

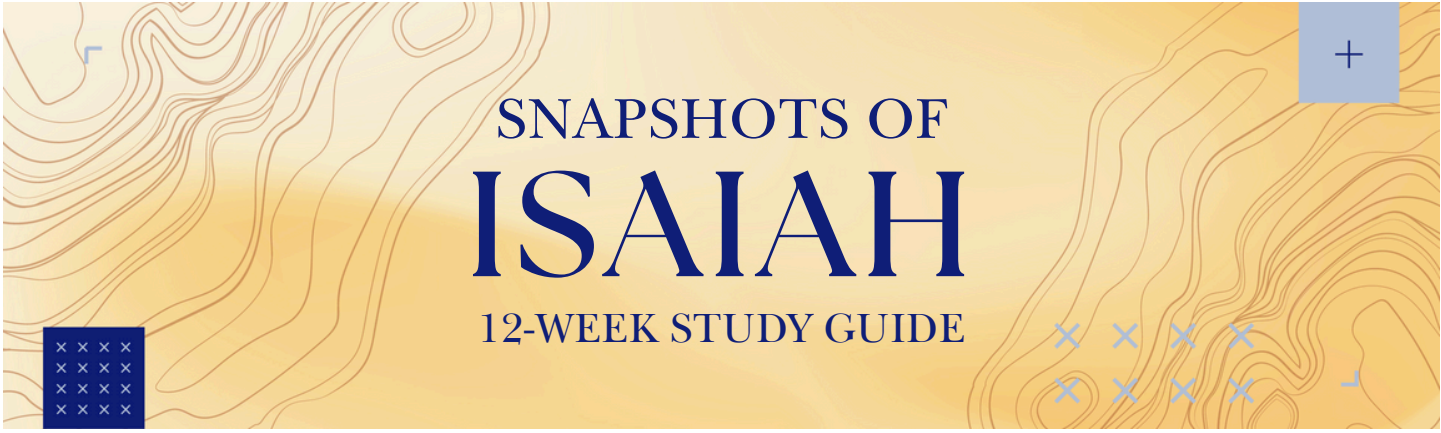
S T U D Y G U I D E

# ISAIAH



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# SNAPSHOTS OF ISAIAH

## 12-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

## Theological Focus

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The book of Isaiah is filled with prophecies that address the spiritual and moral condition of the people of Judah, as well as the political and military challenges they face.

In his writings, Isaiah calls for repentance and warns the people of the consequences of their disobedience to God's laws. He also speaks of a future restoration and salvation for the people of Israel, pointing to a Messiah and a renewed covenant with God.

Several theological foci addressed in the book are:

1. God hates pride and will destroy the proud.
2. What pleases God is for people to trust in him for the forgiveness of sins, for security from their enemies, for guidance in the future, and for eternal hope. (Chapter 1-39)
3. Glorify God who transforms the world. (Chapter 40-66)

## Background

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The authorship of the book of Isaiah is traditionally attributed to the prophet Isaiah himself. However, biblical scholars suggest that the book may have been written by multiple authors over a period of time, due to the differences in linguistic styles and historical context.

The book is commonly divided into two main sections:

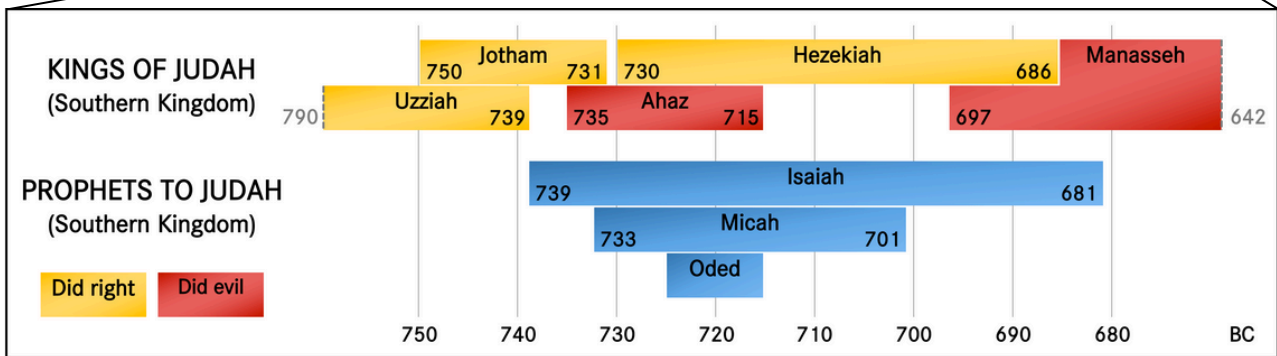
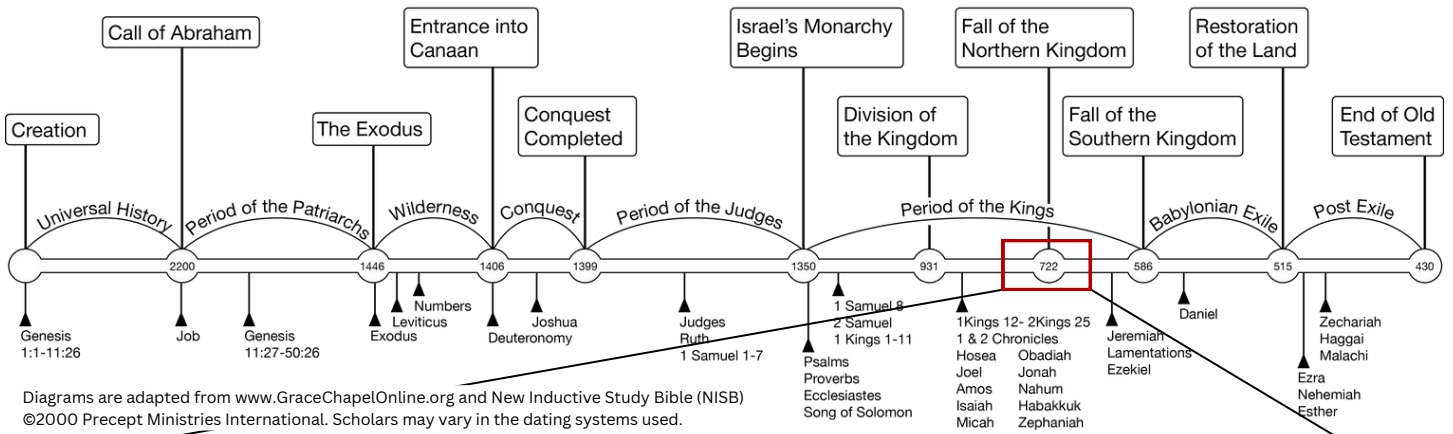
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|-----------|---|--|---|
| Ch. 1-39  | [ | • Believed to be written by Isaiah himself<br>• Events and prophecies during Isaiah's lifetime                         | ] |
| Ch. 40-66 | [ | • Authorship remains a subject of debate<br>• Prophecies that address a different historical context (exile and after) | ] |

Some biographical information about Isaiah: 🧑 **Wife:** an unnamed prophetess (Isa. 8:3)

🧑 **Sons:** Shear-Jashub (Isa. 7:3) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isa. 8:3)

Isaiah was known primarily by what he said, not what he did. However, there was one major act recorded in Isa. 20 when he went naked for three years to warn Judah not to put their trust in Egypt and Cush. In his writings, Isaiah is critical of Judah's foreign policy to trust in Egypt, Babylon, and other nations, as well as Judah's lack of commitment to trust God.

