

# God's Word for Today

## Isaiah

### Herald of the Messiah

*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. Of the increase of  
His government and peace there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it with justice and  
righteousness from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

**Isaiah 9:6–7**

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# Lesson 1

## Isaiah, Prophet to a Rebellious Nation (Isaiah 1:1–6:13)

### Theme Verse

“ ‘Come now, let us reason together,’ 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 1:18**).

### Goal

We seek to begin to comprehend Isaiah’s message as one of both sin and grace, Law and Gospel.

### What’s Going On Here?

Isaiah is called by God to speak His message to a rebellious people. In these chapters, Isaiah confronts God’s people with their sins of pride and idolatry. He minces no words as he unmasks their smug self-satisfaction and as he describes the coming day of God’s judgment and wrath.

But God’s prophet also preaches God’s Word of Gospel to those who will respond to the Lord’s gracious invitation, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD. ... He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths” (**Isaiah 2:3**).

### Searching the Scriptures

1. Read **Isaiah 1**. Like all of God’s Old Testament prophets, Isaiah sees, really sees, the condition of God’s people. Isaiah paints several word pictures in this passage that portray the dire straits in which God’s people find

themselves. List some of the pictures of sin and rebellion painted by the prophet and the verses in which those portraits appear.

2. Isaiah also sees a beautiful picture of God's love (**1:18**). If you were to commission an artist to paint that picture, what details would you want included? Explain.

Read **Isaiah 2:1-5**. "In the last days" here and elsewhere in Scripture refers to the first coming of Christ and usually includes the entire New Testament era that will conclude with Christ's second coming. This passage is a poem built around one central thought. That thought is expressed in two phrases found at the center of the poem. Reread these words (the middle two phrases of **verse 3**: "He will teach us ... in His paths").

3. What does it mean to learn the Lord's ways and to walk in the Lord's paths? (See also **Psalms 86:11; 143:8-10**.)

4. We do not learn the Lord's ways and walk in His paths by drumming up the desire or the ability to do so inside our own hearts. It does not happen as we try hard. How do the verses from **Isaiah** and those from **Psalms 86** and **143** describe God's role in this process?

The phrases *Mt. Zion, the mountain of the LORD's temple, the mountain of the LORD, the house of the God of Jacob, Zion, and Jerusalem* all refer to nearly the same thing—the place where God meets His people.

5. Where did God meet His Old Testament people (**Exodus 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–13**)? Where does God meet us today (**Matthew 18:20; Acts 2:38–39; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26**)?

6. Read **Isaiah 2:6–11**. Isaiah notes how wealthy Judah is. While wealth is not inherently evil, riches and personal security often lead people down the path away from God's light and into the darkness of idolatry. Why do you think this happens? (See **Isaiah 31:1**.)

**Isaiah 2:12–4:1** makes a unified point. The wrath of God will fall on His rebellious people of that day—and also, in the final judgment, on all who have stubbornly stood in opposition to God's justice and love. God's judgment will show itself in the breakdown of social order in Judah. Chaos will result. Read this section as you have time inside or outside of class.

Read **4:2–6**. Note that this picture of God's grace and the picture of that same grace in **2:1–5** form bookends, as it were, around the picture of judgment in **2:6–4:1**.

7. What, specifically, does God promise His people in **4:2–6**? Where in these verses do you see the Messiah, your Savior?

8. Read **5:1–7**. In the Scriptures, vineyards often symbolize God's people. What did the Lord do to cultivate His vineyard? What good reason can be given for its unfruitfulness?

After the song of the vineyard, Isaiah goes on to give many specific examples of fruitlessness. He prefaces several of these examples with the word *woe*. Read **5:8–30** as you have time inside or outside of class.

9. Read **6:1–8**. Describe what Isaiah sees and hears. Why do you think Isaiah confesses his own sins? Why does he confess the sins of his people? (See **1 Corinthians 12:12–26**.)

10. How does God (through the seraph) respond to Isaiah's confession? Since Isaiah's ministry involves speaking for God, why would this specific assurance of forgiveness (absolution) be particularly meaningful for him?

11. Reread **Isaiah 6:8**. The words translated "I am ruined" (**verse 5**) likely mean "dumbstruck," silenced by the fear of destruction. What does Isaiah say when he first speaks again?



12. Read **6:9–13**. The people would undergo some terrible consequences because of their hard-hearted rebellion (**verses 11–12**). What words in **verse 13** speak of the hope Judah could have?

## **The Word for Us**

1. **Isaiah 1:29–31** refers to the idolatry into which God's people had fallen. The "sacred oaks" and "gardens" were sites reserved for idol worship and sexual immorality. Isaiah says the people will someday be ashamed and disgraced as they remember what they did there. What idols in the lives of God's people today are shameful and an embarrassment?

2. How can God's promise to cleanse and restore His people (**1:25–27**) also comfort you today as you think about the false gods on which you sometimes rely?

3. How do our lives become lives of fruitfulness rather than barrenness? (See **John 15:4–8**.)

## Closing

Read or sing together these stanzas of "Holy, Holy, Holy":

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
Which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

## **Lesson 2**

# **Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel! (Isaiah 7:1-9:7)**

### **Theme Verse**

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel” (**Isaiah 7:14**).

### **Goal**

We aim to understand Isaiah's prophecy of Immanuel and his prophecy that a light would dawn on those living in the darkness of sin and under the shadow of death.

### **What's Going On Here?**

Isaiah wrote eloquently about the sign of Immanuel. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of that sign. In Jesus, God is with us. In Jesus God took the punishment for our sins upon Himself, thus obtaining for us the salvation and deliverance we could never obtain by our own effort, our own scheming. We bow in reverence and receive from our Immanuel the peace we so desperately need.

