

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

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

### **Leader's 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. It is strongly recommended that the leader  
read through the People's Bible Commentary for each of these lessons as part of her preparation.

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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 prophesies 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?

*All spiritual leaders and believers who share the gospel are to speak words of comfort to God's people – notice how God uses the possessive "my people"! They are to tell them 1) their hard service, their time of difficulty and trial is over, the chains of death and bondage have been broken 2) their sins are paid for through the work of Christ 3) and God continues to shower his grace on them in the form of ample blessings, blessings well beyond what we can imagine or expect.*

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

*Repent! For the Kingdom of God is at hand. Prepare for the coming of the Lord.*

*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?  
*It is the Law, which brings down the haughtiness of all men and makes their accomplishments nothing. Before God all men wither and fall. Think of how this affects our thoughts and concerns about the evil governments, powerful men and false teachers of our day! Think of what or who you lean on for support and comfort! Only the Word of our God lasts forever.*
5. What is the primary message of “the voice” in vs 9-11?  
*It is the gospel, the good tidings of God’s power, love. The reward and recompense that accompany the Savior are not from any reward we have earned, rather they are the forgiveness and rich blessings that he gives us freely. The reward is the result of the work he has done for us.*
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?  
*We cannot limit God by our understanding of time. God gave all of the words of Scripture to the men who wrote it, why would we think if impossible that he couldn’t reveal something from the future to Isaiah? If God wanted to give the people a word of comfort to remember while they were in captivity under the Babylonians, it would seem that knowing there would be a future after that period of trial would be just such a comfort.*
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)  
*Don’t be afraid. Remember who you are. Remember what I’ve done for you in the past and what I’ve promised to do for you! I am more powerful than any enemies.*

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

*They are not like other people because God chose them and had a special plan for them from the very beginning; God had a special relationship with Abraham and had made great promises to his descendants. God is begging the people to cling to their heritage. These would have been very personal, intimate names that God was using when talking to his people.*

Do we fear a Babylon in our world today?

*Christianity seems to be losing out in our world as heathen values grow stronger, a terrible illness could be overpowering for us, a loss of wealth or personal security could be threatening to us...*

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?  
*They are destroyed, reduced to dust and blown away! (vs 14-16) His help is like fresh water on a parched tongue (vs17) or an oasis in a desert filled with trees (vs 18-19)*

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

*So that everyone can see and know that he is in control when they see our faith in him and when he also sends his deliverance.*

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?  
*He is important, sent by God, chosen by God to judge the nations (note the plural, not just the Jews but all nations). He will mend broken lives! He brings his salvation to all people. His work will not be easy but he will be sustained and he will accomplish God's will.*
2. Looking at verses 5-9, why should we believe there is a Messiah?  
*Isaiah says the words are from "God the LORD" – the Jehovah, the God of the Covenant promises; he not only has the power to create the universe, he also sustains the life of the world; Isaiah makes it clear that God himself is speaking and these words are not made up by some human mind; he explains that God demands perfection but people have proven to be far from righteous, so he describes the plan put into place to accomplish his will – a Savior who will pay the price demanded for sin. No one but Jesus himself can become a covenant, can open the eyes of the spiritually blind and free the people from the bondage of death and hell.*
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?  
*When God promises a Savior in Genesis 3:15, he said he will crush Satan's head and restore peace. Here God is marching against and defeating Satan, an essential part of our salvation.*
4. What is being described in verses 13-17?  
*God has let much time pass since he gave us his promise of a Savior. He has patiently endured the sins of his people and withheld their just punishment. But when his time comes he will destroy this creation and lead his people home. The unbelievers will be left.*

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?  
*I have redeemed you...summoned you by name...you are mine...I will be with you... because I love you...all the people will gather in heaven...*

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)?