# OLD TESTAMENT TIMELINE



## Historical and Religious Background of Isaiah 1-39

### I. The time of Uzziah and Jotham (ch. 2-5)

- Isaiah chapters 2-5 address the latter part of Uzziah's reign when he had attained considerable prosperity and military strength (cf 2 Chr. 26:6-16) – likely in 750-740 BC.
- At this point, Assyria was quite weak and divided, which allowed Uzziah to consolidate control over the Philistines, Meunites, Arabs, and Ammonites.
- Uzziah achieved significant success at the beginning of his reign because he listened to the prophet Zechariah who instructed him in the ways of God.
- However, Uzziah did not destroy the high places of worship. Most significantly, he went into the temple to burn incense to God, and God struck him with leprosy (cf 2 Chr. 26:16-20).
- At this time, Jotham, his son, was co-regent because Uzziah was secluded because of his leprosy.

### II. The time of Ahaz (ch 7-23)

- The political and military situations of the region got dramatically more difficult when the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser came to power (745-727 BC).
- The vassal King of Damascus (Rezin) and Israel (Pekah, Northern Kingdom) tried to get Judah (Ahaz, Southern Kingdom) to join their coalition against Assyria, which then prompted them to attack Judah. As a result, Judah came into an alliance with Assyria and eventually became an Assyrian vassal state.
- During this time, the kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria (721 BC), and many Israelites migrated to Judah.
- Notably, Ahaz was not a good king. He introduced pagan worship in the temple of Jerusalem.

### III. The time of Hezekiah

- Hezekiah primarily squared off against Sennacherib. He made extensive preparations in Jerusalem to withstand Assyrian attack. Ultimately, this was the period when Assyria declined, and Sennacherib was killed by his sons.
- Hezekiah is ultimately pictured as a great reformer, a man of faith who encouraged his armies to trust in God for deliverance. However, he was not perfect as he was still looking to foreign alliances for help. During his reign, he made an alliance with Egypt and was condemned by Isaiah.
- Hezekiah demonstrated faithfulness through the following actions: he repaired the temple, consecrated the priests, renewed the covenant with God, and restored worship in the first year of his reign (715 BC).

# Key Verses

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**Isaiah 1:18**

“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

**Isaiah 9:6**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**Isaiah 40:31**

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

**Isaiah 53:5**

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

**Isaiah 55:8-9**

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

**Isaiah 65:17-19**

“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.”

# Messianic Theme

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The book of Isaiah contains a prominent messianic theme, which refers to the anticipation and prophecy of a future anointed figure, known as the Messiah, who would bring salvation, justice, and restoration to God's people.

In this book, the Messiah was uniquely portrayed as a “Suffering Servant”, characterized by the “Servant Songs” found in Ch. 42, 49, 50, and 52-53. These writings describe a servant who would suffer on behalf of others, bear their sins, and bring forth redemption and healing.

This book also prophecies about Jesus’ birth (Isa. 7:14) and emphasizes the Messiah’s role in restoring and redeeming God’s people. It speaks of the Messiah gathering the scattered Israelites, bringing comfort to the afflicted, and transforming the desolate places into the new heavens and the new earth.

# WEEK 01 · ISAIAH 1

God has the power to refine His people through the expulsion of the wicked and the removal of sins. Therefore, His people are to live according to His will.

## Preface

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**Context:** The Book of Isaiah begins with a chapter that was probably written very late in Isaiah's life, likely after he had finished most of the book. The text mimics a covenant lawsuit, like the negotiations that might take place before a trial, an arraignment. The key markers are:

- Accusations brought before the defendant (verses 2-9)
- Defensive reasoning is refuted (verses 10-15)
- Unexpected exhortations on acceptable behavior (verses 16-17)
- One party offers to resolve the case (verses 18-20)
- Consequences of positive and negative responses (verses 21-31)

**History:** Isaiah 1 indicates that it must have been written after a major military event, which gives four potential times of writing:

1. Syro-Ephraimite War (734-732 BC) — when Israel and Syria attacked Judah to force Judah to join their coalition (cf. 2 Kgs. 16)
2. During the attack on Judah by Sennacherib (701 BC) — where the whole nation was destroyed except Jerusalem
3. After the attack by Sennacherib (701 BC) — during the reign of Manasseh (most likely)
4. Or a prophecy about the future fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

## Observation

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1. What was Jerusalem being condemned for? (Isa. 1:1-4, 21-23)
2. What was the state/condition of Jerusalem as a result of their rebellion? (Isa. 1:5-9)
3. What are the consequences of Jerusalem's unfaithfulness? (Isa. 1:10-15, 24-26)
4. What did God command Jerusalem to do? (Isa. 1:16-17)

## Interpretation

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1. What does the comparison between Jerusalem and Sodom and Gomorrah reveal about Jerusalem's sins and God's character?

*Leaders' note: Sodom and Gomorrah are two cities that were destroyed in Genesis 19 for their wickedness. The people of Judah had sinned greatly and God's justice would necessitate their destruction. However, God is gracious and faithful to His promises that He would preserve the people.*

2. What intrigues you about God’s command in Isa. 1:17?

3. What does the phrase “let us settle the matter” in Isa. 1:18 imply about sin?

*Leaders’ note: Sin is being equated to a dispute that must be settled. However, the only way it is settled is through God’s grace.*

4. What is the relationship between obedience (Isa. 1:19) and grace (Isa. 1:18)?

*Leaders’ note: There seems to be a human responsibility in being made clean from sin.*

*Potential follow-up question: How do we reconcile being obedient while at the same time knowing that God’s grace is unmerited?*

## Application

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1. Are we as a society, just as guilty as Israel? In what ways?

2. What keeps you from living out verse 17: “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause”?

3. What is a new way you can begin to incorporate more of verse 17 into your life, both personally and as a community?

### Optional Prayer Exercise: Fasting and Corporate Prayer of Repentance

In Scripture, God made promises through a mediator and to a people. In response, corporate acts were recorded in the Bible as an essential element in the spiritual life of God’s people. Our study this week reminds us of the grievance of our sins. Although we might not contribute directly to the injustices in our society, we ought to grieve and confess the sins of the world.

In the Bible, repentance is usually expressed by prayer and fasting, where God’s people grieve outward tragedies and demonstrate the genuineness of their inward contrition. When we pray and fast together with our community, it helps us set aside our agendas while we focus on asking God to do what He has promised to do for the sake of His name. In addition, fasting can function as a magnifying glass to our sins and a reminder of our dependence on God.

*Practical Instructions:*

*Fasting is the voluntary act of abstaining from food for a specific period and for spiritual purposes where we dedicate the time to praying and seeking God. The purpose of fasting and prayer is to set aside our fleshly “appetites” to clear out space for God to come and fill our hearts with His Presence.*

- Block out a specific time to fast so we can pray and seek God.
- Set a specific objective. For corporate repentance, focus on asking God to reveal to us our sinful nature and our desire for God to establish His kingdom where He reigns and justice is done.
- Prepare ourselves by reading the Word (ex: Joel 2, Daniel 9, Nehemiah 9) and pray.
- Focus on praying and worshiping God during our time of fasting. Journal our experiences and share.

# WEEK 02 · ISAIAH 6

God judges the rebellious by hardening the hearts of the wicked and rendering them blind to the truth.