### **Searching the Scriptures**

1. Read **Isaiah 7:1-9**. Today's reading includes a number of historical players. Note the identity and position of each of these people:

- Ahaz

- Rezin
- Pekah (see also **2 Kings 15:27–31**)

2. The year is approximately 735/734 B.C.. As the account begins, what crisis occupies the thoughts of Ahaz and his advisors (**Isaiah 7:1–2**)?

3. Knowing His people's problem, God—the heavenly King—takes the initiative. He knows Ahaz will not come to Him (see **2 Kings 16:1–4**), so He sends Isaiah to Ahaz. What does this tell you about God and His concern for His people? Contrast what Aram/Syria and Ephraim/Israel say (**Isaiah 7:5–6**) with what Judah's true King says (**7:7–9**) about Judah's future.

4. Read **7:10–25**. God is not about to give up on Ahaz. Why do you think God offers Ahaz a sign? Why do you think Ahaz refuses?

5. In grace, God gives Ahaz a sign anyway. What is it and what does it signify (see also **Matthew 1:18–23**)?

6. Rather than trusting God and His promise to deliver, Ahaz decides he must try to save himself and his people apart from God's help. Read about his plan in **2 Kings 16:5–9**. To whom does Ahaz turn for help? Reread **Isaiah 7:17–25**. What unexpected, monstrous consequences will grow from Ahaz' rebellious plan?

7. Read **8:1–10**. Isaiah paints a powerful word picture in **8:6–8**. The phrase "the gently flowing waters of Shiloah" refers to a small stream that may have formed part of the water supply in Jerusalem. With what are these peaceful waters contrasted in **8:7–8**?

As you have time inside or outside of class, read **8:11–18**, which contains a warning from God to Isaiah not to follow the way of the people of Judah and Isaiah's response.

8. As a backdrop for the wonderful promises found in **Isaiah 9**, read **8:19–22**. Then read **9:1–7**. If possible, locate on a map the land Joshua allotted to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali at the time God's people conquered Canaan. Then compare **Matthew 4:12–17** with **Isaiah 9:1–2**. How would Jesus fulfill Isaiah's prophecy?

**Isaiah 9:6–7** is a birth announcement—the birth announcement of the coming Messiah. This announcement is 700 years or so early, but it contains such good news that the heavenly Father wants the world to know what He will do through His Son.

9. See how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about Him contained in the four names listed:

- Wonderful Counselor (**John 14:16; 15:26**)
- Mighty God (**Matthew 28:18**)
- Everlasting Father (**John 14:9–10**)
- Prince of Peace (**Ephesians 2:14–18**)

## **The Word for Us**

1. God is faithful even when we waver in faith. Read **Romans 8:32**. How can Christ's cross help you overcome the guilt of faithlessness? How can the cross increase your confidence in your Lord's promises in future times of crisis?

2. The sign of Immanuel was earthly, tangible evidence of God's very real presence in the midst of His people. What earthly, tangible signs provide evidence that God is still among His people today? When have these signs brought you particularly powerful comfort?

3. Compare **Isaiah 9:2** with **John 8:12**. Explain how Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy in your life.

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel”:

Oh, come, O Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heav’nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high,  
And cheer us by Your drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death’s dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!

## Lesson 3

# “His Hand Is Still Upraised” (Isaiah 9:8–12:6)

### Theme Verse

“In that day you will say: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done, and proclaim that His name is exalted’ ” (Isaiah 12:4).

### Goal

We seek to better understand God’s justice and mercy and to trust more deeply in the God who is our strength, our song, and our salvation.

### What’s Going On Here?

God’s hand is upraised in judgment on all who rebel against Him, on all who in arrogance insist on creating their own security, their own happiness, their own prosperity.

God’s hand of judgment fell fully on Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace, great David’s greater Son, who hung on the cross and absorbed all of God’s wrath against human sin.

Now, those of us who live as citizens of Christ’s peaceful kingdom enjoy many of the blessings He lived and died to earn for us. As we look forward to the coming of that kingdom in all its fullness, we continue to spread the Good News of the kingdom so that our God’s great name may be known in all the earth.

### Searching the Scriptures

Read **Isaiah 9:8–10:4**. Today’s reading might correctly be called a song of judgment in four stanzas. The song’s refrain carries a tone of fore-



boding, but also a hint of hope. Read the refrain from **9:12, 17, 21**, and **10:4**.

1. What words of the refrain express the judgment of God? From what might someone listening to this song derive hope?

2. Summarize the sin of God's people that each of the stanzas condemns:

- **9:8–12**

- **9:13–17**

- **9:18–21**

- **10:1–4**

3. Read **10:5–19**. Though God uses Assyria, He will still judge and punish its wickedness. How would you summarize the basic charge the Judge of the universe makes against Assyria? (See especially **10:12, 13, 15**.)

4. Read **10:20–23**. Who is included in the remnant of Israel? If you had been among Isaiah's first hearers, would all this talk about the remnant give you comfort or more reason for fear?

As you have time inside or outside of class read **10:24–34**, which contains more comforting news about God's judgment of Assyria, the oppressor of His people.

Previously in his book, Isaiah referred to the coming Messiah as "Prince of Peace" (**9:6**). **Isaiah 11** expands on that title, describing the Messiah's peaceful kingdom. Read **11:1–16**.

5. What examples can you give to show that sin lies at the root of all the lack of peace in individual lives and in human society?

6. Compare **Isaiah 11:4** with **Matthew 5:3–5**. The poor (needy) and the meek are not those without enough money to take care of themselves. Who, then, are they?

7. Is the promise that the Prince of Peace will judge the poor, that He will give them justice, good news or bad news for you? Explain.

8. In what way is the curse of sin (**Genesis 3:14–19**) reversed in Christ's peaceful kingdom according to the picture painted here? When will this peaceful kingdom come in its fullness? (See **Romans 8:18–21**; **1 John 3:1–2**; and **Revelation 21:1–4**.)

