity will see His glory. Life on earth is temporal, but God and His Word are eternal. He will come with strength, establish His rule, and reward those who have been faithful. He will protect His flock like a shepherd and gently lead them as if they were nursing lambs. He is awesome in power as Creator. God is also inherently holy in His knowledge and wisdom, meaning His knowledge and wisdom are far beyond human understanding. Unlike humanity, He needs no instruction; God has always been and always will be complete in His knowledge and understanding apart from external sources. The nations are nothing before Him.

In your own words, how would you summarize God's incomparableness?

Day 2: God is the Creator of all things.

Read Isaiah 40:19-20, considering what idols of today look like.

Isaiah highlighted the absurdity of going to so much trouble to worship what is ultimately worthless and nothing. How can such temporal things made by human hands compare to the omnipotent, omniscient eternal God who is the Creator? Idols may look impressive and be quite exquisite, but in the end they are just wood, stone, clay, or metal. Their worshipers construct them with material created by the living God.

Humanity must always recognize the infinite distance between God and His creation. To lose the distinction between the Creator and His creation is to fall into the sin of idolatry. To think of God as just another god or to compare Him with other idols is blasphemy. It is dishonoring to God's name, character, work, and attributes. Isaiah sought to show his audience that the false gods were based on delusion and absolutely no comparison to the glory of the God of Israel. Given all that God had done for His people, they should have already known this.

What work of human hands are you tempted to be more impressed by than all that God has done?

Day 3: We must acknowledge God's incomparableness.

Read Isaiah 40:21, contemplating what these questions are truly asking.

Isaiah used rhetorical questions to make his point. Here, the first and fourth questions go together and the two in the middle go together. Such an arrangement is common and Bible teachers often refer to it as a “chiastic structure.” It is a literary device where the biblical writer presents a sequence of ideas and then represents them in reverse order. In this instance, ideas A and B are repeated in reverse order with B and A. Normally, the idea in the middle is the most emphatic point. Isaiah’s first and fourth questions indicate that his listeners should have known the fundamental truth that the Lord is the Creator and nothing compares to Him. It is a matter of general knowledge.

Describe a time you gazed at the stars at night. How might doing so serve as a reminder of God’s creative power?

Day 4: God is the Holy One.

Read Isaiah 40:22-26, noticing how God looks over His creation.

Officials who sit in the highest seats of leadership among the nations may appear to have great power, but they are under the rule of Almighty God. Isaiah described the powerlessness and temporariness of world leaders using the metaphor of young plants that wither. These leaders are *planted*. In other words, they do not establish themselves by their own power. It is God who “removes kings and establishes kings” (Dan. 2:21).

God’s calling Himself “the Holy One” conveys the truth that nothing compares to Him. God was saying that He is so transcendent—so far above and beyond His creation in every way—that it is impossible to compare anything to Him.

Therefore, while the starry hosts of heaven may reveal a glimpse of God’s glory, He is their Creator. They reflect His glory. Human beings can only guess how many *stars* there are, but God knows how many there are and *calls all of them by name*. It does not just mean God knows their names; it means God is the one who has given them their names. Furthermore, God is the Holy One who by His great power sustains them. Not only did He bring them into existence, but also He is the one who keeps them in existence. Consequently, as creations of the Holy One, the heavenly bodies are unworthy of worship; only their Creator is worthy of worship.

How should knowing that God is the Creator and is directing the affairs of His creation affect your daily life?

Day 5: God is everlasting.

Read Isaiah 40:27-31, noting God's response to the people's complaints

The Lord asked His people why they complained that He had been ignoring them and had abandoned them. The grammar conveys a continual complaining. One might expect the Lord's response to their complaint to be harsh. Instead, God points out they needed to acknowledge what they already know and listen to what they have already heard. The God of Israel is Eternal God. He never tires, and there is no limit to what He knows and understands. They must never doubt His capability and must never assume they can understand His ways.

God is capable of strengthening the failing and empowering the powerless. Drawing on the Lord's strength, the dragging one will soar, weary legs will run, and the fainting person will be able to walk a great distance. Soaring, running, and walking all imply forward movement. While they may move at different paces, God's people will never be stuck. They have no reason to despair.

Why might you forget what you have heard and know about the Lord?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 40, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How does the truth of God's incomparableness give you confidence to face the chaos of life?

How does Isaiah 40:21-26 affirm God's identity?

Consider circumstances that can make a person feel weary or fatigued. How can we discover God's strength?

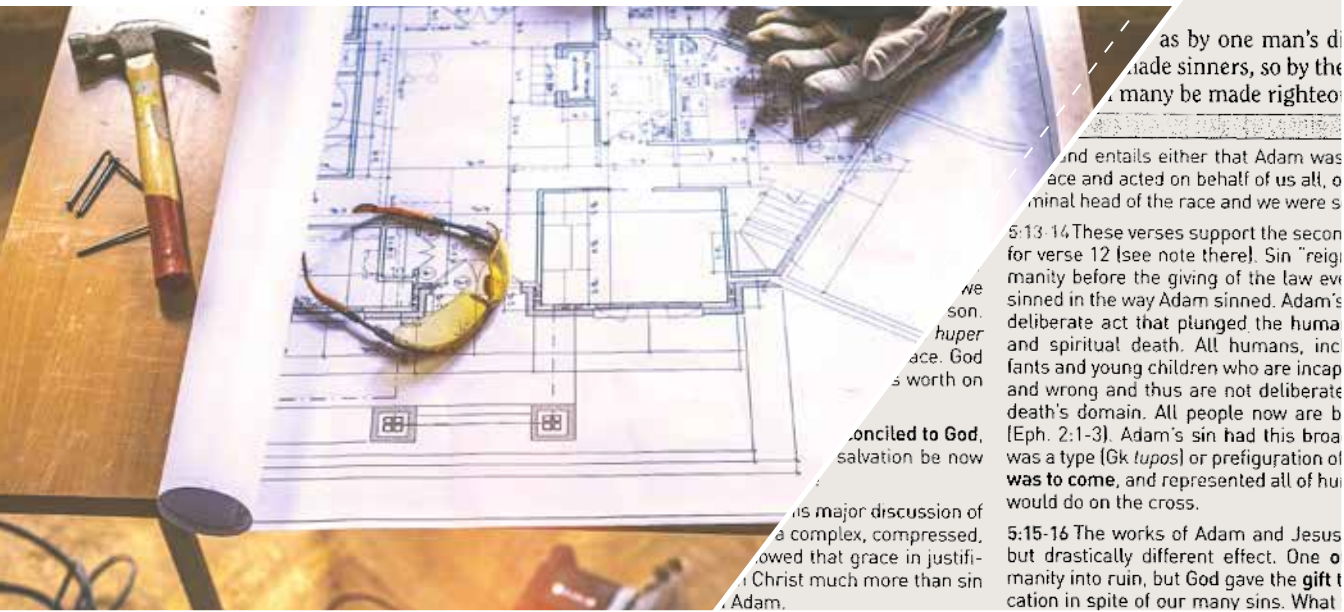


For additional context, read “The Eagle: A Symbol of Strength,” available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Acts

The one true God is incomparable; He will complete His plan to save His people.

ISAIAH 46:3-13



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would do on the cross.
5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
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cation in spite of our many sins. What

9

Share about a time you completed a task by following a specific plan. How important was following your plan in successfully completing that specific task?






Many of us will “plan our work, and work our plan” when seeking to accomplish a big task. Doing so may require a singular focus. We may even choose to participate only in activities that contribute to the plan’s success and abstain from involvement in anything that gets in the way of us working our plan. Isaiah 46 indicates God has a plan and is committed to it. His plan is to save His people, and nothing will keep Him from accomplishing this plan of salvation, not even the hardheartedness of the people He will save.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In chapters 42–44, Isaiah’s message revolved around four proclamations. The first was that God would intervene on behalf of His people, even though they are spiritually blind and deaf (42:13-17). The Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel would bring about a new exodus, bringing His people out of Babylonian exile (43:14-21). The second was an exhortation to listen to and obey God’s Word because He was the one who would remove their sins (42:18-25; 43:22-28). Third, the Lord was their salvation (43:1-7; 44:1-5). The fourth proclamation was that the Lord is sovereign over all the nations and superior to all their false gods (43:8-13; 44:6-20). Isaiah declared that Israel needed to remember these things and turn back to Him because they were God’s chosen people and He would never forget them. God chose to glorify Himself through His people. While the nations formed their gods, Yahweh, Israel’s Redeemer, formed His people (44:21-24).