## Preface

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**Last week**, we learned that we all bear guilt for societal injustices when we ignore the cause of the poor and the powerless. Our sins have caused significant pain and suffering which can only be settled through God's grace. Yet, God may use the consequences of our sins to refine us as His people and teach us obedience as we are being made clean from sins.

**This week**, we will learn about a calling that God called Isaiah into, to pronounce judgment upon the Israelites by hardening their hearts and making them blind to the truth.

**Context:** Isaiah 6 was written at a significant turning point in Israel's history, when they shifted from a relatively good king, Uzziah, to a wicked king, Ahaz. This was also the period when Assyria became an international world power.

This text can be interpreted as either Isaiah's original call or a revised re-commissioning for a new task. For the context of our study, we see this as a re-commissioning, when Isaiah is given a new mission because Israel is facing a new political situation with a new unbelieving king.

## Observation

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1. What is the overall mission that God is calling Isaiah into? (Isa. 6:9-10)
2. Compare and contrast the responses of the seraphim, Isaiah, and the people upon seeing God. (Isa. 6:2-3, 5, 9-10)

*Leaders' note: The seraphim responded in reverence and worship, and Isaiah responded by pronouncing judgment upon himself ("Woe to me!"). Both the seraphim and Isaiah expressed their unworthiness to look upon the LORD. However, the people were described as "be ever seeing, but never perceiving".*

3. What were the consequences of the people's unwillingness to honor God? (Isa. 6:9-13)
4. How long will the people be deadened in their senses? Has this been fulfilled? (Isa. 6:11-12)

## Interpretation

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1. Why do you think Isaiah responded to God in the manner that he did in Isa. 6:5?
2. Why do you think Isaiah responded to God's call in the manner that he did in Isa. 6:8 and 11? How do you think Isaiah viewed his own people and viewed God?
3. What prompted such a severe punishment from God?



#### 4. What does God's punishment teach us about God's justice and fairness?

*Leaders' note: We cannot judge God's decisions and we may never be able to fully understand the reasons behind them. This question aims to prompt a lively discussion on God's fairness.*

## Application

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1. How would you respond if God gave you the same mission as He did to Isaiah (to pronounce judgment on his own people)? Why?
2. Has God ever called you to do something hard? How did you know it was His calling and how did you experience God's provision as you obeyed Him?
3. What were your experiences like when you came across others who are unresponsive when you share the gospel?
4. How can we live a life that matches Isaiah's reverence for God's holiness?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Testimony Sharing and Evangelism

Our study this week reminds us of our calling in this world to share the gospel and make disciples of all ethnic groups (The Great Commission). Sharing the gospel with strangers can be scary and difficult. However, if we truly believe in the gospel, we should be grieved when we see others being overshadowed by the impending judgment, and we should be moved to share the grace that we have received from God even when we did not deserve it.

An essential component of sharing the gospel is to engage in a spiritual conversation that leads us to share the testimony of God's active and transforming grace in our lives. We are called to be God's witnesses, not His attorneys or salespersons. However, we also need to be equipped and well-versed in sharing the gospel in a way that is understandable for those who have never heard it before.

*Put it into practice:*

1. Commit to a specific timeframe with your group to be accountable for engaging in spiritual conversations with a non-Christian friend or colleague, or choose a specific time and location to do street evangelism.
2. Practice sharing your testimony in your small group. Reflect and share about: "What was your life like before you met Jesus?" "How did you commit your life to Jesus?" "What difference has Jesus made in your life?"
3. Familiarize yourselves with the gospel message. Several useful tools are the resources from Cru, called "Knowing God Personally" or "Four Spiritual Laws".
4. Pray earnestly for God to soften the hearts of the people that you are going to talk to. Trust God that His presence goes before you and He will bring the right people.
5. This week, think of one person to have this conversation with.
  - Helpful tip: Begin by asking them about their views of God and their purpose in life. Try using a tool called "Perspective Cards" by Cru if you would like to have more inspiration on what to talk about.
6. In your small group, share what the experience was like and pray that God will continue to grow the seed of the gospel in the hearts of the people you talked to.

# WEEK 03 · ISAIAH 14

God's divine judgment will result in the complete and utter destruction of the proud,  
bringing relief and comfort to the oppressed.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned that God is aware of all the injustices resulting from those who neglect the poor and powerless, and His justice will come forth with His grace to judge the wicked and refine His people. **Last week**, we learned that God has the power to harden the hearts of the wicked and even render them blind to the truth as His way of punishing them.

**This week**, we will learn about God's abhorrence towards pride.

**Context:** After Isaiah received his calling (Isaiah 6) to proclaim judgment upon the Kingdom of Judah, he confronted King Ahaz. Isaiah reassured the king of God's protection, warned of the Assyrian invasion, and advised against forming alliances. He also prophesied about a future time of deliverance through the birth of a child named Immanuel (Isaiah 7) and the branch from Jesse (Isaiah 11). From chapter 13 onwards, Isaiah denounced the cruelty of other nations and prophesied their impending judgment.

**History:** Many agree that Isaiah 13-14 takes place during the political events in Isaiah 39:1-8 when Babylon became relevant (~701 BC). At that time, Judah sought an alliance with Babylon to fight against Assyria but the Babylonian king eventually failed. In his prophecy, Isaiah gave reasons why Judah should not place their trust in the surrounding nations, but only in God.

## Observation

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1. What is the king of Babylon condemned for doing? (Isa. 14:6, 8, 9-11, 12-15)

*Leaders' note: v.6 - in his anger struck down people and subdued nations, v.8 - mistreated the land, v.9-11 - killed the kings of other nations, v.12-13 - his own desire to be worshipped.*

2. What will happen to the offspring of the wicked? (Isa. 14:20b)

3. How do the judgements against Babylon (Isa. 14:20-23), Assyria (Isa. 14:24-27), and the Philistines (Isa. 14:28-32) differ from one another?

*Leaders' note: **Babylon** (v.3-22) – complete destruction, **Assyria** (v.24-27) – crushed in God's land and mountains, **Philistines** (v.28-32) – destroyed by famine.*

## Interpretation

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1. Do you think that God's judgment in Isa. 14:20 is too extreme? Why or why not?

## 2. What are the roots of pride, based on what the ‘morning star’ said in his heart? (Isa. 14:13-14)

*Leaders’ note: There are five “I Wills” where he asserted his own will rather than the will of God. The five wills refer to his desire to be like God, be exalted, have governing power, be glorified, and be the Most High.*

**Side note:** The Latin translation of the Bible (Septuagint), translates ‘morning star’ as Lucifer, which is where we get his name from. While it is traditionally associated with the king of Babylon in its immediate context, some consider it an allusion to the fall of Satan. This verse has also been linked to two verses in the New Testament, which are, Luke 10:18 and Revelation 12:8. It is common for prophecies to have a “near” fulfillment and a “far” fulfillment. Therefore, some argue that this text shadows forth the coming of the Antichrist.

## 3. What does the humiliation described in Isa. 14:15-23 teach us about pride?

## 4. How do you interpret the judgment given to the Philistines, “that the rod that struck you is broken” (Isa. 14:29), concerning God’s sovereignty?

*Leaders’ note: Historically, Assyria was the rod that struck the Philistines. Now that Assyria was humbled, the Philistines rejoiced. However, judgment would come for them as well. Hence, Isaiah continued to warn Judah not to place their trust in their surrounding nations but only in God’s sovereign plan alone.*

# Application

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1. How does pride manifest itself in different areas of your life, such as self-righteousness, personal achievements, cultural identity, etc.?

