

# **A Study of the Book of Isaiah**

## **Chapters 40-63: A Book of Comfort and Consolation**

### **Participant Guide**

This Bible study was written by Marilyn Miller,  
a staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston. The theological content was  
reviewed by Pastor Timothy Flunker.

The study has seven one-hour sessions and is written for mature women who can apply the words  
of the prophet to their lives and the world we live in. Students may want to read through the  
People's Bible Commentary with each lesson.

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duplicate for Bible study

## Lesson 1: Chapters 40-41

### Opening Prayer

### A Quick Review

1. A few things to remember about Isaiah, the author of this book:
  - Isaiah lived around 700 BC, at a time when Judah and Israel were at war with one another and both nations were spiritually corrupt. Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians and disappeared from history.
  - With great political chaos going on, Isaiah's message did not say God would free Judah from oppression and military occupation, but rather he pointed the people to God for refuge from sin, death and hell. God used Isaiah to foretell the birth of Christ and the establishment of his Messianic kingdom through the Savior's suffering, death, and resurrection. Some of the prophecies can and should be interpreted as specific physical freedom.
  - His book is full of the promises of a Messiah, often given to us in vivid imagery and superb poetry. He has been called the greatest of the writing prophets because of his writing skills and has written some of the most treasured passages of Scripture.
  - The book is divided into two parts. Chapters 1-39, often referred to as Isaiah I, were most likely written in the early 700's BC, before the Assyrian army was destroyed. The prophecies of Isaiah I are linked to the history of this period. Chapters 40-66, known as Isaiah II, may have been written in his later years, giving a message of comfort to those under exile. These are artificial divisions; the great Isaiah Scroll, part of Dead Sea Scrolls, does not make a distinction between the two parts.
  - Two messages prevail throughout the entire book: LAW, which condemns Israel's sins in the strongest possible language, and GOSPEL, proclaiming grace, forgiveness, and hope to a faithful remnant.

### Read Chapter 40

2. As we discuss this chapter, notice how frequently we see the words "speak" and "words". What a blessing we have been given that God puts his message into our human language so that we can so easily study, understand and share it!

In the opening verses, who is God talking to and what is he asking them to do?

3. What is the primary message of "the voice" in vs 3-5, the message that John the Baptist preached?

Personal meditation: Is there anything that needs leveling and preparing before you are ready for the Lord?

4. What is the primary message of “the voice” in vs 6-8?
5. What is the primary message of “the voice” in vs 9-11?
6. The remainder of the chapter continues to clarify just who this great God of ours is. Did Isaiah paint any pictures that are particularly touching or humbling for you? Have you ever soared like an eagle?

## Read Chapter 41

7. Picture God addressing the unbelieving nations, suggesting they gather all of their strength and then come before him in a court. God gives them the chance to say who is responsible for the destruction caused by the conqueror from the east (Cyrus the Great of Persia, as told us in 44:28, 45:1), but they all remain silent. Would it bother you to know that Cyrus made his conquests about 550BC, 150 years after Isaiah lived?
8. As Cyrus approaches, the people come together to help and encourage one another, to build even bigger idols. What does God tell his people to do as they see the enemy approach? (vs 8ff)

What comfort should the people have gotten when God says things like “Israel, my servant”, “Jacob whom I’ve chosen”, and “descendants of Abraham”?

Do we fear a Babylon in our world today?

When was the last time you remembered the words of 41:9b-10a? Is there someone you can share those words with today?

9. When people allow God to hold them by their hand (vs 13), what happens to our enemies?

According to verse 20, why does God allow difficulties in the lives of his people?

In verses 21-29, God returns to the unbelievers and their idols, but they remain silent, unable to answer his challenge. It reminds us of Elijah’s challenge to the prophets of Baal as they in vain waited all day for their god to set fire to their offering, but the True God sent fire that consumed the water-soaked offering as well as the altar, the soil and even the water.

Personal reflection: Is there anything in your life whose wisdom or advice you credit above God’s?

10. What have you learned about God from these chapters? About yourself?

## **Closing Prayer**

### **References:**

Braun, John A. *People's Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 1-51

## Lesson 2: Chapters 42-44

### Opening Prayer

### Chapter 42

1. Read chapter 42:1-9. The servant that Isaiah tells us about is none other than the Messiah. What are some of the things we learn about him in verses 1-4?
2. Looking at verses 5-9, why should we believe there is a Messiah?
3. Read chapter 42:10-25. The people rejoice and praise God for his grace and salvation. Who is the enemy God is marching against in verse 13?
4. What is being described in verses 13-17?