*What an honor to be chosen to do the work of God, to spread the good news of his grace and salvation, to help others also go to heaven! Certainly he wouldn't have chosen me for such an important role if he couldn't be certain of success, if he didn't ensure that I would be properly prepared. Lord, use me as you will, guide me and give me the words to use; give me the opportunities to serve and the courage to act on them!!*

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

*Grace is God's undeserved love. Isaiah helps us see this when he says: for your sake (v 14), I am doing a new thing (v 19) – giving a Savior, my chosen (v 20), the people I formed for myself (v20), verse 25 even though the people had done nothing to deserve what they were being given, the whole thought that he preserved a remnant of people throughout the OT so that a Savior could be born. God cares for us physically and spiritually because he loves us; without him we are unable to do anything*

## Read Chapter 44

7. What striking contrasts do we see between the True God and the gods made by men?

*The gods of man are made from things that God created. The workers sustain themselves through the things God created. In the end, the idols, and their makers are completely impotent. It is such folly to spend time in this endeavor and get nothing for the work. The True God does not forget his people, cares for his people, protects his people, and keeps his promises.*

8. What appeal is being made to Israel, and to us, as this chapter comes to a close?

*God himself formed us and our world, he is faithful to us, he is all-powerful. God is begging his precious people to believe in him and turn away from the deadly foolishness of idolatry.*

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?  
*Fear of Cyrus and his advancing army, forgetting God's promises? Or confidence in the Lord?*
2. Israelite kings were called God's anointed. What is the significance of the Lord calling Cyrus his anointed in verse 1?  
*God is using Cyrus for the benefit of his people just as he used the kings of Israel for their benefit. Both were sinful and yet useful for God's purposes.*
3. In verses 3-6, can you find 3 reasons why God used an unbeliever as a benefactor for the believers?  
*1) vs 3 – so that Cyrus would know that it was the Lord who stood behind him and gave him success  
2) vs 4 – for the sake of his chosen people; because God was using the history of the times as part of his master plan for all times and especially to fulfill his promise of a Savior;  
3) vs 6 – so that all humanity would know he alone is God*
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?  
*Knowledge of the Lord would be shared with every country of the world. As people come to faith, they bow in submission to the Lord and confess their faith.*
5. Isaiah says that God hides himself in verse 15. Do you agree with him? Why?  
*God is visible in nature and his magnificent power is seen by all, but his love and grace are made known only through his Word. 1) This saving knowledge of him is invisible to the sinful mind and must be given by the Spirit. He is still revealing himself today, by the quiet means of Word and Sacrament, to more and more people. 2) But even with faith, God remains hidden to us in that we are unable to grasp just who he is and the greatness of his majesty. He only tells us what we need to know for salvation and many things are kept from us. 3) His master plan is also hidden from us. We do not know the future or how he uses seemingly random events to craft the perfect tapestry of his plans. We can only trust that he is in control. We are limited by our concepts of space and time, but God created these concepts and he works outside their boundaries.*
6. What do the remaining verses of this chapter tell us about who God is and what he desires?  
*He is the creator of this world and intended it to be occupied. He will not leave the world alone but will always protect and sustain it. He wants us to worship and praise him alone. He wants men to turn to him and be saved. All he says is true. Every knee will bow to him and every tongue will declare that he is God – some in shameful unbelief and some in belief.*

## Read Chapter 46

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

*The idols have no power of their own and must be carried by men and beasts of burden; they are even carried off as a spoil of war when Babylon is defeated. What a pathetic picture of impotence! But the LORD is the one who does the heavy lifting for his people. From conception to death, from the beginning of time to the last day, he is the one with the power and promise to sustain us. Not only does the LORD sustain us, he also removes our sin and gives us eternal life. There's just no comparison to be made between the idols and God. Notice the frequency of "I am", "I have", "I will" ... in these verses. How the faithful in the audience needed to hear such sweet reassurance that God was acting and controlling the world in their behalf, forgiving their sins and granting salvation.*

## 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?

*Self-secure, arrogant, trust in self and idols, rejection of God*

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

*The law says we must remain faithful or this same judgment will fall on us; this is the law letting us know there is a consequence for our sins; this is the law convicting us of our sins and driving us to the cross in repentance. When we see sinful men thrive, we know that God may allow them to remain in their position for a time to accomplish his will, but in the end God will pass judgment. When we see sinful men thrive we know that we can share the good news of salvation with them so that they are not eternally destroyed.*

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

*Sorceries and spells (vs 9) – Babylon was the birthplace of astrology (vs 13) and the home of magic and the black arts.*

Why are such things so alluring?