2. Share about a moment in your life when you were exceedingly prideful.

3. What are some practical ways to grow in humility?

## Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Redirecting Praise

Pride is a universal human problem that can manifest as an attitude of self-sufficiency, self-importance, and self-exaltation in relation to God. Pride is a great danger to our souls as it usually creeps in slowly, erecting a barrier between us and God and others. Feeding into our pride is an implicit attempt to steal God’s glory, and may lead to other sins or sinful behaviors. This chapter shows us the dark repercussions of a prideful heart and how God judges the proud severely. This week, try to pick up a new practice of redirecting praise to God in order to guard ourselves against pride. “He must become greater; I must become less.” - John 3:30

*Practical Instructions:*

1. Write down the praises and compliments that you receive from others
2. Acknowledge and digest them with a thankful heart
3. Think of a characteristic of God based on the praises you received
4. Redirect the praises we received to God in prayer

# WEEK 04 · ISAIAH 29

God condemns and corrects spiritual hypocrisy by reawakening our senses to fully perceive His awe-inspiring nature, which leads us to true worship.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's severe judgment for those who neglect His command to advocate for the poor and powerless, and the wicked who are irreverent to God's holiness. **Last week**, we learned that God despises pride and He humbles the proud.

**This week**, we will learn about true worship that stems from the awareness and awe of God.

**Context:** At the end of Isaiah 14, Isaiah received a series of oracles in the year King Ahaz died (~715 BC). He prophesied about the future judgments of the surrounding nations (Isaiah 14-23) and other prophecies that are more universal in perspective (Isaiah 24-27). The main message of these prophecies is that God will destroy the wicked and the proud, and establish His kingdom where His people can worship Him.

Isaiah 29 is written along with other "woe oracles" in Isaiah 28-33. These oracles declare the impending doom of Jerusalem due to the spiritual problems caused by bad leaders (Isaiah 28) and the people's distrust in God.

**History:** The judgments described in Isaiah 28-29 are generally interpreted as Assyria's attack on Jerusalem which came to pass in 701 BC.

## Observation

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1. What is the future fate of 'Ariel' and the consequence of her sins? (Isa. 29:1-4)

*Leaders' note: 'Ariel' refers to Jerusalem, the place of Judah's worship. In the Hebrew language, the word 'Ariel' sounds similar to other words that translate to 'altar hearth' (v.2), interpreted as a place of death.*

2. What are the three major reasons for 'Ariel's' judgment? (Isa. 29:9-12, 13-14, 15-16)

*Leaders' note: v.9-11 - spiritual insensitivity and deadened senses, v.13-14 - meaningless/empty worship, v.15-16 - deception and the determined decision to hide from God, denying God's sovereignty and wisdom.*

3. How will God restore 'Ariel'? (Isa. 29:5-8, 14, 17-21)

4. What will be the results of God's restoration? (Isa. 29:18-19, 22-24)

## Interpretation

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1. What are the dangers of spiritual blindness and drunkenness?

2. What are wrong perceptions that lead to false worship?
3. What does this passage teach us about God's desire for our worship?
4. John 4:23 says that true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth. How does Isaiah 29 illustrate the failure to worship in the Spirit and in truth?

## Application

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1. What are the things that hinder us from seeing and experiencing God's wonder?
2. What are the signs of false worship and how do we guard against it?
3. What are some ways for us to grow as true worshipers personally and communally?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Worship God in New Ways

We often equate worship with music, as it is the most commonly practiced form at a church gathering. However, worshipping God should extend to every aspect of our lives. True worship stems from a heart that is fully satisfied in God. It involves the entirety of our being to magnify Christ and become the instruments of righteousness.

This week, try incorporating several new ways to worship God. The goal is to increase our awareness and awe of God in our lives.

*Practical Instructions:*

1. **Admire the wonders of nature:** Take a short walk, and observe God's good design in His creations.
2. **Dedicate a sacrifice of silence to God:** Wake up earlier or find a time when you can experience complete silence. Spend time focusing on God's wonder during that time.
3. **Read and memorize Scripture:** Acknowledge the power of God's words and discover the beauty of God through His words.
4. **Love others:** Reach out to others and do acts of service. Jesus has modeled us the life of a servant. In serving, we declare God's beauty and emulate it.
5. **Create an artwork:** Meditate and express the beauty of God in the artwork that we create.

# WEEK 05 · ISAIAH 34-35

God will completely vindicate the faithful, and the redeemed will enter his Kingdom with great joy and gladness.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's judgment for those who are unjust, faithless, and proud. **Last week**, we learned that God condemns spiritual hypocrisy.

**This week**, Isaiah 34-35 brings a message of hope to those who are faithful, assuring them that God will deliver vengeance upon His enemies and grant complete victory to the redeemed.

**Context:** Isaiah 28-33 contains a series of woes. Isaiah rebuked the kingdom of Judah for seeking help from Egypt and other allies instead of relying on God. He urged them to turn back to God for deliverance and protection. He then described a future era of peace and prosperity under the reign of a righteous king. Finally, in Isaiah 33, Isaiah prophesied the downfall of the Assyrian empire, assuring the people of Judah that God would deliver them.

**History:** These oracles speak to a situation in Judah when the Assyrians were invading the land. This event was likely to have taken place in 705-701 BC. At that time, the leaders of Jerusalem were quite complacent and yearned for additional protection through political treaties with Egypt. Though Edom is specifically mentioned in these chapters, Edom is likely used as a symbol to represent all the other countries.

## Observation

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1. What do you notice about the description of the sword in Isa. 34:6?

*Leaders' note: There is a description of great violence, but also an allusion to the sacrificial system (blood of lambs and goats). Isaiah prophesies that this is the payment for sin.*

2. What is the result of believing in the promise of Isa. 35:4?

*Leaders' note: eyes opened, ears unstopped, lame will leap and tongues will shout. Streams in the wilderness, grass, and reeds in the desert. There is a complete restoration of the world.*

## Interpretation

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1. What does God's vengeance on Edom teach us about the consequences for those who go against God and God's people?

*Leaders' note: God's judgment will be done in His timing (v.8). Edom is often used as the representative of all nations that hated the Jews. Throughout history, Edom had a burning hatred towards Israel. Edom, a nation descended from Esau, had their capital in Bozrah and lived in the mountains of what is now Jordan.*

2. Is the imagery described in Isa. 34:11-15 a prophecy of judgment or peace?

*Leaders' note: The imagery described is a prophecy of judgment and desolation. Edom will be so completely decimated that the desert creatures will begin residing there.*

3. How does trusting in divine retribution, help us walk the Way of Holiness (Isa 35:4-8)?

4. What do you think the “Highway of Holiness” (Isa. 35:8) means? Are we on it now and can we fall off of it?

*Leaders' note: This is a significant image as it relates to Isaiah and John the Baptist. Isaiah 40:3-5 prophesies about one who will “make straight a highway for our God.”*

## Application

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1. In what ways has placing trust in God’s justice and retribution supported you in navigating challenging circumstances where you have been wronged by others?

2. Did you ever struggle in those moments where you have been wronged? What made it hard for you to trust in His retribution?

3. What are proactive measures you can take to prevent yourselves from taking “justice” in your own hands?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Intercessory Prayer

This week we are reminded that God is the ultimate judge, and we can rest in His promise to vindicate the faithful in His own timing. Nevertheless, in reality, we frequently feel hurt and burdened by the injustices in society and situations where we are wronged by others. This week, bring your burdens to God through intercessory prayers. There is power in naming and releasing your disappointments within a community.