9. Read **Isaiah 12:1–6**. Thinking of everything God had done and planned to do for His people, Isaiah bursts into a song of praise. Compare the words of Isaiah's hymn of praise with **Exodus 15:1–18** and **Revelation 15:3–4**. What similarities in thought and wording do you find? What conclusions can you draw from these similarities?

## **The Word for Us**

1. When are you most likely to take credit for your own accomplishments? What makes this so spiritually deadly?

2. How does God's control and use of evil nations comfort you?

3. In what ways is God your strength? your song? your salvation?

## Closing

Reread **Isaiah 11:1–3a**. The reference to the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit in the first stanza of the hymn below comes from **Isaiah 11:2–3a**. The Spirit with whom Christ was anointed was poured out on the church on Pentecost. Now that same Spirit bestows His sevenfold gifts on Christ's people. Read or sing together the following stanzas of "Come, Holy Ghost, Our Souls Inspire."

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,  
Ignite them with celestial fire;  
Spirit of God, You have the art  
Your gifts, the sev'nfold, to impart.

Your blest outpouring from above  
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.  
Illumine with perpetual light  
The dullness of our blinded sight.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,  
And you, of both, to be but one  
That, as the ceaseless ages throng,  
Your praise may be our endless song!

## Lesson 4

# Fallen Is Babylon the Great (Isaiah 13:1–23:18)

### Theme Verse

“The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again He will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob” (**Isaiah 14:1**).

### Goal

We aim to understand “Babylon” as the world system that throughout history has set itself up against the Lord and against His Christ and take comfort in the ultimate defeat of this world system. We seek to gain a greater appreciation for our God who loves even His enemies.

### What’s Going On Here?

These chapters begin what Bible scholars have called “the Gentile oracles.” God condemns a number of Gentile nations for their rebellion and stubborn pride. Even as our Lord does that, He comforts His people with the promise that their oppression under these nations will soon come to an end. He will pour out His wrath in full on “all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness” as Paul writes in **Romans (1:18)**. God will destroy His enemies. He will bring His people relief.

But the Lord also has another purpose in mind for these acrid declarations of His judgment. In love, God speaks Law to show sinners their need for a Savior. He invites all people of every nation to receive His great gifts of repentance and faith in the one who is the world’s only hope.

# Searching the Scriptures

**Isaiah 13–23** pronounces God’s judgment on the enemies of His people. In 722 B.C. (during the time of Isaiah’s ministry), Samaria, the capital of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), was destroyed by the Assyrians. The people were taken into captivity. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, though threatened by Assyria, was spared by God and remained an independent nation. But in 587 B.C., Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, would be destroyed by the Babylonians. The first prophetic oracle in this section of Isaiah’s book addresses Babylon.

1. Read **Isaiah 13:1–22**. What will “the day of the LORD” described in this chapter be like for Babylon (**13:6–9**)?

2. What clues in **13:10, 11** and **13** hint that God is not here addressing the ancient Babylonian Empire exclusively? (Compare **Joel 2:31; Luke 21:25–28**; and **Hebrews 12:26**.)

3. Read **Genesis 1:28** and **11:1–9**. In what ways has Babylon (Babel) symbolized the rebellion of the sinful world system of thought and behavior almost from the beginning?

4. Read **Isaiah 14:1–23**. The main part of this reading can be called a taunt song against the king of Babylon. From reading the song of joy his victims would some day sing at his defeat. What details can you find to illustrate what this king's reign would be like?

5. Reread **14:13–14**. How are this king's words similar to those of the rebels at Babel? (See **Genesis 11:4**.)

6. In what ways is this king of Babylon like “the man of lawlessness,” the Antichrist, described in **2 Thessalonians 2:3–8**?

Reread **Isaiah 14:1–4**. Right in the middle of His denunciation of Babylon, God stops to address His own people. (As the context indicates, “Israel” here means the whole people of God rather than the Northern Kingdom only.)

7. Contrast the future of God's people with those who pridefully oppose Him. What clue in **verse 1** tells that not just the people of Israel can count on God's mercy?

God now turns His attention from one of the archenemies of His people (“Babylon”) to other nations. Read **Isaiah 14:24–18:7** as you have time inside or outside of class.

8. Read **Isaiah 19:1–25**. Isaiah thunders God’s threats of impending judgment against Egypt. Still he holds out hope. What phrases here speak most powerfully to you of that hope? What does this tell you about God’s concern for all the earth’s people, even those who are His enemies?

More oracles against Gentile nations are found in **Isaiah 20–21**. Read these chapters as you have time inside or outside of class.

Now God turns His attention to Judah. This oracle is an especially heavy one. Read **Isaiah 22**.

9. **Verses 15–25** contrast Shebna (an unfaithful steward of the king) with Eliakim (a faithful servant). Shebna holds a position of trust in the kingdom, a position similar to a prime minister or chief of staff today. Shebna should be giving the king wise counsel during a time of national crisis. What occupies Shebna’s time and concern instead? Shebna’s attitude is typical of Judah’s unfaithful spiritual and political leaders. How is Eliakim different?

10. Read **Revelation 1:17–18; 3:7**. Compare Jesus’ description of Himself with the description in **Isaiah 22:22**. How does it comfort you to know that Jesus is the Key of David, that He holds “the keys of death and Hades” (**Revelation 1:18**)?



## The Word for Us

1. List as many ways as you can that God's people are oppressed and how they suffer and experience turmoil at the hands of the world system today.

2. How does it comfort you to know that God does not ignore wickedness, that He will not overlook the harm the Babylons of this world inflict on His people?

3. Read **Isaiah 17:10**. When are you personally most likely to forget God your Savior, just as Isaiah's audience had? Name (to yourself only, if you wish) at least three specific sets of circumstances if you can. What has happened in your life or in your relationship with your Lord as a result of this forgetfulness? (Compare your own results with those of the people described in **17:10–11**.) Where can you turn when you realize your sin (see **Psalms 65:1–5**)?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of "Jesus Shall Reign":

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Does its successive journeys run;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

People and realms of ev'ry tongue  
Dwell on His love with sweetest song;  
And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on His name.