*They seem to give us power – knowledge/control of the future, something others don't know, unworldly strengths. But those who studiously read and believe their horoscopes or dabble with the occult don't realize they are giving Satan a paved inroad into their heart.*

## Read Chapter 48

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

*For hypocrisy, for doing the all the religious things they do but without faith and righteousness. (v1)*

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

*He was hitting close to home, giving Israel the opportunity to recognize themselves in his message, and then return to him. He was using the law to show them their sins and then announcing the solution to sin, the gospel.*



11. In verse 9-11 God says he does what he does for his own sake. What does this mean?  
*If God would just cut us off, not give us another chance, let us go our own way, not demand justice, he wouldn't appear to be any different than all the other gods. God refines his people and leads them on the path of salvation. He is shouting his grace, power and supremacy from the roof tops and showing all men who he really is and why he should be glorified.*

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?  
*As the Holy One of Israel he sets himself apart as being without sin and also the constant source of love and faithfulness for Israel, the God of the covenant promise. As the Redeemer he delivers the people from sin and makes that covenant promise of salvation a reality. He is begging the people to listen to him!*

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?  
*Everything works as God would have it work, and he sustains me in this life and will give me salvation at the end. Alleluia!*

## 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?

*It can only be the Messiah. No one else fits the description of a servant set apart from before birth, who exposed sin and applied the healing of the gospel with his words, who displayed all of God's glory while here on earth. He is called Israel because he came from the line of Abraham and he fulfilled all of the promises given to Israel.*

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

*From a human perspective, he looked defeated in Gethsemane, as he was arrested and then put to death as an ordinary criminal. But he put his life in God's hands, and knew that God's will would be done. Compare these words with those in Luke 23:46.*

Can you find yourself in verse 6?

*Not only would he restore Israel, he would also bring salvation to the Gentiles.*

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?

*This is the promise God made to the people to send a Savior who would pay the price demanded for sin so the people could be reunited with the LORD. Unlike a usual covenant, this is one-sided: God does everything, we do nothing.*

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

*The shroud of death is removed and heaven is pictured as a place of plenty, quiet pastures, peaceful, a place with people from all parts of the world, a place where the people and the entire world shout for joy.*

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?

*The trials and troubles of life cause us to doubt and we only focus on what is going on around us instead of trusting in God's promises. How does God respond? His love goes beyond that of a mother, he will never forsake us. His love is as permanent as a tattoo; we are as visible to him as the palms of our hands are to us.*

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)?

*Where did all these people come from? Have you ever thought about the huge number of people that have gone to heaven before us, are going even today, and will go in the future?*

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

*They will be destroyed in a most horrible way.*

## Chapter 50

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

*Obviously Israel is separated from God. They can't claim it is because God divorced her, as a man might send away his wife; or because God sold them as someone might sell his children to meet a debt. God even sent prophets to try to call them back and he certainly had the power to save them. Yet they were the unfaithful ones.*

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

*1) He will proclaim God's Word (refer back to 49:2) and we know it is true because he is obedient to the LORD.*

*2) The Servant will suffer in willing obedience. Indeed this Servant must be the Messiah himself.*

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?

*Look back and see the saints that went before (Abraham, Sarah, deliverance from Egypt, for example) and see what God did for them, how he was faithful to them and how his blessings sustained them. We have God's Word to sustain us (vs 7). We have been forgiven and chosen (vs 16). Focus on the victory to come and do not fear. The victory is never in doubt.*

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?