*Practical Instructions:*

1. **Reflect on the Scripture and listen to the Holy Spirit:** Begin by meditating on Isaiah 35:4 individually and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us areas where we have experienced injustice.
2. **Share in small groups and practice active listening:** Ask open-ended questions and listen closely, so that our prayers can go deeper than just repeating what is shared by others. Remember that our goal is not to solve the problems at hand but to lift them to God and ask Him for help to comfort and guide us.
3. **Spend some time in silence before praying out loud:** Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us how we can pray for each other.
4. **Pray out loud:** Try to include in our prayer any Bible verses or characters of God that come to our mind during the time of silence.

# WEEK 06 · ISAIAH 36

Being obedient to God entails standing firm in faith and holding onto His promises especially when being challenged, insulted, or tempted.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's wrath and judgment upon His enemies. **Last week**, we learned about the severity of God's judgment for those who oppose Him and His promise to vindicate those who remain faithful.

**This week**, we will learn how to stand firm in faith when facing challenges and opposition.

**Context:** Isaiah 36-39 contains stories about King Hezekiah's life and the ways he dealt with political challenges. He trusted in God's deliverance amidst a threatening Assyrian invasion.

**History:** In the 14th year of King Hezekiah's reign (701 BC), the Assyrian army besieged the cities of Judah (cf. 2 Kgs. 18 and 2 Chr. 32). Unlike his father King Ahaz, King Hezekiah was a king who "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" and kept the LORD's commands.

## Observation

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1. What was the king of Assyria/his commander persuading King Hezekiah to do or not to do? What were his reasons and arguments? (Isa. 36:4-10)

*Leaders' note: The commander's arguments were based on what was imminent and visible only. All these questioned the foundation of King Hezekiah's faith and confidence in the LORD.*

2. Why did Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah ask the Assyrian commander to speak in Aramaic instead of Hebrew (Isa. 36:11)? Did the commander follow?

*Leaders' note: Aramaic was the official language of international relations at that time. They wanted the commander to speak in Aramaic probably because they did not want their people to feel discouraged.*

3. How would you summarize the Assyrian commander's appeal to the people of Judah (Isa. 36:13-20)? Who/What was he challenging or insulting?

*Leaders' note: The commander compared the LORD with foreign gods, and tried to confuse the LORD's true deliverance with the Assyrians' so-called deliverance of the people of Judah.*

## Interpretation

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1. From a spiritual point of view, what led to Assyria's attack of Judah?

*Leaders' note: It could be a result of the disobedience by King Ahaz and the people (Isa. 8:5-8) or the fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 10:5-6). The commander claimed divine authorization (Isa. 36:10) but that might just be a bluff or war strategy.*



## 2. Why would it be a problem for Judah to accept Assyria's offer and form an alliance?

*Leaders' note: To accept the advantages proposed by Assyria, the people of Judah must come out of the protection of the walls of Jerusalem, which would make them susceptible to surrender to the Assyrians, and then be exiled (Isa. 36:17). God has warned the people to put their trust only in God's deliverance and not to make treaties with foreigners, consistent with His command in Exo. 23:32 and Exo. 34.*

## 3. Where did Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah put their trust? What can we learn from their response to the Assyrian commander's challenge when we face opposition?

# Application

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1. Have you been challenged by others about your Christian faith? How did you respond?
2. This chapter teaches us to put our faith in God's promise of future deliverance rather than immediate relief from suffering through wrong means. Have you come across such a dilemma before? What are the obstacles or concerns that prevent you from making the right decision?
3. What practical steps can you take to strengthen your faith in God when things are not going as planned?

## Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Exploring Basic Apologetics

The Assyrian commander challenged the faith of King Hezekiah and the people of Judah through his persuasive speech. To this day, similar questions are still being asked: *If God is real, why are Christians still suffering? How can you prove your God is real?* While we may not have all the answers, it is still important to understand basic apologetics to equip ourselves when questions arise (1 Peter 3:15).

Here are some classic arguments for the existence of God. Discuss in your group about which ones are more convincing / which ones you would use to respond to a non-believer:

1. **The Cosmological Argument (Ps. 102:25; Heb. 3:4):** The universe is an extraordinary *effect* that necessitates an adequate *cause*, which is God.
2. **The Teleological Argument (Ps. 19:1-6; 94:9-10):** Complex order and design in the universe requires an intelligent Designer, and could not have occurred by chance. The Designer must be of sufficient intelligence to order with purpose, which is God.
3. **The Anthropological Argument (Ps. 8:3-8):** The appearance of mind, emotion, and will in humans is most reasonably the result of a superior intelligent, feeling, and willing Being, which is God.
4. **The Moral Argument (Prov. 28:1; Rom. 2:14-16):** Moral awareness is found generally among individuals and cultures. The presence of an absolute moral obligation implies the existence of an absolute moral Lawgiver, which is God.
5. **The Aesthetic Argument (Ps. 19:1-4; 27:4):** Capacity for the admiration of beauty, even when the object of beauty has no practical value, is universal. The existence of beauty must be accounted for by a ground and giver of beauty, which is God.

(Source: Nathan D. Holsteen and Michael J. Szigel, eds. *Exploring Christian Theology*. Vol. 1: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2014), 189.)

# WEEK 07 · ISAIAH 37

God actively responds to and protects those who are humble and prayerful. He will keep His promises and fight our battles when we are faithful.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's wrath and judgment upon His enemies and His promise to redeem those who are faithful. **Last week**, we learned that obedience to God requires standing firm in faith when being confronted.

**This week**, we will learn that God protects the humble and prayerful and keeps His promises to fight their battles.

**Context and History:** This story is part of the narrative account of King Hezekiah's life in his 14th year of reign (701-700 BC). After being attacked and taunted by King Sennacherib of Assyria (Isaiah 36), King Hezekiah sought help from God through the prophet Isaiah, prayed for deliverance, and God miraculously saved the people of Judah (cf. 2 Kgs. 19).

## Observation

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1. After hearing the challenges raised by the Assyrian field commander in Isa. 36, what were King Hezekiah's two reactions? (Isa. 37:1-4)

*Leaders' note: 1) Mourned and repented, 2) sought God through the prophet Isaiah, and asked him to pray for the remnants that still survived.*

2. What was so powerful about King Hezekiah's prayer? (Isa. 37:14-20)

3. For what reasons was King Sennacherib of Assyria condemned? (Isa. 37:23-25, 26-27, 28-29)

*Leaders' note: v.23-25 pride, v.26-27 destroyed Jerusalem and the people, and v.28-29 raged against God.*

4. What were the reasons for Judah's deliverance and protection? (Isa 37:32, 35)

5. How was the LORD's word in Isa 37:7 fulfilled? (Isa. 37:9, 36-38)

## Interpretation

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1. How did King Hezekiah describe his nation's situation in 37:3? What does Isa. 37:1-4 tell us about King Hezekiah's heart and priorities when facing attacks and insults?