Let ev'ry creature rise and bring  
Honors peculiar to our King;  
Angels descend with songs again,  
And earth repeat the loud amen.

## Lesson 5

# “In That Day” (Isaiah 24:1–27:13)

### Theme Verses

“On this mountain [the LORD] will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 25:7–8).

### Goal

We seek to understand and find comfort in Isaiah’s description of the end times.

### What’s Going On Here?

In love, our Savior has done everything necessary for our salvation. He has defeated Satan and the death we deserved because of our sin by absorbing the wrath of God in our place. When He returns, death will be swallowed up in victory. He has planted us in His church and enables us to bear abundant fruit. We praise Him now and into eternity.

### Searching the Scriptures

The chapters you will read this week (Isaiah 24–27) have been called by some Bible scholars “Isaiah’s apocalypse.” The word *apocalypse* means “an unveiling or revealing of something that was at one time unknown.” Commonly, the word refers to the end times, to the Last Day and the events leading up to it.

1. Read **24:1–25:5**. How do the judgments described differ from the Gentile oracles you read in the previous lesson (**Isaiah 13–23**)?

2. Read **25:6–12**. Describe the details of God's great banquet as Isaiah pictures it in **25:6–9**.

3. The Bible uses banquet imagery often as it pictures the glories of heaven. What additional details does God reveal in **Matthew 22:1–14**; **Revelation 19:7–9**; **21:2–4**?

4. Read **26:1–11**. What city do you think Isaiah is writing about in **26:1–2**? (See **Hebrews 12:22–23** and **Revelation 21:1–2**.)

5. In what ways are God's people "the righteous nation," "the nation that keeps faith" (**Isaiah 26:2**; **Philippians 3:8–9**)?

6. What clue does **Isaiah 26:3** give about how to live in God's perfect peace? (Note who is acting in **verse 3a.**)

7. Read **26:12–21**. This prayer of praise points to the futility of human effort to accomplish salvation. What phrases in each of these verses make that point?

- **Verse 12**

- **Verse 14**

- **Verses 17–18**

8. What contrast do you see between **26:13–14** and **26:19**?

9. Read **27:1–13**. Compare **Revelation 12:9–10; 20:10** and **Isaiah 27:1**. Who is Leviathan? With what kind of end does he meet?

10. Now Isaiah sings a new vineyard song. Review the first song of the vineyard in **Isaiah 5:1–7**. In what significant way does this song differ from the new vineyard song in **27:2–6**?

11. **Isaiah 27:7–11** portrays how God will, through a carefully controlled judgment, bring Israel to a point where the people can be restored to their land. But **27:9** speaks to contemporary Christians too. “By this, then, will Jacob’s guilt be atoned for, and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin,” Isaiah writes. On what day did God’s wrath fall in such a way that all our guilt was removed? Explain.

12. Reread **27:12–13**. Here Isaiah promises that God will collect all His people one by one and bring them home from exile to “the holy mountain in Jerusalem,” where they will worship Him. Compare these verses with **Isaiah 2:2–4; 24:23; Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; Revelation 21:2–3**. What similarities do you find that indicate that here Isaiah is also speaking of the Day of Judgment and the believers’ deliverance in heaven?

## The Word for Us

1. Reread **Isaiah 25:1–5**, a song celebrating the end of tyranny. Which words give you special comfort and joy as you think about your life now and as you consider the coming Day of Judgment?

2. In what ways for you personally is Holy Communion a foretaste of the eternal celebration of heaven?

3. How do you know for sure your Lord has reserved a place for you in His heavenly banquet hall? (See **John 3:16** and **1 John 5:11–13**.) (*Note:* God extends to all people His invitation to enjoy eternal life with Him, but sadly not all respond. If you have never responded to God's invitation extended by the Holy Spirit, read **Isaiah 55:1–6** and **2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2** and prayerfully receive God's grace and forgiveness now.)

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of "Jerusalem, My Happy Home":

Jerusalem, my happy home,  
When shall I come to thee?  
When shall my sorrows have an end?  
Thy joys when shall I see?

O happy harbor of the saints,  
O sweet and pleasant soil!  
In thee no sorrow may be found,  
No grief, no care, no toil.

Jerusalem, my happy home,  
Would God I were in thee!  
Would God my woes were at an end,  
Thy joys that I might see!



## **Lesson 6**

# **Sight for the Spiritually Blind (Isaiah 28:1–33:24)**

### **Theme Verses**

“In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (**Isaiah 29:18–19**).

### **Goal**

We seek to understand and heed Isaiah’s warnings about spiritual blindness and complacency and then trust in God alone for all the blessings of this life and the life to come.

### **What’s Going On Here?**

Isaiah continues to prophesy against those who are blind in their sin and complacent in their trust of human wisdom and alliances and who ignore the Lord, their only source of salvation. Isaiah calls them to return to the Lord in repentance and faith. Isaiah also continues prophesying of the Messiah to come and the blessings the Messiah will bring.

### **Searching the Scriptures**

Read **Isaiah 28** as you have time inside or outside of class. Isaiah begins by reminding his readers of the sins and coming fate of the Northern Kingdom. Then he addresses those who rule in Jerusalem and imagine that they have “a covenant with death” (**28:15**) that will protect them from

the onslaught of God's judgment. In the midst of this section of Law, Isaiah also speaks a prophecy of the Messiah to come.

1. Read **Isaiah 28:16** and **1 Peter 2:4–7**. Of what is the Messiah the cornerstone? Why do some people stumble and fall over this wonderful stone (see **Isaiah 8:14; John 3:18; 1 Peter 2:8**)?

2. Read **Isaiah 29:1–14**. Just how far has Judah's refusal to listen to the Lord gone? What has happened in the people's hearts (**29:9–12**)? What is wrong with their worship (**29:13**)?