Verses 18 to the end are yet another plea for the people to repent and follow God. But many would not and thus they suffered God's burning anger.

For personal meditation: Are there any areas in your life where you are still turning a deaf ear or an intentional blind eye, or where you do not speak in love to someone about their ongoing sin?

### Chapter 43

5. Read chapter 43:1-13. Which words or pictures in these verses give you special comfort?

You might want to mark these verses and share them with someone when they are having a difficult time.

What does it mean to you when God says "You are my witnesses", "my servant whom I have chosen" (vs 10)?

6. Read chapter 43:14-28. What are some of the words that help us define "grace" in these verses?

### Read Chapter 44

7. What striking contrasts do we see between the True God and the gods made by men?
8. What appeal is being made to Israel, and to us, as this chapter comes to a close?
9. What have you learned today that has been inspirational in your understanding of Scripture?

## **Closing Prayer**

### **References:**

Braun, John A. *People's Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 51-109

## Lesson 3: Chapters 45-48

### Opening Prayer

#### Chapter 45

1. Read chapter 45:1-13. At the close of the previous chapter, the LORD declared that he was the Lord of all, and that he would even use Cyrus, an unbeliever, to rebuild Jerusalem and his temple. Imagine you are one of the Hebrews who had heard this prophecy from Isaiah, and then also hear how Cyrus becomes very powerful, conquering the neighboring nations, destroying kings. How might you react to stories of Cyrus' conquests and approach?
2. Israelite kings were called God's anointed. What is the significance of the Lord calling Cyrus his anointed in verse 1?
3. In verses 3-6, can you find 3 reasons why God used an unbeliever as a benefactor for the believers?
4. Read chapter 45:14-25. These far flung countries mentioned in verse 14 were not physically in bondage to the Hebrews; therefore this is a spiritual picture of what?
5. Isaiah says that God hides himself in verse 15. Do you agree with him? Why?
6. What do the remaining verses of this chapter tell us about who God is and what he desires?

#### Read Chapter 46

7. How does Isaiah compare Bel and Nebo, the gods of Babylon, with the LORD?

#### Read Chapter 47

8. When this chapter was written, Babylon hadn't even become a world power yet, say nothing of being taken captive in shame. But the same thing happens even in relatively modern-day history. What is the reason for her destruction?

How might you apply the message of this chapter to things in your own life?

9. What things did the people of Babylon rely upon in their idolatrous worship?

Why are such things so alluring?

## Read Chapter 48

10. For what does God rebuke the house of Jacob?

How might this attitude account for God's ridicule of idolatry and those who practice it in these chapters?

11. In verse 9-11 God says he does what he does for his own sake. What does this mean?

12. In vs 17, the LORD calls himself both the Redeemer and the Holy One of Israel. Do you see any difference between those two names?

Verses 20-21 conclude the first part of Isaiah II. They point God's people to the promised release from captivity and to the greater redemption that lies beyond. Will you announce it with loud proclamations and shouts of joy?

13. What is the biggest message that you took away from our study today?

## Closing Prayer

### References:

Braun, John A. *People's Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 109-168



## Lesson 4: Chapters 49 - 52:12

### Opening Prayer

#### Chapter 49

Luther tells us “From this chapter to the end, there is nothing but Christ, and although the prophet at the same time occasionally corrects and rebukes, the scope of this treatise has to do with Christ, with the calling of the Gentiles, and with the rejection of the Jews” (LW, Vol 71, page 169)

1. Read chapter 49:1-7. Who is the servant who is speaking in these verses?

Can you think of a time when the work of the Servant, Christ, might have appeared to be in vain? (vs 4)

Can you find yourself in verse 6?

2. Read chapter 49:8-13. In verse 8 the LORD says he will make the Servant a covenant for the people. What does this mean?

How does Isaiah describe the benefits of this covenant in the next verses?

3. Read the remainder of chapter 49. If heaven is going to be so wonderful, why would Zion (God’s people) complain? Why do we complain today?

In the pictures in the remaining verses of this chapter we see the return of the Babylonian exiles and also the many believers in heaven. What will amaze the people about heaven (vs 20-21)?

According to vs 25-26 what will happen to the unbelievers?