*Leaders' note: King Hezekiah recognized that Judah was facing an urgent situation - the crisis had peaked, and victory was near, but there was no human strength left to bring it to completion. He knew that this matter could only be resolved by divine help. His actions showed that (1) he sought the LORD before making any response to his enemies and (2) his repentance and humility came first when seeking the LORD.*

## 2. Based on Isa. 37:3-4 and Isa. 14-20, what was the focus of King Hezekiah's prayers, and why?

*Leaders' note: Hezekiah's prayer began with the LORD's titles and attributes, and ended with the petition to glorify the LORD's name. While his prayer included a plea for the deliverance of his people, its primary focus remained on glorifying the LORD.*

## 3. How do Isa 37:32 and 37:35 pave the way for the Messiah?

*Leaders' note: "For the sake of David" - The LORD remembered the covenant He made with David that the throne of his kingdom would be forever, which culminated in the Messiah.*

# Application

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1. When you are in a desperate situation, would you resolve it first and pray afterward, or would you pray first and resolve it afterward? Why?

2. In light of King Hezekiah's prayer in Isa 37:15-20, is there anything that you would want to change in the way you pray? (E.g. focus, premise, heart)

3. We often sing "For the battle belongs to you Lord..." but what does this mean to you personally? Do you have any struggles in trusting God to fight your battles?

## Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Start your prayer with God's attributes

King Hezekiah's prayer in Isa 37:15-20 was powerful, even the LORD explicitly acknowledged that in Isa 37:21: "Because you have prayed to me..." Even in the most desperate situation, King Hezekiah did not start his prayer with his own agenda, but with the LORD's attributes. He declared God's glory and asked God to be God.

Try to list out at least 5 attributes of the LORD that you can think of, and start your prayer by praising His attributes before you ask anything. Observe how this may shift your posture and focus of your prayer.

Example list of the attributes of God found in Isaiah 37:

- LORD Almighty (v.16)
- God over all the kingdoms of the earth (v.16)
- Creator of heaven and earth (v.16)
- The one and only God (v.19)
- Omniscience / All-knowing (v.26, 28)
- Provider and sustainer (v.30-32)
- Protector (v.33)
- Promise keeper (v.35)

# WEEK 08 · ISAIAH 38

The LORD's grace and mercy is sufficient even for the boldest request made from a faithful and honest heart.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's judgment upon His enemies and His promise to redeem those who stand firm in faith, especially when facing opposition. **Last week**, we learned that God protects the humble and prayerful and keeps His promises to deliver them.

**This week**, we will learn about God's grace in His answer to Hezekiah's prayer, upon his sincere and honest plea.

**Context and History:** Many scholars suggest that the events in Isaiah 38-39 took place before the events in Isaiah 36-37, because according to Isaiah 38:6, Jerusalem had not been delivered from the Assyrian attack yet. Isaiah 38 recorded how King Hezekiah was dying, yet the LORD extended his life in response to his prayer. This was likely to take place around 703-701 BC, right before Assyria besieged Jerusalem. A parallel record can be found in 2 Kings 20:1-11.

## Observation

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1. What was Hezekiah's posture and attitude when he pleaded with the LORD? (Isa. 38:2-3)?
2. Why did the LORD show a sign to Hezekiah, and what was the sign? (Isa. 38:7-8)

*Leaders' note: Isa. 38:7-8 is actually the answer to Isa. 38:22 (see 2 Kgs. 20:8-11). The order was swapped probably because the author wanted to present Hezekiah's song (Isa. 38:9-20) as the climax of the text.*

3. Summarize how Hezekiah went from hopelessness to hopefulness in his song (Isa. 38:9-20). What was the turning point?

## Interpretation

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1. How did the LORD identify Himself in His response to Hezekiah in Isa. 38:5? How does it provide a reason for why the LORD added 15 years to Hezekiah's life (Isa 38:5-6)?

*Leaders' note: The LORD referred to Himself as "God of your father David". It shows that God is faithful to His promises. Historically, Hezekiah's son (Manasseh) was born during this 15-year period, who became his successor. He then preserved David's lineage, from whom Joseph – the earthly father of Jesus – was born.*

2. What was the symbolic meaning of the sign given by the LORD? (Isa 38:7-8)

*Leaders' note: The sun casts shadows on more or fewer steps depending on the time of day. This sign is a symbolic representation of Hezekiah's life that was passing away and about to be restored. The practical impossibility of "reversing" daylight also proved that it was a miraculous sign.*

3. In other English translations, the word “benefit” in Isa. 38:17 is translated as “peace”. How does this verse show the impact of sins and the power of God’s restoration?

*Leaders’ note: In the Old Testament, sickness was often seen as a punishment from God. Hezekiah initially viewed his suffering as a punishment for his sins, which were then forgiven by God. In the New Testament, Jesus disproved this belief in John 9. Nonetheless, this verse still teaches us that sin can impact both our spiritual and physical well-being. Through genuine repentance, we can seek restoration from God. While physical restoration on earth is not guaranteed, God promises to give us a new body in the eternal life.*

4. Why is it important for Hezekiah to write his “song”? (Isa. 38:9-20)

*Leaders’ note: He wrote his praise to express his worshipful response to God’s restoration. Declaring God’s work through worship is important to tell others and the future generations about God’s faithfulness (v.19).*

## Application

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1. God already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). All the days ordained for us were written in His book (Psalm 139:16). If you were in Hezekiah's situation in Isa. 38:1, would you still pray to God? Why or why not?

2. Share the boldest / the most emotional / the most honest prayer you have ever made to God. What was that prayer experience like?

3. How can we expand or enrich our worship experience as a community, especially when we receive answers to our prayers?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Writing your own psalm

Psalms are great examples of genuine expression of the authors’ raw emotion to God. Isaiah 38:9-20 is a psalm of lamentation and praise expressed by Hezekiah, filled with his anguish and transformation to hope. This week, try writing your own psalm using a similar format. Allow yourself to dwell in His presence through reflecting, wrestling, writing, and praising God.

Format of Hezekiah’s psalm:

(i) Present your anxieties, worries, and difficulties;

(ii) Come to a turning point, e.g. recognizing God’s sovereignty or repenting your sins;

(iii) End with thanksgiving and praises to God.

# WEEK 09 · ISAIAH 39

Pride, self-centeredness, and forgetfulness of God's mercy could result in  
God's judgment on a much greater scale

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's sovereignty in how He judges, protects, and redeems His people, and the reasons for His actions. **Last week**, we learned about God's grace in His answer to Hezekiah's prayer and his worshipful response upon receiving it.

**This week**, we will read about how Hezekiah became prideful and how it contributed to the reasons for the judgment proclaimed on the kingdom of Judah.

**Context and History:** The story in Isaiah 39 likely happened in 701 BC, right after Hezekiah recovered from his illness (Isa. 38), but before the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem (Isa. 36-37). The order of these chapters was likely swapped by the author.

Marduk-Baladan was the first king of Babylon but was defeated by Assyria in 702 BC. He sought to build a good relationship with Hezekiah, such that the kingdom of Judah could be on Babylon's side against Assyria. It was in this context that the king of Babylon sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, and Hezekiah welcomed his envoys (cf. 2 Kgs. 20:12-20 and 2 Chr. 32:31).

## Observation

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1. How did Hezekiah welcome the envoys from Babylon, and what was his motive? (Isa. 39:1-2)

*Leaders' note: It was a show-off, or a gesture to impress and ally with Babylon through sharing resources to fight against Assyria. Either way, Hezekiah put his trust in his own wealth and Babylon, rather than God.*

2. What were the long-term and immediate consequences of Hezekiah's actions? (Isa. 38:6-8)

3. How did Hezekiah respond to Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 39:8)? How was it different from His *previous* reaction in Isa. 38:1-2, and His *future* reaction in Isa. 37:1-2?

## Interpretation

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1. The envoys' visit was said to be a test from God for Hezekiah (2 Chr. 32:31). What was God testing Hezekiah for, and did he pass or fail the test?