*He tells them to rouse themselves from their hopelessness. He tells them he has removed that cup of sin from them. He gives them yet another invitation to believe and trust in him. What grace! The gospel is the only solution to the weight of the law.*

## 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?

*In Isaiah, God is picturing the excitement and joy that greets the men bringing the message of physical peace and salvation from their enemies (the Babylonians). But the picture is much deeper*

*and more profound. There are also messengers that bring news of God's peace that exceeds anything we can experience on earth, they bring the good news of God's grace and blessings, they bring the message of eternal salvation from sin and death. Paul refers to the messengers bringing the spiritual good news. There is no message more powerful and reassuring than "Your God reigns!"*

**Who are these messengers?**

*They are anyone who shares the gospel with someone. You too can be a messenger with beautiful feet!*

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)

*God is both leading them and protecting their back, much as he did when the people left Egypt many years before. There is nothing to fear! Death is no more than the transition from this life to the next.*

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)?  
*He came from a humble family, from the stump of Jesse (a once great family that was all but gone), he wasn't handsome by human standards*
  - What would you know about his older years on this earth (vs 52:14, 53:3-4)?  
*He was despised, given no honor, and suffered greatly, to the point of disfigurement. From a human perspective many may have considered him deserted by God, left to suffer for his own sins and diseases. His life was cut short by his suffering. Yet we know that he was without guilt and his suffering had nothing to do with anything he had done.*
  - What would you know about the law (vs 4-6)?  
*There is a God-given law that demands perfection at all times but we have broken that law (transgressions), have grossly sinned (iniquities), and deserve punishment, eternal separation from God. Because of our sin, the world is filled with disease and sorrow. Every one of us has broken the law and gone astray. We are without hope.*
  - What would you know about the gospel?  
*There is a Messiah, the Servant, who is without sin and obedient to the Father. He endured unimaginable pain and ridicule, was pierced and punished to the point of disfigurement, was brutally murdered and then put in a grave. But he was not confined to the grave as an ordinary man, rather he was raised, lifted up to heaven, and is now highly exalted. He did this to pay for the sins of all people so they could be reconciled with the LORD, the giver of the law. The Servant is the only one that does anything to make this reconciliation a truth; the people can do nothing to help the cause. This great exchange defies reason, is so astonishing even kings are speechless.*

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?  
*We see a tent that has to be expanded and stakes that have to be strengthened to accommodate the huge number of people. In chapter 49 God described his people as an unfaithful wife. But now they are reconciled and she is no longer barren, but having the children of her husband. The number of*

*believers (tent) is growing exponentially because of the work of the Servant. Fast forward to Pentecost when the Spirit began the work of building the New Testament church and think about how many saints there are today! Not only is the church growing because her members are having children, it is also growing because they are reaching out to others. Certainly the tent is bursting.*

3. When did God abandon his bride (vs 7ff) and does this still happen today?

*God took his people out of Egypt and gave them a land of milk and honey, yet they became unfaithful and worshipped other gods. They didn't change their ways even after many warnings. Finally, as a faithful husband does with an unfaithful wife, he left her and they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. But it was only for a short while because he loves his people and has promised to watch out for their good. Yes, there are times when we anger God and he seems to turn away from us. But this doesn't change or negate the love he has for us or the promises that he makes us. Rather, he is trying to get our attention and get us to repent. You might want to mark verse 10 and come back to it when you need the comfort of God's love and assurance of forgiveness.*

4. How does Isaiah assure us of God's continuing love and faithfulness, even when the ground under our spiritual life quakes?

*He uses the illustration of the vow God gave Noah to never again cover the earth with water (vs 8). God has sworn to not be angry and rebuke his people again (vs 9). God has promised his unfailing love and compassion (vs 10). He gives us a picture of heaven, much like that in Revelation 21, where we and our children will live eternally (vs 11-13). He tells us he is in control even of those who might wish us harm (vs 14-17). Notice the last 3 words of the chapter!*

## 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?

*It is ours without money and without cost! (vs 1) We spend our lives striving for material goods that do not satisfy and yet what is truly needed is ours for the taking. (vs 2) Pure grace! It is God himself who establishes the covenant (vs 3) that flows from his promise to David of a Messiah.*

Compare verse 1 and John 6:35.