#### Chapter 50

4. Read chapter 50. Did God divorce Israel or sell her into slavery? What is the LORD saying in verses 1-3?

The Servant responds in verses 4ff. What two things do we learn about the Servant in vs 4-5 and vs 6?

Even though the suffering of the Servant was necessary, he is constantly being reassured that the LORD will sustain him. (42:4, 49:4, 50:7, 50:9). For self-meditation: are there troubles in your life where you need to grasp this same assurance that the God of free and faithful grace will sustain you to the end?

## Chapter 51

5. Read chapter 51. Believers throughout history have faced dark and dreary circumstances, even though they pursued righteousness. What encouragement do these verses give us in our trials?

When you feel discouraged, what event in your personal history can you look back upon to remind you of God's grace?

In verse 17ff, Isaiah pictures the sins of Israel as a drunkard, as an animal completely unable to free himself from a trap. Yet, what is God's response?

## Chapter 52

6. Read chapter 52:1-12. Compare verse 7, read in context, with Romans 10:14-15. What is the message of peace, good tidings, and salvation that the messengers are bringing?

Who are these messengers?

In verses 11-12 we see the procession of exiles leaving Babylon, carrying the temple vessels with them. In the spiritual sense, we see all believers leaving this earth at the second coming of our Savior. What do we learn about these processions in verse 12 and what does it mean for us? (Also see Exodus 13:21 and 14:19-20)

7. What have you learned about God from these chapters? About yourself?

## Closing Prayer

### References:

Braun, John A. *People's Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 168-218

## Lesson 5: Chapters 52:13 – 56:8

### Opening Prayer

### Read Chapter 52:13 – 53:12

1. If this was all you ever knew about this Servant:
  - What would you know about his young years on this earth (vs 2)?
  - What would you know about his older years on this earth (vs 52:14, 53:3-4)?
  - What would you know about the law (vs 4-6)?
  - What would you know about the gospel?

How do these verses affect you?

How amazing the accuracy of the picture that Isaiah gives us 700 years before Christ came to this earth! How amazing that God chose to share this picture with us! How amazing that God loves us this much that he wants us to be with him through eternity! We must agree with Isaiah when he begins chapter 53 with the rhetorical question, “who would ever believe such an amazing message?”

### Read Chapter 54

2. We now see the glorious results of the Servant’s work. What picture do you see in the first three verses? What does it mean?
3. When did God abandon his bride (vs 7ff) and does this still happen today?
4. How does Isaiah assure us of God’s continuing love and faithfulness, even when the ground under our spiritual life quakes?

### Read Chapter 55

5. God’s invitation is open to every individual, not just the chosen Old Testament tribe. Everyone is invited to come and partake. How much does it cost to accept his invitation? How do I know this?

Compare verse 1 and John 6:35.

6. How do our thoughts and our ways differ from God's thoughts and ways?

Think of the most majestic mountain range you have ever seen. Can you fathom what it would be like if burst into song and all the trees in sight would clap their hands? How does it make you feel that they are singing for joy over what God has done for *you*?

## **Read Chapter 56:1-8**

7. What do you think it means to “maintain justice and do what is right” (vs 1)?
8. What is the difference between the blessings given to the Jewish believers and those given to the Gentile believers?

Think about Sunday morning at our church. Do you feel our worship services, customs and activities are inviting to all people or do you see things that might keep those “not like us” from feeling welcome? What can you do help our visitors feel equally loved by God?

9. What have you learned about God from these chapters? About yourself?

## **Closing Prayer**

### **References:**

Braun, John A. *People's Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 218-266.

## Lesson 6: Chapters 56:9 - 59

### Opening Prayer

### Read Chapter 56:9 – 57:3

1. Last week we read the beautiful passages of promise and deliverance – all the blessings given to believers of all nations, the picture of heaven where all believers will be gathered to the LORD. Suddenly the tone changes as God speaks to those who spurn his free gifts. Why do you think Isaiah compares the Jewish leaders and priests to blind watchmen and muted dogs?
2. Should the righteous that live along side the unrighteous fear the destruction described in the last verses of chapter 56? Why or why not?

### Read Chapter 57:4-21

3. What does it mean to take refuge in the Lord (vs 13)?
4. Does the message of judgment in the first half of chapter 57 mean God has given up on those who don't believe?