*Leaders' note: Despite God's merciful response to Hezekiah in Isa. 38, Hezekiah neither consulted God before receiving the envoys nor acknowledged God's provision when showing his treasures.*

## 2. Why did Hezekiah say the LORD's word was "good" (Isa. 39:8)?

*Leaders' note: Some scholars argued that Hezekiah simply acknowledged that Judah deserved divine judgment, and was thankful for the mentioning of "descendants" (Isa. 39:7) because he didn't have an heir yet. However, some scholars argued that Hezekiah lacked concern for the future generations, and simply focused on his own peace during his lifetime.*

## 3. What was the impact of Hezekiah's behaviors on the kingdom of Judah? What does that tell us about the consequences of our sins?

*Leaders' note: After more than 100 years (in 586 BC), King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and removed all treasures, and the Israelites went into exile (2 Kgs. 24:10-13). The prophecy was fulfilled. A king's pride contributed to the nation's downfall.*

# Application

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1. If you were Hezekiah who received gifts and visitors from Babylon, how would you respond? What is a godly way to respond to compliments and flatters?

2. "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." (C. S. Lewis) What are some practical ways to prevent yourself from being prideful or self-centered?

3. Knowing that your pride or your sinful act could have an impact on others, are there any habits, attitudes, or thoughts that you would want to confess and change now?

## Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Time capsule - remembering God's mercy

There were past instances when Hezekiah was very faithful to God and God responded with blessings, but he seemed to have quickly forgotten about it and blinded by his own pride. We too are susceptible to sins like pride and self-centeredness if we do not remember God's mercy and blessing.

Practical Instructions:

1. Think of 3 instances in the past where God responded to your prayer, plea, or concern
2. Write them down on a piece of paper and seal it in an envelope
3. Pray together as a group to praise and thank God for His mercies
4. Re-open it in 3 months' time (or let your group leader keep your envelopes and re-distribute them after 3 months), and be reminded of God's mercy and blessing for you

# WEEK 10 · ISAIAH 41

God's power and sovereignty prevail over fear. We can find strength in Him and His promises to bring justice.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned through Hezekiah's life about how to be faithful and obedient to God when facing challenges, and God's response to our sincere plea. **Last week**, we delved into the consequences of pride and God's divine wrath, though not without mercy.

**This week**, we will discuss God's power and desire to deliver His people which are evident in His sovereignty over nations, nature, and the future; we should not fear but trust in Him.

**Context:** As explained in the "Introduction" at the beginning of this study, Isaiah 40-66 is likely written by a different author(s) and intended for a different audience. Chapters 40-55 were written to the people during the exile, while chapters 56-66 were written for post-exilic audiences. Isaiah 40-66 mainly focuses on God's promise of redemption and grace, which includes writings about the coming "Messiah". In Isaiah 40-48, the prophet reminded the people of their coming deliverance because of God's greatness and their unique relationship with Him.

**History:** There are two possible interpretations of the historical context of Isaiah 40-44: either the military conflict with Sennacherib, the King of Assyria (701 BC), or Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylonia (587 BC). Nevertheless, to the original audience, Isaiah 41 gives a message of encouragement amidst military pressure. While the text uses legal terms, it is not a covenant lawsuit like in Isaiah 1, as there is no direct accusation against the accused.

## Observation

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1. Who was speaking and who was he speaking to?

*Leaders' note: God, Israel, the "islands" (v.1, v.5), the idols (v.21).*

*The "islands" refer to the unidentified nations surrounding Israel, possibly located on distant islands and coastlands. This is an imaginary call where God invites the Israelites and foreigners to gather and investigate the evidence of God's sovereignty.*

2. What was the response of the "islands" to God's actions in verses 2-4?

3. What were the pictures that God gave to strengthen the Israelites? (Isa. 41:10, 14-16, 17-20)

## Interpretation

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1. Based on the islands' response to God's assertions (Isa. 41:2-7), what does it say about their understanding of God?



2. Based on God's view on idols as presented in Isa. 41:21-24, what does it say about God's nature and the things He is sovereign over? (Isa. 41:25-29)

*Leaders' note: God displayed **His authority, foreknowledge, and supremacy over idols**. This invites the islands/nations to recognize and align themselves with God's divine plan.*

3. What is the relationship between God and the Israelites, and why should they not fear?

*Leaders' note: The Israelites should not fear if they truly know **God's character and power, His promises, and His relationship with them**. God reminded the people that they are **God's chosen people**. God is their **God** and their **Redeemer**, who is sovereign over the future and has promised a glorious future.*

## Application

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1. What are some examples of idols in our society? In what ways can we observe the futility of idols in our society's dependence on wealth, technology, or power?

2. How have we put our trust in "idols" or things apart from God during times of fear?

3. How can we live differently from the culture around us to display our reliance on God rather than the world?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Practicing the Daily Office

The Daily Office is a practice of intentionally creating pauses in our day to **be still, slow down, and be with Jesus**. It is easy to be preoccupied with our daily tasks and responsibilities, as we try to gain control over our life. The goal of practicing the Daily Office is to create a continual and easy familiarity with God's Presence each day. When we stop our activity and pause to be with God, we are declaring that God rules, and we do not.

Practical Instructions:

1. Choose a liturgy, depending on the time of the day that your group is meeting, and read through it together. Agree on a leader to facilitate the pace, or take turns reading and praying.
2. Read the text aloud, even if you are alone when you practice it throughout the week. Be sure to read it slowly, prayerfully, and thoughtfully.

Example resources:

1. Daily Office Prayer Guide by Peter Scazzero
2. <https://dailyoffice.app/>
3. <https://dailyofficeforall.com/>

# WEEK 11 · ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

God's promise of salvation would come true through the Suffering Servant who removes the guilt of the people by his sacrifice.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we studied the life of Hezekiah—his moments of faithfulness and obedience, as well as his pride. Yet, God remained gracious and merciful to him at all times. **Last week**, we discussed God's sovereignty which should embolden our trust in Him.

**This week**, we will **read Isaiah 52:13-53:12** which talks about the suffering and sacrificial role of the Messiah, foreshadowing Jesus Christ, through whom many will be redeemed.

**Context:** Isaiah 52:13-53:12 consists of the fourth and final Servant Song, which prophesies the Messiah who would bring salvation, justice, and restoration to God's people through His suffering. In Isaiah 42, the Servant of the LORD is introduced, stating that He was chosen by God and God delights in Him. The second Servant Song can be found in Isaiah 49 and speaks of the Messiah's work in the world to display God's splendor and restore His people. Isaiah 50 consists of the third Servant Song, which contrasts Israel's sin with the Servant's obedience.

**History:** Isaiah's prophecies of the Suffering Servant are understood to be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' suffering and sacrificial death are vividly depicted in Isaiah 53, and it was prophesied that he would bear the sins and transgressions of humanity. Jesus' resurrection was also alluded to in Isaiah 53:11.

## Observation

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1. How was the Servant's appearance described? (Isa. 52:14, 53:2-3, 5)
2. How would humans view and treat the Suffering Servant? (Isa. 52:14, 53:1-3, 7-9)
3. What did the Servant do? (Isa. 53:4-6)
4. Why was the Servant pierced, crushed, punished, and suffered (Isa. 53:7-9, 10-12)?
5. What was prophesied to come after the Servant's suffering? (Isa. 53:11-12)

## Interpretation

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1. Based on this passage, what does it say about the natural tendencies of humans?