God promised Israel that He had chosen to use Cyrus to rescue the people and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (44:28–45:13). When the nations witnessed what God had done for Israel, they would recognize the futility of their gods and that the God of Israel is the one true God. The Lord’s call of salvation would go out to the nations (45:1-22). In chapters 46–47, Isaiah described God’s judgment on Babylon. God’s judgment on Babylon would be severe because of how harshly Babylon treated the people of God. God also recognized many of the people of Israel had an outward religion without true devotion to God, but God offered them a new beginning with their deliverance from Babylonian exile (Isa. 48).

ISAIAH 46:3-13

3 “Listen to me, house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been sustained from the womb, carried along since birth. **4** I will be the same until your old age, and I will bear you up when you turn gray. I have made you, and I will carry you; I will bear and rescue you. **5** “Who will you compare me or make me equal to? Who will you measure me with, so that we should be like each other? **6** Those who pour out their bags of gold and weigh out silver on scales — they hire a goldsmith and he makes it into a god. Then they kneel and **bow down to it** . **7** They lift it to their shoulder and bear it along; they set it in its place, and there it stands; it does not budge from its place. They cry out to it but it doesn’t **answer** ; it **saves**  no one from his trouble. **8** “**Remember**  this and be brave; take it to heart, you transgressors! **9** Remember what happened long ago, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and no one is like me. **10** I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: my plan will take place, and I will do all my will. **11** I call a bird of prey from the east, a man for my purpose from a far country. Yes, I have spoken; so I will also bring it about. I have planned it; I will also do it. **12** Listen to me, you **hardhearted** , far removed from justice: **13** I am bringing my justice near; it is not far away, and my salvation will not delay. I will put salvation in Zion, my splendor in Israel.”

Passage Outline

The True God
(Isa. 46:3-7)

The Trustworthy One
(Isa. 46:8-11)

The Just One
(Isa. 46:12-13)

Key Words

- A. In Exodus 20:3, God made it clear that His followers were only to worship Him: “Do not have other gods besides me.”
- B. Unlike Almighty God, a man-made idol has no power or authority to answer when a worshiper calls out to it (Ps. 4:1). God promises to respond to those who believe in Him (Jer. 29:12).
- C. The basic meaning of the word is one who is delivered from great distress so that the person is set free. “God is our salvation” (Ps. 68:19).
- D. As wise people ponder past experiences, their future decision-making will be transformed. God “remembered” His promise to Israel (Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:44-45).
- E. Those who may be mighty and strong but oppose God (Lam. 1:15)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

In verses 1-2, we find the beginnings of a contrast between Bel and Nebo—two of the main Babylonian gods—with the Lord. The Lord stated He would determine the future of Bel and Nebo. They would be defeated and carried away as spoils of war. In contrast to these weak and conquered gods, the Lord had shown Himself strong for His people. He exhorted them to listen to Him as He reminded them that even before their existence as a nation, He had sustained Israel or “put them on His back” and *carried* them.

How might we describe the difference between idols that are carried and God carrying His people? How does God carry His people today?

In verses 5-7, the Lord mocked the idols of Babylon along with the craftsmen who made them. In verse 5, He began with rhetorical questions asking who can compare to Him. In verses 6-7, He derisively concluded that certainly those who hired skilled workers to make the idols, the artisans who actually crafted the idols, and the idols themselves did not compare.

What promises are offered by the man-made gods of today? How do these man-made gods compare to the one true God?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize Scripture.

Seek to memorize Isaiah 46:4.

Review each phrase, identifying ways you have seen this true in your life and the lives of others. Reflect on the impact this passage may have on believers as they contemplate God’s faithful care and salvation.

The Lord told His audience to *remember this*. To what does this refer? It refers to *what happened long ago*, all the magnificent things God had done for them. If they would listen to this command, they would know that Yahweh was the only One who was trustworthy.

These verses describe what the incomparable God is able to do. First, He foretells events before they happen. He knows what is going to happen ahead of time, and the Lord revealed the future through His prophets. Second, the Lord accomplishes what He plans to do. The past, present, and future all proceed according to God’s purposes.

How should God’s omniscience and sovereignty over all of history be a source of strength and hope for believers today?

God promised to bring His *justice* near to them, declaring that it was *not far away* and His *salvation* would come quickly. Salvation would come at God’s initiative, by His mercy and grace. The people would not do anything to deserve it. It would be the Lord’s righteousness and the Lord’s work of salvation, and it would be for His *splendor in Israel*.

How should the mercy and grace God shows hardhearted rebels against Him affect how believers relate to God, other believers, and unbelievers?

KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

APPLY THE TEXT

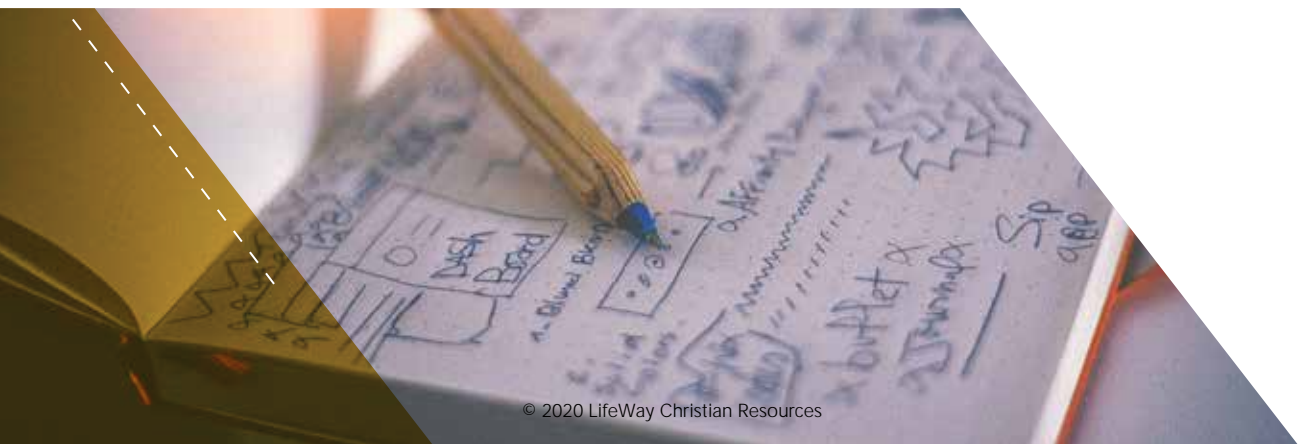
- The one true God is able to save His people.
- The one true God continues to demonstrate His power and trustworthiness.
- The one true God provides His eternal plan of salvation for His people.

Discuss as a group ways of sharing the truths found in this passage to help people understand their need for Jesus. With whom can you share the truth about idols and any item that gets in the way of worshiping God? How can you use the truths from this passage to help them understand the need for trusting Jesus alone for salvation?

In what areas of your life are you in need of God's assurance? How does this passage give you assurance in those areas? Thank God for being faithful to His plans.

Examine your life, looking for places where you are hardhearted and unwilling to trust God. What actions do you need to take as expressions of faith in God?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God faithfully cares for His people.

Read Isaiah 46:3-4, considering God's role as He cares for His people.

There comes a point when parents can no longer carry their children. However, the Lord promised that His tender loving care for His children not only began before they were born but that it would also continue through their infancy, their childhood, their adulthood, on through their old age when their hair turns gray. They would never become a burden to Him. His arms would never tire. He made them. He would carry them as His load, lift them up, bear them, and in doing so rescue them from the Babylonian captivity in which they would find themselves. The Babylonian gods would be unable to come to the rescue of those who worshiped them much less save them from going into captivity. However, the Lord would faithfully care for His people and save them.

How might you describe the difference between idols that are carried and God carrying His people? How does God carry you today?

Day 2: Nothing compares to God.

Read Isaiah 46:5-7, noticing the length to which people will go to create idols.

The Lord's four rhetorical questions in verse 5 served as declarations. In Hebrew, normally a three-fold repetition of the same idea is the way to express superlative emphases, the most or utmost. The use of four statements was the Lord's way of saying His incomparability is even beyond that. Just as it is impossible for people to comprehend the idea of thinking of something greater than the greatest thing they are capable of imagining, it is impossible to compare anything to the incomparable eternal God.