*Jesus is the bread of life and the living water that gives us eternal life.*

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

*Ours are corrupted by sin and bounded by space, time and imagination. God is all-knowing, all-seeing. He is in control of all things and has a master plan that exceeds anything we can even comprehend. For example, we would never expect that faith could be created in our hearts by simple words; it only makes sense that such a dynamic and powerful thing as faith would take much more to create and sustain. Yet with God, that is the way he makes it happen.*

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)?

*This sounds like the law! But the law is no longer the curse that it was when we talked about it in chapter 53. Now that we know the gospel and the Spirit is active in our lives, we live in ways that reflect the joy we have. We gladly follow the law because we know this is what pleases God. It's incongruous for us to give the message “do as I say, not as I do”. While we will always struggle against sin this side of heaven, we have the power of the Spirit to help us fight those battles. We are blessed when we keep the commandments.*

8. What is the difference between the blessings given to the Jewish believers and those given to the Gentile believers?

*All believers are the same in God's eyes. His house is a house of prayer for all people. All believers will have their name written in the book of heaven and they will be taken to live with God in joy. God will love them and accept their praise.*

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?  
*Because they have not kept watch and kept the people faithful. This is their job and they have been unfaithful. Now Satan will come and devour the people, destroying them as a foreign invader would do, or as a wild animal attacks a herd of sheep.*
2. Should the righteous that live alongside the unrighteous fear the destruction described in the last verses of chapter 56? Why or why not?  
*In 57:1-2 we are told the righteous are always in God's protective care. One of the ways he protects his people is by taking them home to him, where they are given peace and are spared from the evil of the world.*

### Read Chapter 57:4-21

3. What does it mean to take refuge in the Lord (vs 13)?  
*The world would have us think that their ways are best – witchcraft, adultery, worship all kinds of gods, hide any sign of faith, seek everything to ensure your future except trusting God. Those who take refuge in the Lord cling to God and his promises even in a world filled with such evil.*
4. Does the message of judgment in the first half of chapter 57 mean God has given up on those who don't believe?  
*No, God would have all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:3-4). Our Savior lives in a high and holy place, but he also chose to live among the contrite and lowly. He comes to those who have sinned and guides and restores them, healing them; they are given the peace of the gospel. But those who continue to reject him will have no peace, only judgment.*

### 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?  
*No, he cares about our motivation and what's in our heart, not what we do. The Israelites appeared to want to hear about God, they followed the rules for fasting and worship. Yet, they did these things mechanically, quarreled, and didn't love each other; they didn't live the faith they purported to have. We've heard it before. This type of worship is an abomination. Not all "good works" please the Lord, only those done to his glory. Not all "good people" will be seen in heaven. It's the motivation that counts. God's favor is through grace, not because of anything we do.*



Does the picture in verse 8 remind you of anything?

*Remember how God led his people out of Egypt with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; he moved the cloud to their back to keep them safe from the approaching Egyptian army. (Exodus 13:21-22, 14:19-20). He does this for us yet today!*

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?

*He will answer when they call (vs 9), he will show us the way (vs 10), he will satisfy our needs (vs 11), he will produce a bountiful harvest of souls (vs 11), he will give us joy in our work (vs 13-14) and he will give us the inheritance of a child of God (vs 14).*

## 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?

*Bloody hands, lies and wicked words, born into trouble, violence, racing to shed innocent blood, lack of justice... total corruption, no peace. But we seem to like it!*

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

*These are frightening things to most of us, things we would avoid given a choice. They are creepy, crawly, yucky. Yet that is what God sees when he looks at us through the eyes of the law.*

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?