3. Read **29:15–24**. Compare **29:11–12** with **29:18–19**. What reversals will take place? What would account for such drastic changes (see **29:14**)?

4. Read **30:1–17**. Isaiah is evidently getting too personal in his preaching. What demand do the people make—loud and clear? (See **verses 10–11** and note that it has three parts.)

5. Reread **30:15**. Even though repentance is often a painful process, it also brings us peace. How?

6. Read **30:18–33**. This reading paints a beautiful picture of forgiveness and victory for God's people. Read it in light of the New Testament blessings we have received in Jesus. What does God promise in the following verses?

- **Verse 18**

- **Verse 19**

- **Verses 20–21**

- **Verses 23–24**

- **Verses 25–33**

In **Isaiah 31** the prophet again tries to convince the people of Judah of the folly of relying on Egypt instead of on the Lord. Read the chapter as you have time inside or outside of class.

7. Read **32:1–8**. Who is this king who “will reign in righteousness”? (See **2 Kings 18:1–7** and **Isaiah 36:1**.) What is the deeper, ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy? (See **Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; Matthew 2:1–2; Luke 23:38; Revelation 11:15**.)

8. What things will change under this King's rule?

9. Read **Isaiah 32:9–20**. Isaiah prophesies the outpouring of God’s Spirit. What specific benefits will result? (Compare **32:16–20** with **Galatians 5:22–23**.)

**Isaiah 33** exalts the Lord as the only source of salvation. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

## **The Word for Us**

1. Suppose Isaiah were to point his finger at you and ask whether you’ve been ignoring or conveniently overlooking God’s will, God’s wisdom, for any area of your own life. How would you answer him? Why is ignoring God’s wisdom so dangerous?

2. In **32:9–11**, Isaiah gives a specific warning to those in Judah who are complacent, to those who feel secure. What makes complacency so dangerous? What warning do you see here for yourself? Explain.

3. **Isaiah 29:22–24** outlines God’s goals for His people—the people of ancient Judah and His people of all time. How does He work toward these goals in your life? (Whom and what does He use?) To what can you point

and say—in all humility—“Look what *God* is doing in me”?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of “God, Whose Almighty Word”:

God, whose almighty word  
Chaos and darkness heard  
And took their flight:  
Hear us, we humbly pray,  
And where the Gospel day  
Sheds not its glorious ray,  
Let there be light!

Lord, who once came to bring,  
On Your redeeming wing,  
Healing and sight,  
Health to the sick in mind,  
Sight to the inly blind:  
Oh, now to humankind  
Let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,  
Lifegiving, holy dove,  
Speed forth Your flight;  
Move on the water's face,  
Bearing the lamp of grace,  
And in earth's darkest place  
Let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three,  
Glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, love, might!  
Boundless as ocean's tide,  
Rolling in fullest pride,  
Through the earth, far and wide,  
Let there be light!

## **Lesson 7**

# **God's Judgment and Grace Validated in History (Isaiah 34:1-39:8)**

### **Theme Verse**

"Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you' " (**Isaiah 35:4**).

### **Goal**

We seek to understand how God's judgment of the nations means vindication and salvation for His people.

### **What's Going On Here?**

God acts in history to bring judgment on sinful nations and people. God does this for the sake of His name and for the sake of His people who call upon His name. God's judgment on those who oppress His people results in vindication and salvation for believers.

### **Searching the Scriptures**

Read **Isaiah 34**. God through Isaiah pronounces judgment on the nations.

1. Reread **34:4**. Many predictive prophecies in the Old Testament refer to events soon to happen, while others refer to what will happen in the distant future. When will the destruction described in this verse occur? (See **Matthew 24:29-31**; **2 Peter 3:1-13**.)

2. The people of Edom were descendants of Esau, Jacob's (Israel's) brother (**Genesis 25:23–30; 27:38–40**). Why is Edom singled out by God for such disaster? (See **Amos 1:11; Ezekiel 35:5–6, 15**.)

3. What does God's judgment on the nations mean for God's people (**34:8**)?

4. Read **Isaiah 35**. Here Isaiah describes in picture language the effects of God's salvation. What is the main point of the portrait that Isaiah draws?

5. **Isaiah 36** tells of the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem. In **36:7** the field commander asks a question. How does his question show that he does not understand the true God or His will? (See **Deuteronomy 12:2–6; 2 Kings 18:1–4**.)

6. Why do Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah in **verse 11** ask the Assyrian field commander to speak in Aramaic?

7. Read **Isaiah 37:1–20**. What does Hezekiah's behavior when he receives the letter containing a further threat indicate?

8. Read **Isaiah 37:21–38**. In **verses 22–25** the Lord lists in poetic form the boasting of Sennacherib's feats. Why is this boasting condemned as an insult to the Lord? (See **verse 26**.)

9. What two things does the Lord cause to happen that make the promise in **37:33–35** come true? (See **Isaiah 37:36–38**.) For whose sake does God do this?

10. Read **Isaiah 38**. When informed that he will not recover from his illness, what does Hezekiah ask the Lord to remember (**38:3**)? Are you surprised at this, and if so, why? Is there a relationship between an obedient, righteous life and prayers answered? (Before answering, see **John 15:7, 16; James 5:16b; 1 John 3:21–22**.)



11. Read **Isaiah 39**. The king of Babylon's gift to Hezekiah is possibly a political maneuver. However, there is a spiritual significance in this occurrence. According to **2 Chronicles 32:31** what is it?

12. Hezekiah's action described in **Isaiah 39:2** indicates pride in his possessions. What warning about possessions does Jesus give in **Matthew 6:19–21**?

## **The Word for Us**

1. In what way is Hezekiah's action in **Isaiah 37:14–20** an example for us when problems we face seem to get worse? (Consider **Psalms 37:5–6**; **Philippians 4:6–7**.)