In verses 6-7 the Lord mockingly proposed three possible contenders who could have compared to Him. The first candidates are those who poured out their gold and silver to have idols made. As the worshipers knelt and bowed down before these gods, they believed they were in the actual presence of the god. They worshiped the thing that they just paid an enormous amount of money to have made. Verse 7 points out these lifeless idols could not move, so their devotees had to lift them on their shoulders and carry them. Otherwise, an idol just stood in its appointed place in its temple doing nothing. Its powerlessness to move on its own shows its inability to do anything for anyone. These realities stood in strong contrast to Yahweh. While He chose to make His presence known at the temple in Jerusalem, He is everywhere.

What promises are offered by the man-made gods of today? How do these man-made gods compare to the one true God?

Day 3: God's people must remember how He has cared for them.

Read Isaiah 46:8-9, remembering what God has done for you.

If the people would just think about the impotence of the idols and remember what God had done for Israel even before its existence, it would strengthen their faith and give them a proper perspective. The Scriptures clearly teach the importance of God's people remembering what He has said and done. Moses told the Israelites to remember how God led them and provided for them for forty years in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2). God instructed the Israelites to set up memorial stones to remind the people of His faithfulness (Josh. 4:21-22). The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a memorial of what God did to save Israel from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 13:1-8), just as the Lord's Supper is a memorial of what Jesus did to save us from bondage to sin (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

God called them *transgressors* because they deliberately disobeyed God and were willfully unfaithful to Yahweh by worshiping idols. *Take it to heart* means the people needed to seriously consider all that God had done. God commanded them to do what David did, remembering God's works and reflecting on them. (See Ps. 77:11-15.) If only the people in Isaiah's day would have listened and done what David did! God told them that if they truly remembered what He had done for them in the past, then like David, they would have recognized what the Lord emphatically stated. Certainly, He is God, there is no other, and no one is like Him.

How has God demonstrated His trustworthiness to you?

Day 4: God has a plan.

Read Isaiah 46:10-11, underlining verse 10.

The Lord has a plan, and He will carry out all of it down to its finest detail. God is not figuring things out as He goes, and He does not act on a whim. God is sovereign. He will do whatever is His pleasure, and no one can thwart Him.

In verse 11, God provided evidence of His sovereignty and part of His plan to use King Cyrus of Persia. God would cause Cyrus to come and conquer the Babylonians. He would be God's instrument of judgment and carry out what Yahweh intended, His *purpose*. Cyrus would swiftly fly in like a *bird of prey* and defeat his enemies. The Lord concluded this verse with two parallel statements for emphasis: *I have spoken* and *I have planned it*. Both statements confirmed God's established will, and the statements *I will also bring it about* and *I will also do it* were emphatic ways of saying "You can count on Me to do it!"

How is God's omniscience and sovereignty over all of history a source of strength and hope for you?

Day 5: God shows mercy.

Read Isaiah 46:12-13, noting God's plan for justice.

The Lord called them *hardhearted* and commanded them to *listen* to Him. To call them *hardhearted* was to say they were callous, resistant, stubborn, and unreceptive to God's Word. To be *far removed from justice* means they were unrighteous, that is, unbelievers. Those who are far from justice or righteousness are those who are far from being justified or righteous before God. Nevertheless, God demonstrated His mercy by calling them to listen and by communicating His Word to them. The kindness God showed these sinners by even speaking to them one more time is incomprehensible. God then promised to bring His *justice* near to them. Salvation would come at God's initiative, by His mercy and grace. The people would not do anything to deserve it. These words to Israel are similar to words the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans as he reminded them that salvation was near and was available to those who confessed and believed in Jesus. (See Rom. 10:8-9.)

How does the mercy and grace God shows hardhearted rebels against Him affect how you relate to God, other believers, and unbelievers?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 46, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Why is it important for believers to heed Isaiah's warnings today? Explain.

How does remembering what God has already done build trust in Him?

How does God's form of justice affirm His graciousness?



For additional context, read "Idols: From Production to Veneration" in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Comforts

The one true God is compassionate; He comforts His people.

ISAIAH 49:1-13



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would do on the cross.
5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
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cation in spite of our many sins. What



What or who gives you comfort when you are facing a seemingly impossible situation? How does that item or person give you comfort?

Some things in life seem impossible. A doctor's diagnosis, the emotions of an ended relationship, or being called into the boss's office can make us feel like there is no tomorrow. The people of Israel faced the seemingly impossible in the form of conquering armies, guilt of moral failure, and God's judgment for their disobedience. Isaiah reminded them that God was preparing the way for His Servant. Through this Servant, He would accomplish His purposes and reward those who faithfully serve Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah included four Servant Songs in his prophecy. Although Bible scholars sometimes disagree on the precise number of verses included in the Servant Songs, Isaiah 49:1-13 contains the second Servant Song.

God chose Abraham and his descendants to be a blessing to the nations. The Servant's identification with Israel in Isaiah 49:3 indicates He was Abraham's chosen seed who would not only fulfill Israel's purpose to be a blessing to the nations but who also would restore Israel back to Yahweh. He would mediate a new covenant with Israel. The Servant would accomplish what Israel had failed to do. He would be despised but God would vindicate Him. World leaders would bow before Him in recognition of who He is. In Acts 3:13, the apostle Peter identified the Servant as Jesus.

Isaiah 49:14-50:3 indicates the Servant's work would have a significant impact on Zion (Jerusalem) and the people of Israel.

The city's inhabitants felt like the Lord had forsaken them. The Lord responded by declaring He had more compassion for Israel than a mother nursing her child. God had not abandoned His people, and He would not leave them in exile. Using foreigners, God would defeat their oppressors and bring many of His people back to Zion.

In the third Servant Song (Isa. 50:4-11), the Servant proclaimed that He was taught how to encourage the weary. Though He endured severe opposition and mistreatment, He was resolved to obey God, knowing that one day God would vindicate Him before His enemies. The Servant's instruction to the people of God was to remain faithful and trust the Lord. Those who failed to do so would suffer God's judgment.

ISAIAH 49:1-13

1 Coasts and islands, listen to me; distant peoples, pay attention. The LORD called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother's womb. **2** He made my words like a sharp sword; he hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me like a sharpened arrow; he hid me in his quiver. **3** He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." **4** But I myself said: I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and futility; yet my vindication is with the LORD, and my reward is with my God. **5** And now, says the LORD, who **formed** **A** me from the womb to be his servant, to bring **Jacob** **B** back to him so that Israel might be gathered to him; for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God is my strength — **6** he says, "It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and **restoring** **C** the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth." **7** This is what the LORD, the **Redeemer** **D** of Israel, his Holy One, says to one who is despised, to one abhorred by people, to a servant of rulers: "Kings will see, princes will stand up, and they will all bow down because of the LORD, who is **faithful** **E**, the Holy One of Israel—and he has chosen you." **8** This is what the LORD says: I will answer you in a time of favor, and I will help you in the day of salvation. I will keep you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land, to make them possess the desolate inheritances, **9** saying to the prisoners: Come out, and to those who are in darkness: Show yourselves. They will feed along the pathways, and their pastures will be on all the barren heights. **10** They will not hunger or thirst, the scorching heat or sun will not strike them; for their compassionate one will guide them, and lead them to springs. **11** I will make all my mountains into a road, and my highways will be raised up. **12** See, these will come from far away, from the north and from the west, and from the land of **Sinim** **F**. **13** Shout for joy, you heavens! Earth, rejoice! Mountains break into joyful shouts! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

Passage Outline

Included (Isa. 49:1-4)

Called (Isa. 49:5-7)

Vindicated (Isa. 49:8-13)

Key Words

- A. The Lord formed man (Gen. 2:7-8), like the potter who forms the clay (Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:2-6).
- B. The people of God who descended from Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah and the brother of Esau
- C. As the good shepherd restores his sheep (Ps. 23:3), God was calling His people to return to Him.
- D. Leviticus 25:23-55 provides the basis for redemption by the Redeemer (also see Ruth 4).
- E. God "keeps his promises" (GNT). He's certain to follow through. Moses and Samuel were faithful servants (Num. 12:7; 1 Sam. 3).
- F. The land where God promised to gather the Babylonian exiles; some believe this to be modern-day China.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Whenever Old Testament writers used the word *peoples*, they were referring to the nations. Thus, this message was universal, addressed to everyone everywhere. The command was for the peoples to *listen to me*. The insistence for the people to listen is common among the prophets and reveals that the Servant was a prophet. His gospel would reach those both far and near. Everyone would have to respond one way or another to His message. Furthermore, as the Servant carried out His mission, He would be secure in the hand of His heavenly Father, and the Lord would protect and keep the Servant hidden like arrows in a *quiver* until it was time for the Servant to reveal Himself. Verse 4 reveals the Servant would be rejected and would not see a great response to His message.