### Read Chapter 58

5. If we always try to do the right thing and follow the commandments as best we can, will God be pleased?

Does the picture in verse 8 remind you of anything?

What comforting words do the faithful have in this chapter that tells them God not only leads them but has their back as well, on their journey through this life?

### Read Chapter 59

6. This chapter opens with a description of the sin that separates humanity from God. What are some of the descriptors used in vs 1-8?

How does the picture of the vipers and spiders in vs 5-6 add to the description of complete corruption?

7. Notice how the pronouns change in vs 9-15a. Isaiah had been talking about “them” and now he says “us”, including himself in the realization that humanity is hopelessly separated from God because our sins are innate, so numerous, and so grossly offensive. This is a clear statement of the law. See how the New Testament writers give us the same message: Matthew 15:19, Romans 3:9-20 & 3:22.

What is God’s response to this dismal situation?

8. What is the message of verse 18?
9. Do you find any comfort in verse 19? Explain.
10. What major things will you remember from today’s study?

## **Closing Prayer**

### **References:**

Braun, John A. *People’s Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 266-314

## Lesson 7: Chapters 63:7 – 66:24

### Opening Prayer

#### Chapter 63:7-64:12

1. Read chapter 63:7-17. This is the beginning of a prayer of Isaiah. We can learn something about prayers from Isaiah. He doesn't jump immediately to his need but begins with praise (7-9), then talks of God's faithfulness even in times of their rebellion (10-14), then finally he gets to his plea that God would not forsake his people (15ff). In verse 15, Isaiah makes it sound as if God is a long way away. Has he ever felt like that to you? Why do you think that is?

Look at verse 17. Does God cause us to rebel? (see also Exodus 7:3, Galatians 6:7)

2. Read chapter 63:18-64:4. There are times when our faith is severely challenged as evil seems to win. When this happens, what can we learn from Isaiah's prayer?

Can you recall a time when you expressed this type of faith in an exceptional God?

3. Read chapter 64:5-12. Isaiah's prayer continues. God helps those who strive to do his will, but we know our continued sin angers him. As we meditate on the magnitude of our sin and our complete inability to please God, we lament, with Isaiah, how we can ever be saved. For self-meditation: Does the confession of sins said in worship each Sunday morning, or in your personal prayers, move you to see your sins in a way similar to verse 6?

"Yet", we do have hope (vs 8). We have the beautiful picture of God shaping and molding our lives into what he deems appropriate, much as a potter shapes his clay. We are his workmanship. In verse 8 Isaiah uses two names for God: LORD and Father. What do they each add to our picture of God?

What a bold prayer! When things around us look lost and hopeless, we remember God's blessings and promises, we confess our sins with the confidence that God will forgive us, and then we humbly plead for God's relief to help us through whatever pain, disaster, misery or suffering we find around us. We give our problems to God for his gracious answer.

#### Chapter 65

4. The last two chapters of Isaiah contain God's response to the believer's prayer that we just finished reading. Read 65:1-7. How does God begin his response in the first seven verses? (see also 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 and Ephesians 2:1)

5. Read chapter 65:8-16. Will God punish the people beyond measure? Why or why not?
6. Read the remainder of chapter 65. Isaiah sees both New Testament life and also life in heaven, the gathering of all believers living with God himself. Human thought and imagination, strained to its limits, cannot comprehend or express what mortals can expect to find in paradise. Not only will heaven be a joy for the faithful, God says he delights in the faithful (vs 18)! The verses depict a type of peace that seems foreign to us – joyful work, nothing in vain, blessed by the LORD, wolf and lamb feeding beside each other. How would you describe God's peace?

## Read Chapter 66

7. God is God and we aren't. What is the proper response to God?

Once again God describes what he thinks of the offerings and lives of the unfaithful. How will their offerings be accepted?

What is being referred to by the picture of birth in vs 7ff?

8. The people were told to rejoice with Jerusalem (vs 10-16). What does this rejoicing look like today?
9. Compare 60:19-21 with Mathew 24:30, Matthew 28:18-20, and Revelation 21:24-47 to see how Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled.
10. Isaiah gives us a peak into eternity while we are still sitting in the courtyard waiting to enter the eternal mansion. But he ends his book with a focus on God's judgment. Why do you think he did this?
11. What will you remember from our study of Isaiah?

## Closing Prayer

### References:

Braun, John A. *People's Bible Commentary – Isaiah 40-66*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001. 356-406.