*Leaders' note: In Isa. 53:3 and Isa. 53:8, we observed that humans despised, rejected, and oppressed Jesus. People were appalled at Him (Isa. 52:14) and opposed Him (Isa. 53). This passage highlights humanity's natural tendency to **reject** God and emphasizes that **humans do not have a passive role**; rather, humanity is identified as the culprit.*

2. How has the prophecy of the Suffering Servant been fulfilled in Jesus Christ?  
Make cross-references to Luke 22-23 for deeper discussions.
3. Why is it vital to see Jesus' willingness to die in our place and his innocence? (Isa. 53:7-9)
4. Do you think that God's will in Isa. 53:10 is too extreme? Why or why not?

*Leaders' note: Some translations of Isa. 53:10 say "But the LORD **desired** to crush Him" or "The LORD **was pleased** to crush Him". It is important to note that The Father did not find the sufferings and death of His Son something pleasurable, unlike the worldly definition of pleasure in the modern day, but they pleased Him because they **fulfilled His great purpose of providing redemption for humankind**.*

## Application

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1. How do the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ draw us to worship?
2. Do you remember and honor Jesus' sacrifice every day? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. How should we live differently, knowing that we have been redeemed by Jesus' suffering?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Observing The Lord's Supper

During the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the act of communion for the church to observe in remembrance of him (Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:18-20). Its significance, however, goes beyond simply remembering Jesus' life and death. Partaking in the Lord's Supper involves the acts of examination and self-reflection, fellowship within the body of believers, proclamation of the gospel as a witness to non-believers, spiritual nourishment, and anticipation of the future consummation of God's kingdom. Moreover, it provides a multi-sensory experience, enabling participants to identify with God's deliverance of sinners through Jesus' death on the cross.

Instructions:

1. Prepare the communion elements (bread and juice/wine) and pass them around.
2. Be sure to give a word of caution before observing Communion, to ensure that everyone who partakes is a follower of Christ.
3. Begin by preparing our hearts, praying in silence, and confessing to God ways that we have fallen short.
4. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 11:23-24. Pause and take the bread together as a group.
5. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 11:25. Pause and take the juice/wine together as a group.
6. Close the time in prayers, declaring praise and thanksgiving for Jesus' sacrifice that allows us into this communion with God.

# WEEK 12 · ISAIAH 65:17-66:24

God rewards the true worshippers with a glorious and abundant future and punishes the false worshippers.

## Preface

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**In the previous weeks**, we learned about God's sovereignty and mercy in how He deals with His people – both the faithful and the unfaithful. **Last week**, we discussed the prophecy of the future Messiah who will suffer and sacrifice Himself for the redemption of many.

**This week**, we will read **Isaiah 65:17-66:24** where God promises a glorious future for those who fear Him and an impending judgment for those who are irreverent.

**Context:** Isaiah 56-66 contains prophecies concerning a distant future from the actual time of writing. The overarching theme of Isaiah 56-59 discusses the human inability to attain salvation without God's help and mercy. Isaiah 60-62 displays God's holiness, emphasizing our need for salvation, and reveals future glory. Isaiah 63-66 explores the themes of God's divine ability to restore and redeem creation, promising a new creation for those who revere Him while warning of impending judgment for those who reject God. These final chapters tie together the overarching themes of the book, providing a powerful and hopeful conclusion.

**Final Summary:** The Book of Isaiah conveys enduring lessons about the existence of God, His imminent return, and the significance of our response to Him in determining our eternal destiny. The major theme of Isaiah is the holiness and salvation of God, emphasizing humanity's need for and provision of salvation through the Servant of the LORD.

Side note: This passage is commonly used to describe the period of tribulation (Isa. 66:7-9) and the millennium (Isa. 66:10-14) before the second coming of Jesus (Isa. 66:15-16) within the dispensationalist view of the end times. However, scholars and theologians hold varying interpretations of these events. Our study will not delve into specific interpretations of this passage but will instead focus on the warnings and promises of God, pertaining to the overall theme of Isaiah.

## Observation

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1. How was the future glory of the New Heavens and a New Earth described? (Isa. 65:17-22)
2. How would God treat and judge those who rebelled against Him? (Isa. 66:3-6, 15-16, 24)
3. Who are the people that God looks on with favor and who are those that God treats harshly? (Isa. 66:1-6, 18-24)
4. What was the people's response to God's redemption? (Isa. 66:10-14)
5. What would be the task of those who would come and see God's glory? (Isa. 66:18-24)

# Interpretation

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1. Building upon Observation question number 3, what does God desire from His people?

*Leaders' note: God desires His people to have **true reverence** (Isa. 66:5), leading them to **true worship and obedience** in following His ways. This is in contrast to what was described in Isa. 66:3-4.*

2. Based on Isaiah 66:17-21, what should those who have witnessed God's glory do?

*Leaders' note: The "sign" in Isa. 66:19 can be interpreted as the resurrection of Christ, signifying the birth of the Church, or as a miraculous manifestation of Christ, the Son of Man (Mat. 24:30), before His second coming. Regardless of the interpretation, a "sign" will be set upon those who have witnessed God's glory and they are called to **proclaim God's glory** among the nations, inviting **people from all nations to come and worship Him**.*

3. What does the description of the New Heavens and the New Earth tell us about God's original intention for humanity and the world? What does it tell us about God's nature?

*Leaders' note: People are meant to **delight in God and His creations**, and to **enjoy the work of their hands**. The world and creations are meant to exist in a state of **peace and complete harmony**. This question may raise the issue of whether God intends punishments from the beginning. While punishment is necessary for God to uphold justice given the present reality of sin (rebellion against God), we can take a leap of faith knowing that God is loving and merciful as much as He is just. We need to be cautious not to impose our own understanding on this matter.*

## Application

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1. Looking at the way we live, does it show our reverence for God and His Word? If so, how? If not, why not?

2. How can we presently respond to this promise of the New Heavens and the New Earth?

### Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Serve and Go on a Mission!

As Christians, we are called to worship God with our lives by actively engaging in the work of the Kingdom. While we can all be Christ's ambassadors and His co-laborers in our workplaces, we should not neglect our calling to serve others and love the poor and powerless. Take some time as a group to consider and participate in activities that proclaim God's glory among the nations, inviting them to come and worship Him. This can be achieved by going on a mission trip together or by serving the community, where we can interact with individuals from other nations or ethnic groups and extend God's hope to those who are in need.

Here are four aspects of mission, take inventory of how your group is doing, and keep each other accountable to practice these disciplines together:

- **Go** = going outside church communities to serve or spread the gospel. It can be in Hong Kong or overseas.
- **Give** = financially supporting world missionaries or mission projects/organizations
- **Pray** = praying for people around the world who need Jesus and for world missionaries
- **Welcome** = inviting others and welcoming them to receive our hospitality, love, and care



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study guide has been created through the coordinated efforts of the young adult staff team at Island ECC. Its purpose is to provide discussion questions for small groups studying the selected chapters in the book of Isaiah. In this series, we aim to offer glimpses into the events and circumstances surrounding the people of Judah, as well as to glean insights from the book of Isaiah through the variety of literary styles it contains.

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THE SPIRIT OF THE SOVEREIGN LORD IS ON ME, BECAUSE THE LORD HAS ANOINTED ME TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKENHEARTED, TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE CAPTIVES AND RELEASE FROM DARKNESS FOR THE PRISONERS

ISAIAH 61:1