How can knowing that God vindicates His children help believers learn to trust Him with the results and timing?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar passages.* Compare Isaiah chapter 40 and chapter 49. Make a list of the promises of chapter 40 and similar phrases in chapter 49. How will the servant of the Lord fulfill God's plan to comfort His people? Look up 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2. What connections do you see between this passage and Isaiah 40 and 49? Note them in your list. How do Jesus' actions as the Servant of the Lord apply to believers today?

Whatever discouragement there was that tempted the Servant, it quickly dissipated with the knowledge that God had prepared Him for His mission from the very beginning. God told the Servant it was not glorious enough for the Servant to restore Israel alone. What would bring God the greatest glory would be the salvation of people from every nation. Initially, people would despise and abhor the Servant. Furthermore, this chosen Servant of the Lord would submit Himself before human rulers. Jesus did this before Pilate and Herod (John 18:33-37; Luke 23:6-12). However, the day will come when the kings and princes of this world will recognize the Servant for who He is and bow before Him because He is God's *chosen One*.

What role does today's believer play as a bearer of the light, one who carries the message of the gospel? How does that role relate to the work done by the Servant?

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. All of the covenant promises and blessings are embodied in Him. Consequently, union with God comes only through Christ for the Israelite and Gentile alike.

Define the rejoicing experienced by a person who trusts in Jesus for salvation. How is the Servant (Jesus) honored through our rejoicing in the salvation He provides?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things* God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end (Heb. 9:27-28).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can find comfort in knowing that God includes them in His redemptive plans.
- Believers are called upon to compassionately deliver the message of God's salvation to all people.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God will vindicate them.

Discuss as a group the comfort found by those who know God has included them in His plan of salvation. How can your group help others discover this truth? List actions to be taken by the group.

How can you demonstrate your thankfulness for God's salvation? Reflect on ways you rejoice in God's salvation. How does rejoicing in His salvation give you comfort?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Believers should listen to God.

Read Isaiah 49:1, underlining the phrase, “listen to me.”

The expression, *listen to me*, is unique to the Book of Isaiah, and only the Lord used this phrase as He addressed the people. What does this reveal about the Servant? The Servant was going to proceed by revealing what God planned for Him to do. He began with how God called Him. Just as God spoke to Abraham and called Israel to be a blessing to the nations before Israel was a nation, the Lord also called the Servant for a specific task. Moreover, since Yahweh issued the commission, the Servant came at God's bidding with divine authority to do God's will. Consequently, the command to listen to Him is as authoritative as was God the Father's command concerning Jesus when He said, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (Mark 9:7).

Consider a time when you should have listened to God, but chose not to. How might the outcome have been different if you had chosen to wait and listen for His guidance?

Day 2: Jesus was God's Servant.

Read Isaiah 49:2-3, considering what was determined before the Servant was born.

Verse 3 needs to be understood in light of the immediate context and in the context of all of Scripture. In verses 5-6, the Servant would “bring Jacob back” to Yahweh “so that Israel might be gathered to him.” He would raise up “the tribes of Jacob” (Israel) and restore “the protected ones of Israel.” Clearly, the Servant, an individual, was doing these things for Israel. It was not Israel doing them for itself. In Isaiah 50:5, the Servant said “I was not rebellious,” and 53:9 indicates the Servant would suffer and die even though “he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.” These descriptions certainly do not pertain to Israel. Isaiah realized that Israel as a people could not accomplish what was needed for the salvation of the nations, let alone their own salvation. So why did God call His Servant (Jesus) *Israel*? First, He did it to reveal the Servant was a descendant of Abraham. God's promise to use Abraham to bless the nations was fulfilled in Jesus. Paul wrote that God's “purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:14). Second, God called Jesus Israel because He was the ideal Israel. The Servant would succeed and embody in perfect obedience what Israel as a nation had miserably failed to do. He would be everything they should have been. In Hebrew, verse 3 has a strong grammatical break between *You are my servant* and *Israel*. Therefore, it could be read, “You are my servant; Israel, in you I will glorify myself.” God used Israel as an instrument of blessing to bring forth His Son, the Servant of the Lord, who would glorify His heavenly Father in His work of salvation.

What conclusions can we draw from these verses regarding the Servant's identity?

Day 3: God would ensure that His Servant would accomplish God's will.

Read Isaiah 49:4, considering in whom the Servant had confidence.

John wrote of Jesus: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). At times, it would appear He *labored in vain*. He suffered ridicule and abuse, and poured out His life for His people. In the end, one of His disciples betrayed Him and only one stood at the cross while the rest abandoned Him. Nevertheless, the word *yet* indicates a strong contrast because the Servant knew the Lord would vindicate Him and ensure that the Servant would completely accomplish all His Father sent Him to do. The Servant's confidence was in His heavenly Father, and the Servant would trust His Father with the results.

How can knowing that God vindicates His children help you learn to trust Him with the results and timing?

Day 4: Jesus is the light for all nations.

Read Isaiah 49:5-7, highlighting "I will make you a light for the nations."

The task that looked like it would defeat the Servant was what God had prepared Him for—to bring Jacob back. Even though Israel had abandoned the Lord, God would not abandon them. Therefore, God sent His servant to go get them and restore them. It was to be much more than just a mere rescue from Babylonian exile. It was to be a spiritual deliverance. Like a shepherd, the Servant would go, gather them, and bring them back to God. God told the Servant He would make the Servant a light for the nations, to be God's salvation to the ends of the earth. With this purpose in mind, the Servant would fulfill God's promise to Abraham and his offspring to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). The salvation of people from every nation always was and still is God's purpose. In the New Testament, believers are identified as bearers of the light and given the responsibility of sharing that light with others (Matt. 5:14-16). We are called on to share Christ with all, pointing them to the comfort found in the Servant.

What role do you play as a bearer of the light, one who carries the message of the gospel? How is our role an extension of the work done by the Servant?

Day 5: Jesus provides salvation for all.

Read Isaiah 49:8-13, noting what God will provide.

Verses 9-12 paint a picture of the Lord's blessing on His restored people. Like a shepherd, He would feed His people in secure places, protected from hunger, thirst, and sweltering heat. With compassion, He would lead them to springs of water. He would transform their obstacles into clear paths. The return of the exiles from Babylon would foreshadow this much greater event in the future when people of every nationality will experience the blessings of provision, protection, and compassionate guidance that come with the Lord's salvation. Isaiah concluded this Servant Song with a call for the heavens, the earth, and the mountains to rejoice in the Lord's salvation of His people. The phrase, his people, refers not only to physical descendants of Abraham but also to all whom the Lord will graciously save through their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God will save those who are afflicted by sin and struggle in darkness, and those who deserved God's judgment will experience His compassion.

Define the rejoicing experienced by a person who trusts in Jesus for salvation. How is the Servant (Jesus) honored through your rejoicing in the salvation He provides?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 49, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Explore the implication of being a servant of the Lord as applied to believers today.

In what practical ways can we be a light to others?

How do these verses speak to the immediate and future restoration of God's people?



For additional context, read "God as 'Redeemer' in Isaiah" in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

God Justifies

The one true God is forgiving; He justifies believers by taking their sin on Himself.

ISAIAH 53:1-12



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...5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
...but drastically different effect. One o
...manity into ruin, but God gave the gift t
...cation in spite of our many sins. What

**How do you celebrate the sacrifice others have made for you?
How does their sacrifice impact you today?**

We honor parents who work multiple jobs to provide a brighter future for their children. We place the names of public servants who died while on duty on bridges and buildings. We commemorate the sacrifice paid by soldiers who fought and died in battle. Most of us willfully celebrate the sacrifices made by a person for the benefit of others. Isaiah told of a Servant who would come for the purpose of paying for our sin so that we could have peace with God. Through faith in the sacrificing Servant, we find forgiveness and restoration.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah delivered a message of hope and encouragement that focused on God's deliverance of His people. He began with an exhortation for the faithful to remember how God used Abraham and his barren wife Sarah to do what appeared impossible and bring forth the nation of Israel in fulfillment of His promise to them. In the same way, God promised the people in Isaiah's day that He would restore the ruins of Jerusalem and fill it once again with joy, thanksgiving, and melodious song. God's salvation would also extend to the nations (Isa. 51:1–52:12).