2. Does Hezekiah's experience of answered prayer in **Isaiah 38:5** mean that God will always answer yes to a Christian's prayer? (See **2 Corinthians 12:7–10** and **Matthew 26:39–46**.)

3. God through Isaiah condemns Sennacherib's boasting of his accomplishments (**Isaiah 37:22–29**). Read **James 4:13–17**. How ought we to regard our personal accomplishments?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of "I Leave All Things to God's Direction":

I leave all things to God's direction,  
For He loves me in wealth or woe;  
His will is good, and His affection,  
His tender love is true, I know.  
My strength, my fortress rock is He:  
What pleases God, that pleases me.

The will of God shall be my pleasure  
While here I live life's interim;  
My will is wrong beyond all measure,  
It does not will what pleases Him.  
The Christian's motto then must be:  
What pleases God, that pleases me.

God knows what must be done to save me,  
His love for me will never cease;  
And all my sins my Lord forgave me  
With purest gold of loving grace.  
His will supreme must ever be:  
What pleases God, that pleases me.

My God desires each soul's salvation,  
My soul He too desires to save;  
Therefore with Christian resignation  
All earthly troubles I will brave.  
His will be done eternally:  
What pleases God, that pleases me.

## Lesson 8

# **“Comfort, Comfort My People” (Isaiah 40:1–44:23)**

### **Theme Verse**

“But now, this is what the LORD says—He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine’ ” (**Isaiah 43:1**).

### **Goal**

We seek to grow in wonder at and trust in God’s strong and beautiful promises in Christ and find comfort in them.

### **What’s Going On Here?**

Isaiah proclaims God’s comfort to His people, looking forward to the return of God’s people from captivity and even farther forward to the coming of the Servant of the Lord. Again and again, Isaiah repeats God’s assurance that His people need not be afraid for their Lord is with them, even when they walk through the fire.

### **Searching the Scriptures**

The theme of the rest of **Isaiah** is stated in **Isaiah 40:1**: comfort for God’s people. Read **Isaiah 40:1–5**. Here Isaiah looks into the near future and sees the return of God’s people from captivity, but he also looks into the more distant future.

1. Why are preparations necessary?

2. According to **Matthew 3:1–8**, who fulfills this prophecy of Isaiah? How does he call on people to prepare for the Lord's coming?

3. Read **Isaiah 40:6–8**. From where will the power come to restore God's people? From where will it not come?

4. Read **Isaiah 40:9–11**. What good tidings does the herald bring?

5. Read **Isaiah 40:12–31**. Why do God's people never need to fear or despair?

**Isaiah 41** proclaims how the Lord will be with His servant Israel and thus His people need not fear. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

In some sections of Isaiah, the Lord refers to Israel as His servant (for example, **41:8**), but at other times Isaiah has in view another Servant of the Lord.

6. Read **Isaiah 42:1–4**. To whom is Isaiah referring? (See **Isaiah 61:1–3**; **Luke 4:14–21**.)

7. How do the following passages show the fulfillment of the prophecy in **Isaiah 42:3**: **Mark 9:21–24**; **John 14:5–10**; **John 20:27–29**?

8. Read **Isaiah 42:5–9**. In what way is Christ a better servant than the nation of Israel was as a covenant for the people of Israel and a light to the nations? (See **Hebrews 3:2–6**; **8:6–9**.)

**Isaiah 42:10–25** encourages praise of God and reveals the blindness and deafness of Israel. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

9. Read **Isaiah 43:1–7**. Many people assume that God's people should escape all problems and trials. How does **43:2** indicate that God does not promise that He will remove us from all the trials and tribulations of this world? What words from this section provide comfort for those who are going through trials?

10. Read **Isaiah 43:8–13**. To what are God's people witnesses?

**Isaiah 43:14–44:23** revisits some of the themes found in the other sections we have read in this lesson. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

## **The Word for Us**

1. Read **Isaiah 42:10–12** and **Lamentations 3:22–23**. Why can we sing a new song to the Lord?

2. In **Isaiah 42:18–25** God complains that the people have paid no attention and did not learn from what He sent them. In what ways can we take to heart even the hard things God allows in our lives? (See **James 1:2–4**.)

## Closing

Read together the following prayer:

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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## **Lesson 9**

# **The Lord Alone Is God, the Savior (Isaiah 44:24–50:11)**

### **Theme Verses**

“Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but Me. ‘Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other’ ” (**Isaiah 45:21–22**).

### **Goal**

We seek to understand the follies of idolatry and to put our trust in God, the only Savior.

### **What’s Going On Here?**

The Lord, through Isaiah, repeatedly declares that He alone is God and He alone is the Savior. He exposes the folly of idolatry and of relying on human wisdom and endeavors. The Lord promises the coming of His Servant, who, though mistreated, will return the people of Israel to God and bring His salvation to the ends of the earth.

### **Searching the Scriptures**

Read **Isaiah 44:24–45:7**. Isaiah again foretells the return of Judah from captivity. Not only that, about 150 years before the return takes place, Isaiah names by name the liberator of God’s people and calls him anointed. (**Ezra 1** records the fulfillment of this prophecy.)



1. For what reason will God summon Cyrus (**Isaiah 45:4**)?

2. Read **Isaiah 45:8–25**. Why does the Lord repeatedly make the point that He does in **45:14, 18, 21–22**? Who does the Lord want to acknowledge His point (**45:22**)? Who ultimately will (**45:23–25**)?

3. Read **Isaiah 46:1–13**. Bel and Nebo, gods of Babylon, are idols that must be carried around—a real chore, a burden. These gods can't even move themselves. How can they help those who seek help from them? In contrast, how is the Lord described in **46:3–13**?

4. Read **Isaiah 47:1–15**. Why does God condemn Babylon, whom He used to execute His judgment against His people?

In **Isaiah 48** God condemns the stubbornness of Israel, laments what could have been had His people paid attention to His commandments, and again announces His redemption of His people. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

Read **Isaiah 49:1–7**. This is the second of four Servant Songs in Isaiah (the first was in **chapter 42**). These Servant Songs speak of one who would come as a lowly servant to deliver Israel. The Servant is the Messiah, Jesus.