*He was appalled at the condition of the human race, so he stepped in, reached across the barrier of the law and provided a Savior, his own Son, to bridge the huge chasm. This is pure gospel! We can do nothing to change our own situation. Only God is able to change us, to make us worth of being in his sight, to be considered his children.*

8. What is the message of verse 18?

*God has done all that is needed to save every single individual and makes this free gift of grace available to all without exception. Yet, those who reject it and continue in their unbelief will forfeit God’s gift of salvation in favor of his judgment.*

9. Do you find any comfort in verse 19? Explain.

*This is God’s promise that we have heard over and over again. He never changes. He repeats his promise once again to make sure we remember that his Word will never depart from this world. There will always be some who believe and carry out his will; we will always have brothers and sisters in Christ. It was a comfort to Elijah, to the Israelites while in captivity, to Paul while imprisoned, and to us as we look at the condition of our world. Praise be to God.*

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?

*We lose connection with God either because we choose our own ways over his, or, at times, he just does hide himself from us. We can't always understand what he does or why; why he allows misery and pain. However, he has not hidden his promises of mercy and faithfulness and we lean on these when we feel alone or puzzled. He has promised that everything will work for our good and to this we cling.*

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

*Satan is the source of our transgressions and sins, not God. Our sinful human nature causes us to stray but God calls us to repentance just as he called the people of the OT. However, God does tell us that he will finally have had enough and will harden the hearts of those who persistently scoff at his grace so that they can no longer turn from their evil ways and be saved.*

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?

*Rather than losing hope, in confidence we plead for God to intervene, to make himself visible, to do some "awesome things". We link our future deliverance to the past grace that God has shown us, and we are reminded that his deliverance is greater than anything our minds could ever imagine.*

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?

*LORD is the name given to the covenant God of the OT, the personal God of free grace. See Exodus 34:6-7. By using the name "Father" we are reminded of how God created us, of our relationship to him, of how we are nurtured and how he takes the responsibility for caring for us.*

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)

*He lays out the fundamental truth that we cannot come to God, but that he has to reveal himself to us. He goes on to show how mankind breaks all of the commandments: they do as they want, they worship false gods; they are as disgusting / irritating as the smoke of a fire to our nostrils. Isaiah had asked if God would punish his people beyond measure and God now responds!*

5. Read chapter 65:8-16. Will God punish the people beyond measure? Why or why not?

*Because there was still a faithful remnant in Israel, God would not completely destroy the people. He promised the seed of Abraham would be preserved and he keeps that promise. He is a God of grace and a God of judgment. We see the contrast between the faithful chosen and the rebellious... eat / go hungry, drink / go thirsty, sing in joy / cry in anguish, name of cursed / name of saved. God will absolutely and thoroughly punish those who reject him, but in his mercy he will rescue a remnant and transform them into a gathering of all believers. We have been warned!!*

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?

*The perfect peace of forgiveness, which leads us to an invitation to enter the mansion of heaven...*

## Read Chapter 66

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

*It can only be humility, reverence and penance – a person who is humble, contrite in spirit and trembles at my word (vs 2)*

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

*They will be rejected and God will repay his enemies as they deserve (vs 6). We are warned against all human effort that seeks to earn God's favor or blessing.*

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

*In what would seem to be simultaneous events, God destroys his enemies and ushers in his new nation, his church filled with all believers. God himself delivers his people from the sinful world into eternal life. This can also refer to the destruction of Jerusalem under the Roman army in 70AD. From those destructive days we see the New Testament church blossom and grow, from 3000 baptized on Pentecost to the millions of believers today. As with many Old Testament prophecies, there is a fulfillment in our days as well as a look to the end of time.*

8. The people were told to rejoice with Jerusalem (vs 10-16). What does this rejoicing look like today?  
*Faithfulness to Word and Sacrament, praising God with our lives, serving God by serving the church and all people, spreading the gospel around the world, trusting in God's promises, ...*
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?  
*It is yet another reminder that there will be a judgment and a warning of what happens to those who do not live according to God's will. It repeats what we read in 48:22 and 57:21, "there is no peace for the wicked." This one chapter has both law and gospel summarized into two powerful verses.*
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.