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 contains the last of the four Servant Songs in Isaiah. This song elaborates on the themes of the Servant's suffering and vindication, providing a detailed description of the Messiah's suffering. Isaiah begins with a promise of His ultimate triumph, as He will cleanse many people. In spite of this, the song reveals the people of God would reject the Servant because of His humble beginnings

and unimpressive appearance. When the Servant suffered, the people would think God was inflicting judgment on Him because of His own sins. In truth, He would be suffering for their benefit as their substitute, bearing God's judgment for their sins and paying the price for their sins. Nevertheless, the Servant of the Lord would rise again to see the reward of His sacrifice.

Because of the Servant, Jerusalem had a bright future. God would protect it and bless it with beauty, peace, and righteousness (54:1–15). The Lord desired an eternal covenant with the nation like the one He made with David. If the people would seek the Lord and turn from their wicked ways, He would compassionately forgive their sins. On the contrary, judgment awaited those who opposed God and persecuted His people. Only those who repent and turn to God, whether Israelite or foreigner, would be part of this future community of faith (55:1–57:21).

ISAIAH 53:1-12

1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been **revealed** **A**? **2** He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. **3** He was **despised and rejected** **B** by men, a man of suffering who **knew what sickness was** **C**. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him. **4** Yet he himself **bore our sicknesses** **D**, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, **struck down** **E** by God, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are **healed by his wounds** **F**. **6** We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all. **7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. **8** He was taken away because of oppression and judgment; and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people's rebellion. **9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully. **10** Yet the LORD was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his **seed** **G**, he will **prolong his days** **H**, and by his hand, the LORD's pleasure will be accomplished. **11** After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities. **12** Therefore I will give him the many as a portion, and he will receive the mighty as spoil, because he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.

Passage Outline

- Despised (Isa. 53:1-3)
- Substitute (Isa. 53:4-6)
- Willing (Isa. 53:7-9)
- Sacrificed (Isa. 53:10-12)

Key Words

- A. "Who could have seen the Lord's hand in this?" (GNT)
- B. Despising the Lord means breaking covenant with Him (Ezek. 16:59).
- C. The Servant was "familiar with pain" (NIV) and "acquainted with deepest grief" (NLT).
- D. The scapegoat bore the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:22); the Lord takes away sin (Num. 14:18).
- E. "A punishment from God" (NLT). Moses was to strike the water so that it became blood (Ex. 7:17); David struck Goliath with a rock (1 Sam. 17:49).
- F. "Made whole by the blows he received" (GNT).
- G. Meaning Jesus' posterity—those who become children of God through Him
- H. This foreshadows Jesus' resurrection to unending life.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah was articulating the general unbelief in the world and in Israel in particular concerning the revelation of the Servant. This Servant of whom Isaiah spoke is Jesus. Isaiah spoke of the future in the past tense. The New Testament clearly teaches Jesus is the fulfillment of this song. In verse 3 Isaiah described how people viewed the Servant. They wanted nothing to do with Him and abandoned Him. Many considered Him contemptible and disgusting and consequently rejected Him.

DID YOU KNOW?: Isaiah 53 is quoted or referred to in 41 verses in the New Testament. New Testament writers identified the servant of Isaiah 53 as Jesus of Nazareth. (See, for example, Acts 8:30-35.)

Verses 4-6 are central to the song. They focus on how the Servant offered Himself as a substitute for others by taking the full penalty of God's judgment of their sin on Himself. The Servant did not become sinful like us but suffered the punishment we deserve.

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son Jesus honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

What single phrase stands out to you the most in verses 4-6? Explain.

Even though He was mistreated with physical violence, Isaiah emphasized the Servant

quietly and willingly submitted Himself to His antagonists. He not only felt the excruciating physical pain of it all, but before and during what He experienced He fully understood and experienced the emotional and mental anguish of it.

How does the willingness of the Servant demonstrate His love for people?

How does it demonstrate His love for the Father?

Verse 10 reveals God Himself not only caused the Servant to suffer but was the One who inflicted the suffering on the Servant. What the Servant accomplished was exactly what needed to be done to make restitution to God for our sins. Isaiah revealed the Servant would live again and see the rewards of His accomplishment—many spiritual children and God's pleasure.

How does the cost paid by Jesus to secure salvation for all who place faith in Him support the idea that there is no other way to the Father? How does what the Servant did for you strengthen your love and commitment to Him?

This Servant Song concludes with God's declaration that He would honor and reward the Servant when He accomplished the work of salvation.

What impact should knowing that the Servant intercedes for those He has saved have on believers?

APPLY THE TEXT

- The Servant faced rejection to secure our salvation.
- The Servant bore our sin, taking the judgment in our place.
- The Servant willingly paid the price for our sin.
- The Servant provides salvation to all who accept His sacrifice.

Memorize Isaiah 53:5. Compare various translations to gain a deeper understanding of each phrase. How is this verse central to understanding the gospel?

Share about your spiritual pilgrimage. How did you come to know of your need for a Savior? What was your response to Jesus' offer of salvation? With whom can you share your story?

If you have not trusted Jesus, review the information on the inside front cover and visit with your Bible study leader.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Jesus was sinless, but identified with sinners.

Read Isaiah 53:1-3, considering what it means for Jesus to face rejection.

In Hebrew, a *young plant* refers to a shoot that grew and was usually cut off from the roots of an established tree. It may be a reference to Isaiah 11:10 that speaks of the Messiah coming from the “root of Jesse” and was thus a descendant of David. In the context, it points to His unimpressive appearance. The description, *a root out of dry ground*, emphasizes His frail appearance, His poor family background, and His struggles. The Servant did not fit the stereotype of a savior for His people. Pain and suffering were distinctive characteristics of His life, and it was so bad that people did not want to look at Him. *Sickness* refers to the consequences of sin as made clear in verse 4. Therefore, the Servant knew what it is like to live in a fallen world. The gospels speak of these things. Jesus was sinless but pitched His tent among us (John 1:14). He identified with sinners. He knew what it was to live in a fallen world. His people rejected Him (John 1:11-13) and His family thought He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21). When soldiers arrested Jesus, His disciples deserted Him (Mark 14:50), and one of His inner circle publicly denied Him (John 18:15-18,25-27). On top of all these rejections was the ongoing hostility of the political and religious leaders of His day, along with the fickle crowds.

How does knowing the Servant faced being despised and rejected comfort you?

Day 2: Jesus suffered the punishment we deserve.

Read Isaiah 53:4-6, noticing the great burden Jesus took on.

The Servant was *pierced*, a verb used in the context of someone being killed. *Crushed* refers to oppression or a crushing that is fatal. *Punishment* refers to discipline or corrective reproof. *Wounds* refers to open bruises. Jesus incurred these from His beating (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1). The Servant endured all of these things because of our *rebellion* and *iniquities* against God. As our substitute, the Servant bore the punishment we deserve. The Servant suffered these things for *our peace* and healing. Because of our sins, God was not at peace with us. However, through His vicarious punishment, the Servant secured our peace with God. In addition to this, the Servant’s wounds healed us in that by His suffering, our relationship with God was restored and we are made whole. The phrase *we all have turned* points out the willfulness of our sin. There was nothing accidental about it. We chose to go our own way. Even so, the Lord *punished* His Servant *for the iniquity of us all*. The Servant did not become sinful like us but suffered the punishment we deserve.

What single phrase stands out to you the most in verses 4-6? Explain.

Day 3: Jesus willingly submitted Himself.

Read Isaiah 53:7-9, underlining verse 7.

Even though He was mistreated with physical violence, like sheep going to *slaughter* or to the *shearers*, Isaiah emphasized the Servant quietly and willingly submitted Himself to His antagonists. Sheep do not realize what is about to happen to them, but the Servant knew and submitted to everything that was going to happen to Him. He not only felt the excruciating physical pain of it all, but before and during what He experienced He fully understood and experienced the emotional and mental anguish of it. *For he was cut off from the land of the living* means He died. The word *pierced* in verse 5 indicates His enemies killed Him. Why did the Servant submit to this death? Isaiah wanted everyone to understand the Servant died as a substitute for the transgressions of His people. Verse 9 speaks of the Servant's burial. His executioners dishonored and disgraced Him by treating Him like a criminal. Nevertheless, the Servant was given an honorable burial after His dishonorable death. Matthew is the only one to mention that Joseph of Arimathaea was *rich* (Matt. 27:57). Jesus' body would have most likely been buried along with the bodies of the two criminals who died alongside Him. However, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus ensured Jesus received an honorable burial (John 19:31-39).

How does the willingness of the Servant demonstrate His love for people?

How does it demonstrate His love for the Father?

Day 4: Jesus was our substitution.

Read Isaiah 53:10-11, understanding that it was God's plan for Jesus to die for our sins.