5. When is the Servant called (**49:1, 5**)? (See also **Luke 1:30–35**.) What will be His mission (**Isaiah 49:5–6**)? What will be the result of His ministry (**Isaiah 49:7**)?

**Isaiah 49:8–26** details more about the restoration of Israel. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

6. Read **50:1–11**. The third Servant Song is found in **50:4–11**. Describe the Servant's reception as He comes to fulfill His mission (**50:6**). What is the Servant's attitude toward this reception? In whom does the Servant trust (**50:7–9**)?

7. Compare **Isaiah 50:8–9** with **Romans 8:33–34**. Because of what the Servant, Jesus Christ, has done for us, of what can we be assured (**Romans 8:33–34**)?

8. Reread **Isaiah 50:10–11**. When the darkness of trouble, worry, or tragedy comes, there are two ways to respond. What are they?

## **The Word for Us**

1. Reread **Isaiah 45:9–12**. Is the thing created to question its maker? The answer seems self-evident, yet human beings question God and His purpose and working in their lives. Think about a time when you questioned God. What did you say or do? How did it all work out? If comfortable doing so, share the experience with the group.

2. Read **48:18–19**. What do people forfeit by disregarding God and His commands and promises?

3. Though we often refer to God as our heavenly Father, what picture of God is found in **49:14–16**? In what ways have you experienced God's maternal love?

4. Because our Lord Jesus was abused when He came to carry out the mission entrusted to Him by His Father (**Isaiah 50:6**), we also can expect abuse in this life because of our faith in Him. Are you experiencing any physical, emotional, or verbal abuse due to your faith? In what ways could the members of your study group help you stay strong in your faith (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**)?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of "All Glory Be to God Alone":

Lord God, our King on heaven's throne,  
Our Father, the Almighty One.  
O Lord, the Sole-begotten One,  
Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's Son,  
True God from all eternity,  
O Lamb of God, to You we flee.

You take the whole world's sin away;  
Have mercy on us, Lord, we pray.  
You take the whole world's sin away;  
Oh, listen to the prayer we say.  
From God's right hand, oh, send today  
Your mercy on us, Lord, we pray.

You are the only Holy One,  
The Lord of all things, You alone.  
O Jesus Christ, we glorify  
You and the Spirit, Lord Most High;  
With Him You evermore will be  
One in the Father's majesty.

## **Lesson 10**

# **The Lord's Servant Stricken for Us (Isaiah 51:1–53:12)**

### **Theme Verse**

“He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (**Isaiah 53:5**).

### **Goal**

We seek to understand the intensity and extent of God's plan of salvation and be filled with a desire to spread the message of salvation.

### **What's Going On Here?**

Isaiah records the Lord's promise to send His Servant on whom He would lay the iniquity of us all. That Servant would willingly drink the cup of God's wrath for us and would emerge victorious. The will of the Lord for the salvation of the world would prosper in His hand.

### **Searching the Scriptures**

1. Read **Isaiah 51:1–16**. Who are God's people not to fear (**51:6–8, 12–13**)? Why? What instead provides a permanent foundation on which we can rely to support us in life and in death?

2. Read **51:17–23**. How is God's wrath pictured (**51:17, 22**)? Who drank the contents for us (**Luke 22:42**)?

3. Read **Isaiah 52:1–12**. The god of a defeated nation was considered weak. What would happen when the Lord would bring His people back from captivity (**Isaiah 52:5–6; Ezekiel 36:20–23**)?

4. The first part of **52:7** pictures what happens as messengers run from a battlefield to tell the folks back home about the battle's outcome. To whom do the beautiful feet talked about in **52:7** belong and what good news is proclaimed? (Compare **Isaiah 52:7** with **Romans 10:9, 14–15**.)

**Isaiah 52:13–53:12** is the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah. This passage is one of the most explicit in the Old Testament concerning the suffering and death of the Messiah (and it alludes to His resurrection as well). It is also the clearest passage in the Old Testament concerning the reason for the Messiah's death.

5. Read **52:13–53:2**. How does **52:13** predict that the work of the Lord's Servant will be successful? (See also **Revelation 5:5, 9–13**.)

6. To what does the phrase “so will He sprinkle many nations” in **Isaiah 52:15** refer? (See **1 Peter 1:1–2**; **Hebrews 9:11–28**.)

7. Read **Isaiah 53:3–9**. How can we have confidence that the Lord's Servant as described in this section of Isaiah refers to Jesus Christ? (See **Luke 22:37** and **Acts 8:26–40**.)

8. For what purpose would the Servant suffer and die? Who lays this burden on Him (see also **Isaiah 53:10**)? Who is included in the pronouns *we*, *our*, and *us* in **53:4–6** (see **Isaiah 53:8, 12**; **1 John 2:2**)?

9. The substitutionary death of Jesus in place of sinners is called vicarious atonement. Four times in **53:5** the point of vicarious atonement is made. In what way do the first two differ from the last two?

10. How do these verses show the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: **Matthew 26:62–63**; **27:12–14, 38, 57–60**?



11. Read **Isaiah 53:10–12**. The second part of **verse 10** is a joyful answer to the question in **verse 8**. Though Jesus had no physical children, **verse 10** speaks of offspring. Who are the offspring? (See **John 1:12–13**; **Galatians 3:26**.) How does **Isaiah 53:10** indicate that these offspring will be many? (See **1 Timothy 2:3–4**.)

12. To what do the phrases “prolong His days” in **Isaiah 53:10** and “see the light of life” in **53:11** refer? (See **1 Corinthians 15:4**.)