The Servant was the only sacrifice acceptable to God, and the Servant's suffering and death provided the necessary sacrifice for salvation. A *guilt offering* was about restitution, paying what needed to be paid for an offense. What the Servant accomplished was exactly what needed to be done to make restitution to God for our sins. Isaiah revealed the Servant would live again and see the rewards of His accomplishment—many spiritual children and God's pleasure. The Servant would know exactly what He needed to do to *justify many*. He would bear their sins so they might stand righteous before God. Everything is dependent on the righteous Servant's substitutionary work and the faith of those who believe in Him.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary to examine a term. Review articles about substitutionary atonement in a Bible dictionary. Read the Bible passages included in the article. How do the passages examined give you deeper understanding into Isaiah 53? Write a summary statement of how you would explain Jesus' substitutionary atonement.

How does what the Servant did for you strengthen your love and commitment to Him?

Day 5: Jesus intercedes for us.

Read Isaiah 53:12, noting God's promise to Jesus.

Having defeated sin and death, the Servant would enjoy the spoils of war because He *willingly submitted to death*. Jesus said, “This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own” (John 10:17-18a). Additionally, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of being *counted among the rebels* when He was crucified between two criminals (Mark 15:27; Luke 22:37). God promised to exalt the Servant because of His willingness to bear *the sin of many*, and now as their mediator He intercedes for them to God (Rom. 8:34).

As a believer, what impact should knowing that the Servant intercedes for those He has saved have on you?



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 53, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

For what reasons or purpose did the Servant suffer?

How does the Servant model what willful service to God looks like?

What does it mean to be justified? Explain its significance to the Christian faith.



For additional context, read “The Early Church’s Use of Isaiah 53,” an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Fall 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.

God Expects

The one true God is just; He expects His people to demonstrate their faith through right living.

ISAIAH 58:1-12



Why are people so upset with the hypocrisies of others and yet so seemingly blind to their own hypocrisies?

We laugh when a friend tells us to drive at the speed limit when we know he rarely does. We may give a puzzled look when a sister who rarely helps clean up after a meal directs others to do so. We might even be angered if our neighbor tells us how to mow our grass yet his yard is the least kept on the block. We know hypocrisy when we see it. Yet being hypocritical is one thing humans have in common, one way or another. The prophet Isaiah revealed God is always consistent and does not put up with spiritual hypocrisy in His people.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

This section begins with God's condemnation of Israel's hypocrisy. The Lord saw through the veneer of false piety and recognized meaningless rituals. None of these meant anything when accompanied by insincerity. Religious formalism is as offensive to God as idolatry. Fasting that pleases God involves emulating the character of God in one's life. Therefore, God told the people of Israel they needed to help those who could not help themselves. Only then would God respond to their prayers (Isa. 58:1-12). Additionally, the people disregarded the Lord on the Sabbath and did whatever they wanted. If His people would honor Him and delight in Him, then they would receive His blessings (58:13-14).

God was able and more than willing to save Israel. God was not the problem. What separated the people of Israel from God was their constant rebellion and sin. The Lord would not tolerate their violence, bloodshed, dishonesty, and injustice. They

were constantly thinking of ways to sin. No matter how much they tried, they could not hide their sin from God. Isaiah acknowledged God's indictment of Israel and lamented their depraved condition. He humbly confessed how the nation rebelled against God and harmed their neighbors. In response to Isaiah's confession, God promised to repay the nations for their offenses against His people and would come to them as their Redeemer and save them. He would put His Spirit on them and His words in their mouth as an eternal covenant with His people (59:1-21).

In the future, Israel would become a light to the nations and a blessing to the nations, just as God promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). The nations would use their resources to help rebuild Zion as an expression of God's compassion and justice. The Lord would be Jerusalem's everlasting light, peace, and salvation. Its inhabitants would be righteous and possess the land forever (60:1-22).

ISAIAH 58:1-12

1 “Cry out loudly, don’t hold back! Raise your **voice** **A** like a trumpet. Tell my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins. **2** They **seek** **B** me day after day and delight to know my **ways** **C**, like a nation that does what is right and does not abandon the justice of their God. They ask me for righteous judgments; they delight in the nearness of God.” **3** “Why have we fasted, but you have not seen? We have denied ourselves, but you haven’t noticed!” “Look, you do as you please on the day of your fast, and oppress all your workers. **4** You fast with contention and strife to strike viciously with your fist. You cannot fast as you do today, hoping to make your voice heard on high. **5** Will the **fast** **D** I choose be like this: A day for a person to deny himself, to bow his head like a reed, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the LORD? **6** Isn’t this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? **7** Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless **into your house** **E**, to clothe the naked when you see him, and **not to ignore your own flesh and blood** **F**? **8** Then your light will appear like the dawn, and your recovery will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the LORD’s glory will be your rear guard. **9** At that time, when you call, the LORD will answer; when you cry out, he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you get rid of the yoke among you, the finger-pointing and malicious speaking, **10** and if you offer yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted one, then your light will shine in the darkness, and your night will be like noonday. **11** The LORD will always lead you, satisfy you in a parched land, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden and like a spring whose water never runs dry. **12** Some of you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore the foundations laid long ago; you will be called the repairer of broken walls, the restorer of streets where people live.

Passage Outline

True State
(Isa. 58:1-5)

True Worship
(Isa. 58:6-10)

True Satisfaction
(Isa. 58:11-12)

Key Words

- A. When used of the Lord, His voice is prophetic, covenantal, and thunderous.
- B. The children of Israel went to Moses to seek understanding from the Lord about difficult issues (Ex. 18:15).
- C. Abraham’s servant praised the Lord for making his way successful (Gen. 24:21).
- D. There are several religious reasons why people prayerfully choose to abstain from food: (1) grief; (2) a critical decision; (3) a time of crisis; (4) religious ceremony.
- E. Biblical hospitality means sharing what we have with willing hearts. (See Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:8-10.)
- F. Despite her husband’s death, Ruth committed to staying with her mother-in-law, Naomi.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The way for God's people to be reconciled to Him is by true repentance and renewed faithfulness. The people looked like they were devoted to the Lord. In reality, they were unrighteous and had abandoned the Lord's compassionate ways of justice. They acted like a godly nation when in actuality they were not a godly nation. The people complained because God did not appear to pay attention to their fasting. They fasted, hoping God would do something for them, but He did nothing. In verse 4, God reiterated that the people's behavior did not correspond to what fasting should have involved. All that their fasting really accomplished was to make them irritable and contentious with others. They failed to understand that their relationship with God and their relationship with others were related. In verse 5, God used rhetorical questions to show the people they really had no concept of who God is if they thought He would be pleased with their actions.

Why are insincere acts of worship offensive to God? How does ritual worship apart from obedience leave worshipers empty and disillusioned?

DID YOU KNOW?: The Bible depicts three forms of fasting. A normal fast consisted of totally refraining from food (Luke 4:1-2). An absolute fast involved abstinence from both food and water, lasting no more than three days (Ezra 10:6; Esth. 4:16; Acts 9:8-9). A partial fast entailed a restricted diet instead of total abstinence (Dan. 1:8-16; 10:3).

Isaiah presented more rhetorical questions, but these are emphatic statements meant to communicate what is acceptable fasting to God. True fasting involves opposing any wrongdoing that oppresses and abuses others. It not only means liberating others from bondage but also doing what it takes to ensure the oppression never happens again.

KEY DOCTRINE: Christian and Social Order We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick (Matt. 25:35-40).

If the people's fasting looked like what God just described, then they would be a light shining forth for others to see. Their exemplary acts would reflect well on them and glorify God. Moreover, the undesirable consequences of their sin would come to a quick end.

If there is such tremendous blessing when people obey God, then why are people so reluctant to do so?

Isaiah explained that God would lead, satisfy, and strengthen His obedient people; these were the ones who would enjoy God's blessings.

How do these verses demonstrate how God can change a life or situation in ruin into something beautiful?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Ritual worship apart from obedience displeases God and ultimately leaves worshipers empty and disillusioned.
- Meeting the needs of others in obedience to God brings honor to God.
- Satisfaction comes to those who obediently follow God.

As a group, identify needs in your community. Which need can your group meet? Record the next action steps required for your group to meet that identified need.

Identify roadblocks you face when it comes to being fully obedient to God. What joys are you missing by not being fully obedient? How can knowing the potential joys help you overcome the roadblocks you identified?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God desires to show mercy to sinners.

Read Isaiah 58:1-2, understanding what God is asking the people to do.

God was able and willing to forgive and restore those who had strayed from Him. His desire was for them to repent by turning away from their sin and turning back to Him. Note that He referred to them as my people, indicating His covenant relationship with them is still in place. Therefore, it was imperative that Israel hear Isaiah as he proclaimed God's message. God told Isaiah to cry out loudly and not to hold back, to raise his voice like a trumpet so that all of His people could hear the message. Messengers often used a ram's horn to get the attention of the community. In order for them to repent of their sins, Israel needed to know what their sins were. This was an expression of God's grace.

God's confrontation of His people with their sins was His way of giving them one more opportunity to return to Him and experience His forgiveness. Isaiah had already told Israel that God was waiting to show them mercy and compassion (Isa. 30:18). Instead of being quick to punish, this verse displays God's incredible patience with sinners and His desire for them to repent. God's desire is to show mercy, not to execute judgment.

Why are insincere acts of worship offensive to God? How does ritual worship apart from obedience leave you empty and disillusioned?

Day 2: God is pleased when our hearts align with our actions.

Read Isaiah 58:3-5, considering why God was displeased with their fasting.

These people were fasting—denying themselves of food—in an attempt to manipulate God. They placed more confidence in what they did than in the Lord. It was not about them serving God but about God serving them. They thought that because of their religious piety and sacrifice God owed them. God did take notice of their fasting but was not pleased with what He saw. God said there was no way they could act like they were acting and expect Him to listen to their prayers. The Lord would not pay attention to the fasting and prayers of such people. Displays of devotion in one area do not cancel out demonstrations of deviance from God's ways in another. In verse 5, God used rhetorical questions to show the people they really had no concept of who God is if they thought He would be pleased with their actions. Just because one goes through the motions does not guarantee one is pleasing God in the process. These actions are pleasing to God only when what is in one's heart corresponds to these outward expressions. Furthermore, what is in one's heart will reveal itself in how one relates to others.

Why was God displeased with the Israelites' fasting and religious practices?

Day 3: True worship points others to God.

Read Isaiah 58:6-7, identifying the actions that please God.

Acceptable fasting and worship involves total devotion to the Lord, accompanied by caring for others. This is what Jesus taught when He replied to questions asking which commandment in the law is the most important. Jesus answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

Therefore, true fasting involves opposing any wrongdoing that oppresses and abuses others. It means fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves instead of fighting for oneself, as the people of Israel were doing. (See v. 4.) Furthermore, true devotion and worship involves giving food to the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, clothing those who are in need of clothes, and at the same time caring for those in one’s own family. It is imitating the God who has done all of these things both materially and spiritually for His people, pointing others to Him.

BIBLE SKILL: Examine cross references. Use a study Bible to identify cross references listed for Isaiah 58:6-7. Read the passages listed, making notes about what you discover. How do the passages you read connect to Isaiah 58:6-7? How do these passages help you better understand what Isaiah was proclaiming?

What type of behavior is associated with fasting that pleases God? Explain.

Day 4: Faith in God is demonstrated through obedience.

Read Isaiah 58:8-10, listing behaviors that show obedience.

Instead of having a humiliating reputation before the nations, a new reputation would go before them: *the righteousness of God*. Just as the Lord went before His people and at the same time followed them to protect them as a rear guard when He delivered them from Egypt, He would once again do the same for His people. There would be even more benefits to those who fought to liberate people in bondage and who committed themselves to feeding the hungry and helping those in need. First, when they cried out to God, God would hear and answer them. God hears and answers the prayers of those who have turned away from their sinful ways and put their trust in Him. Faith in God is demonstrated by obeying His Word. The beginning point of serving others is having a real relationship with God and maintaining intimate fellowship with Him. When believers do this, they will be a light that scatters the darkness. The noonday sun will replace the darkness of the past.

If there is such tremendous blessing when people obey God, then why are people so reluctant to do so? In what areas are you reluctant?

Day 5: God will restore His people.

Read Isaiah 58:11-12, noting what God is offering His people.

Isaiah's message looked forward to the day when the people of God would be able to return home from Babylonian exile. Even though they would return to a city in ruins, God would satisfy them like a well-watered garden and a refreshing spring that would never run dry. Water was the most important resource in the region. No water meant no life. But here is the promise of life.

Not only would God restore the people but also the city of Jerusalem. They should not be discouraged when they returned to the city in ruins. Some of them would restore the foundations, some would repair the broken walls, such as those in Nehemiah's day, and some would restore the streets of the city. God's chosen holy city and God's chosen holy people would no longer be a reproach to the nations. Instead, they would be restored and glorify the Lord.

How has God changed your life into something beautiful?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 58, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What is fasting? What is its purpose?

How is serving others an example of true worship?

How can believers today genuinely be people who live righteously and not merely look the part?



For additional context, read "The Jewish Tradition of Fasting," an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Fall 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.

God Restores

The one true God promises to restore His creation for His people through faith in His Son.

ISAIAH 65:17-25



Conciled to God,
salvation be now

his major discussion of
a complex, compressed,
showed that grace in justifi-
Christ much more than sin
Adam.

and entails either that Adam was
place and acted on behalf of us all, o
criminal head of the race and we were s

5:13-14 These verses support the second
for verse 12 (see note there). Sin "reig
mankind before the giving of the law ev
sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's
deliberate act that plunged the huma
and spiritual death. All humans, inc
infants and young children who are incap
and wrong and thus are not deliberate
death's domain. All people now are b
(Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin had this broa
was a type (Gk *typos*) or prefiguration of
was to come, and represented all of hu
would do on the cross.

5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus
but drastically different effect. One o
mankind into ruin, but God gave the gift
culation in spite of our many sins. What



How does having hope for a greater future give people strength in the present?

Life's challenges can cause us to lose hope. If we are not careful, we can begin to believe all is lost and our best days are behind us. When that happens, the present becomes darker and we lose sight of the lessons we can learn. The Bible teaches that the future should impact how believers live in the present. Isaiah revealed to his audience glimpses of what God would do in the future so that they might be encouraged to be faithful as they wait on Him. Hope in the future gives strength in the present.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In Isaiah 61, the prophet told of the appearing of the Messiah. In His first coming, He came to save His people. Here, Isaiah described how the Messiah would come a second time to vindicate His people. Their shame would be replaced with honor and blessing, and they would be ministers of God as they rejoiced in His salvation and righteousness. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue and proclaimed that He was the fulfillment of this prophecy. (See Luke 4:21.)

Isaiah 62 focuses on Jerusalem. Even though sin had separated God and His people, there would come a time when God fully restored their relationship. The Lord would delight in Jerusalem like a groom delights in his bride.

Isaiah 63–64 turns attention to God's judgment on the nations and the vindication of His people. Edom serves as a representative of every enemy of the people of God that would experience His wrath. Either Isaiah or the people as a whole then recounted how God saved His people from their enemies in the past, especially at the Red Sea.

In chapters 65–66, the Lord answered their prayers, promising to judge idolaters and to deliver and bless the righteous. For God's righteous remnant, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and their lives and work will flourish with great abundance. God will respond to their prayers immediately. They will ultimately experience peace, even though leading up to that time their enemies will torment them. When God finally deals with their enemies, there will be a rebirth of His people and God's glory will extend to every nation. Those who trust in God will be saved, while those who reject Him will experience enduring judgment. People's eternal destiny will be determined by their faith in the Lord or their rejection of Him.

ISAIAH 65:17-25

17 “For I will **create** **A** a new **heaven** **B** and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind. **18** Then be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I will create Jerusalem to be a **joy** **C** and its people to be a delight. **19** I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. The sound of weeping and crying will no longer be heard in her. **20** In her, a nursing infant will no longer live only a few days, or an old man not live out his days. Indeed, the one who dies at a hundred years old will be mourned as a young man, and the one who misses a hundred years will be considered **cursed** **D**. **21** People will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. **22** They will not build and others live in them; they will not plant and others eat. For my people’s lives will be like the lifetime of a tree. My chosen ones will fully enjoy the work of their hands. **23** They will not labor without success or bear children destined for disaster, for they will be a people blessed by the LORD along with their descendants. **24** Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. **25** The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like cattle, but the serpent’s food will be dust! They will not do what is evil or destroy on my entire holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Passage Outline

A Place of Joy
(Isa. 65:17-20)

A Place of Prosperity
(Isa. 65:21-23)

A Place of Peace
(Isa. 65:24-25)

Key Words

- A. The idea of “making” (GNT) a new object. Furthermore, God is the Creator, and His creative activities are endless and unmatched. He is making a new heaven (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-5). Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for His followers, and He will return to take believers there (John 14:3).
- B. Heaven is the abode of God and could also refer to all that is above the earth.
- C. “Rejoicing” (KJV). Three various words are used for rejoicing in Isaiah 65:18-19. These various words express the exuberance of God’s works (Ps. 118:24).
- D. The idea is an antithesis of being blessed. Goliath cursed David (1 Sam. 17:43); Balaam was asked to place a curse on Israel (Num. 22:6).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Verse 17 expounds on the promises the Lord made in verses 13-16 concerning His servants. The word *for* is the key word that makes this link. Verses 13-16 contrast what will happen to those who reject the Lord with the blessings God has in store for His servants. Verse 17 answers these questions: “How will God turn things around from the present disaster and the humiliation of His people? How will He do what appears to be the impossible?” What did God promise? First, He promised to create *a new heaven and a new earth*. The only appropriate response to such amazing news is gladness and rejoicing. Therefore, the Lord exhorted the people *to be glad and rejoice forever* in what He was creating.

What is the difference between joy and happiness? What is the significance of Isaiah using joy to describe the reaction to the promised future?

Verse 20 provides examples of how things will be different for the people of God in this future new era.

What do God’s plans for His people in the future reveal about His disposition toward His people?

KEY DOCTRINE: Last Things

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end (2 Pet. 3:7-18).

Deuteronomy 28:15-68 includes a list of curses that Moses described would happen when the Israelites broke God’s covenant by disobeying His law. In Isaiah 65:21-22a,

the Lord stated just the opposite. He repeated this idea in both verses in order to emphasize the stark contrast between what the people had experienced with what they would experience in the future new era. In the last part of verse 22, the Lord spoke of more blessings: longevity of life, productivity, and the satisfaction of enjoying the fruit of their labors.

How should the blessings God has in store for His people affect how they live today?

The Lord emphasized that the new heaven and earth would be characterized by peace between the created and the Creator and peace between creatures. The sins that separated the people from God will be no more (Isa. 59:1-2).

How do the expectations of the coming of the Messiah a second time compare to the expectations of His first coming?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible

dictionary. The Hebrew concept of shalom, often translated “peace,” occurs in Isaiah 66:12 and pervades this week’s study passage (65:17-25). Read the article on “peace” in a Bible dictionary. Read some of the Bible passages included in the article, recording insights gained from those passages. How does the description of the new heaven and new earth point to peace between God and humanity? How is peace with God different from peace with a nation or group of people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can live with hope, knowing that God will one day create a new heaven and a new earth.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that they will experience God's blessing for eternity.
- Believers can live with expectancy, knowing that God's peace will reign in eternity.

What situations and challenges do you face that rob you of hope? List ways the promise of a new heaven and earth restores hope while facing those situations.

Review the characteristics of the new heaven and new earth described by Isaiah. What can you do today to live in anticipation of one of these characteristics?

As a group, memorize Isaiah 65:17. Discuss why you look forward to sin being forgiven and forgotten in the new age as Isaiah 65:17-25 describes. How should that future reality impact how your Bible study functions today?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God will create a new era.

Read Isaiah 65:17, underlining “create a new heaven and a new earth.”

What did God promise? First, He promised to *create a new heaven and a new earth*. In the Old Testament, God is the only subject of the verb create. God is going to do what only He can do. The new era that God will create for His new creations in Christ will commence with the creation of a new heaven and new earth. God will not merely patch things up. He will create everything new. His work will be comprehensive. It fits with Isaiah’s promises of a future newness. He spoke of “new events” (42:9; 48:6), “a new song” (42:10), “something new” (43:19), “new things” (48:6), and “a new name” (62:2). This message corresponds to the messages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who prophesied of a future when God would give a new covenant and His people would have a new heart and new spirit (Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 18:31). This new era will be so wonderful that the Lord’s second promise is that the burden of past regrets and sufferings will be no more. God’s new creation will usher in a holy forgetfulness where human failure and sin along with its consequences will be remembered no more.

What attributes of God’s new creation give you greatest joy?

Day 2: God will eradicate sorrow for His people.

Read Isaiah 65:18-19, considering what having true joy really means.

In Isaiah 29, God said He would oppress Jerusalem, and there would be mourning and crying. He would encircle it, lay siege to it, and bring it down as He would lead many nations against it. Over a hundred years after Isaiah’s prophecy, these words came to fruition as God directed the Babylonians, along with many nations under their control, to execute God’s judgment on Jerusalem and its inhabitants. When a remnant returned to Jerusalem from exile, they came home to a city in ruin and mourned over the reproach that the city had become. However, in the new era God has in store for His people, not only will the city be rebuilt and restored and the past be forgotten (v. 17), but God’s righteous anger against Jerusalem and its inhabitants will be replaced with the Lord’s rejoicing and gladness in them. This message also echoed David’s words concerning the Lord and His people: “For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor, a lifetime. Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). The people’s rejoicing will replace their weeping, and God’s delight in Jerusalem and its inhabitants will replace His disfavor. God will eradicate every possible source of sorrow for His people.

What do you think is the difference between joy and happiness?

How would you illustrate the difference?

Day 3: God rewards those who serve Him faithfully.

Read Isaiah 65:20, understanding the concept of a long life that God is promising.

Premature death was common for children and adults alike during Isaiah's day. However, the children who are born on this new earth will not die in infancy, and adults will live to a ripe old age. The Israelites appear to have understood seventy years to be a normal lifespan (Ps. 90:10), but in the new era, a man who would live only one hundred years would be thought of as having died young and if a man died younger than that then he would be considered cursed. God was rhetorically making the point that people will live long lives; the context suggests a *premature death* will not occur in this new age. Having children and living a long and healthy life were both understood to be signs of God's blessing in ancient Israel and as God's rewards to those who served Him in faithful obedience. (See Ps. 127:3-5a; Prov. 9:11; 10:27.) The passage indicates that in this new era the people of God will be devoted to God and He will bless them immensely.

What do God's plans for you in the future reveal about His disposition toward you?

Day 4: God's people will enjoy His blessings.

Read Isaiah 65:21-23, identifying the blessings God is promising His people.

Deuteronomy 28:15-68 is a list of curses where Moses described what would happen when the Israelites broke God's covenant by disobeying His law. These curses involved agricultural disaster, foreign invasion, deportation into exile, the reproach of foreign nations, and famine. Deuteronomy 28:30b particularly states that because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord the Israelites would build houses but not live in them and plant vineyards but not eat the fruit that they produce. In Isaiah 65:21-22a, the Lord stated just the opposite. He repeated this idea in both verses in order to emphasize the stark contrast between what the people had experienced with what they would experience in the future new era. The people of God would enjoy living in the homes they build and eating the fruit from the vineyards they plant. The implication should be apparent. Those living in the new creation will be devoted to Yahweh and keep their commitments to Him. Consequently, they would enjoy the blessings of the new covenant with the Lord. Their inheritance would be safe and secure. What God has in store for His people is imperishable, unspoiled, unfading, and eternally secure. In the last part of verse 22, the Lord spoke of more blessings: longevity of life, productivity, and the satisfaction of enjoying the fruit of their labors. The Lord used the simile of a tree to represent the vitality and durability of His people. The expression *my chosen ones* serves as a reminder that all of these blessings are expressions of God's incomprehensible grace toward His people. God chose them to be His treasured possession even though they had done nothing to deserve it. He did it in spite of them.

How should the blessings God has in store for you affect how you live today?

Day 5: God's people will not be separated from Him in the new creation.

Read Isaiah 65:24-25, noting the relationships that change.

The Lord emphasized that the new heaven and earth would be characterized by peace between the created and the Creator—*before they call I will answer*—and peace between creatures—*the wolf and the lamb*. God will be attentive to the needs of His people. When they had strayed away from God in rebellion against Him, apparently, He had ignored their cries, but that would be no more. Thus, it indicates the sins that separated the people from God will be no more (Isa. 59:1-2). What is more, the harmony the people of God will enjoy with God will extend to all of creation. Nevertheless, the curse on sin will continue to stand as indicated by the serpent's food being dust. Evil will be unable to destroy what God will establish on His *holy mountain*. God gave His word on it.

How does your idea of heaven compare to what Isaiah describes?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 58, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How does promise of a “New Jerusalem” offer Isaiah’s readers a future hope?

How does prosperity in God’s future kingdom differ from how we view or achieve prosperity?

How does the absence of peace in our world make us long for what God promises and provides?



For additional context, read “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” available digitally in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay. com/BiblicalIllustrator.