## The Word for Us

1. Discuss opportunities you have to be people with beautiful feet, to proclaim to others the message that Jesus bore their sins. How might you more effectively take advantage of those opportunities? Never forget that the power to do this comes from God and not from yourself.

2. Reread **Isaiah 52:12**. As the people would leave Babylon, they were assured of God’s protection. Reflect on the assurances God gives you in **John 10:27–28** and **Ephesians 1:3–6, 13–14**.

3. We see the last sentence of **Isaiah 53:12** being fulfilled by Jesus as He was being crucified (**Luke 23:34**). But see also **John 17:9, 15–21**; **Romans 8:34**; **Hebrews 7:25**. What does Christ’s intercession for you mean to you?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted":

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted,  
See Him dying on the tree!  
This is Christ, by man rejected;  
Here, my soul, your Savior see.  
He's the long-expected prophet,  
David's son, yet David's Lord.  
Proofs I see sufficient of it:  
He's the true and faithful Word.

You who think of sin but lightly  
Nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the sacrifice appointed;  
See who bears the awful load;  
It's the Word, the Lord's Anointed,  
Son of Man and Son of God.

Here we have a firm foundation;  
Here the refuge of the lost;  
Christ, the rock of our salvation,  
His the name of which we boast.  
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,  
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!  
None shall ever be confounded  
Who on Him their hope have built.

# Lesson 11

## God's Gracious Invitation (Isaiah 54:1-57:21)

### Theme Verses

"Listen, listen to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to Me; hear Me, that your soul may live" (Isaiah 55:2-3).

### Goal

We seek to respond to God's gracious invitation to come to Him and find food for our souls.

### What's Going On Here?

In these chapters, God reveals Himself as a compassionate God who delights to show mercy. After He has brought His adulterous people, portrayed here as His wife, to repentance, He will reverse her barrenness and she will have many children. God issues a gracious invitation for people to come to Him for spiritual nourishment that their souls may live. He invites them to seek Him that He may have mercy on them and freely pardon them. And this same God sends His Word to accomplish His gracious purposes.

### Searching the Scriptures

Read **Isaiah 54:1-17**. The Old Testament often uses the imagery of a marriage to portray the relationship of God (the husband) and His people (the wife).

1. Look ahead and read **Isaiah 57:3–9**. What sin does God's wife commit? (See also **Jeremiah 3:1–2, 6–9, 13**).

Because of that sin, God would judge His wife by sending her into exile. While in exile she would feel abandoned by her husband (**Isaiah 54:6**) and would experience shame, as if she were widowed (**54:4**). While prostituting herself and while in exile, she would be barren (a condition of great shame in that culture).

2. But after the exile what does God through Isaiah command Israel to do (**54:1–3**)? To what does Paul apply this passage in **Galatians 4:21–31**?

3. What comfort does God give in **Isaiah 54:6–10**? When would God's people, God's wife, be ready to receive such love? What does this passage tell us about how God prefers to deal with people?

4. What promise is given to Israel's children in **54:13**?

5. Read **Isaiah 55:1–5**. What kind of thirst do these people have and why are they thirsty, these to whom this invitation is extended? (See also **John 4:13–14; Matthew 5:6**.) Where will they find nourishment? At what price?

6. In **55:3** to what does God's everlasting covenant and faithful love promised to David refer? (See **2 Samuel 7:11b–16; Luke 1:32–33**.) What does the Lord promise about the Messiah in **Isaiah 55:4**?

7. God has extended a gracious invitation in **Isaiah 55:1–5**. What does God promise those who respond, those who turn to Him in repentance and faith? Will people have an unlimited amount of time to do this? (See **2 Corinthians 6:1–2**.)

8. Read **Isaiah 55:8–9**. The point these verses make is true in general, but in the context of **Isaiah 55**, what specifically shows that God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways?

9. Read **Isaiah 55:10–11**. These verses tell how God deals with sinners—through His Word. How does God's Word operate?

10. Read **Isaiah 55:12–13**. What would characterize the return of God's people from captivity in Babylon and looking beyond that from captivity to sin, death, and Satan? Ancient kings used to set up memorials detailing their victories. But often these were defaced by conquering kings. In figurative language, Isaiah describes the transformation of the vegetation as a victory memorial. To what will this be a memorial? Will it be destroyed?

God is about to intervene in His people's lives, bringing salvation and righteousness. **Isaiah 56:1–8** tells how His people are to live in preparation for the coming of His salvation. It also includes the good news that God welcomes foreigners who come to Him in repentance and faith.

In **56:9–12** God accuses the watchmen of Israel, who should be warning their people of spiritual danger. Instead they are consumed with their own appetites.

As you read earlier, **Isaiah 57:1–13** contains a condemnation of Israel's spiritual adultery with idols. **Isaiah 57:14–21** proclaims good news for those who are contrite. Read **Isaiah 56–57** as you have time inside or outside of class.

## **The Word for Us**

1. Reread **Isaiah 55:1–3**. Too often we spend our time, effort, and money on things that don't satisfy us spiritually. Make your own personal list of such things. Confess these to God and respond to His gracious invitation to come to Him and hear Him, to partake of the spiritual nourishment He offers as He speaks to us in His Word.

2. When we proclaim the Gospel to others and they don't immediately respond in the way we would like, we sometimes get discouraged. What encouragement can we find in **Isaiah 55:10-11**?

3. Read **Isaiah 57:10-12**, which pictures shepherds, spiritual leaders, whose only concern is for themselves and their own gain and comfort. Some pastors today may fail to speak the Law for fear they will lose support and perks. How can a Christian congregation seek to avoid such a situation? What can you do in your own congregation to prevent such a thing from happening?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of "O Living Bread from Heaven," thinking of the spiritual nourishment your Lord offers you in His Word and in His Supper:

O living Bread from heaven,  
How well You feed Your guest!  
The gifts that You have given  
Have filled my heart with rest.  
Oh, wondrous food of blessing,  
Oh, cup that heals our woes!  
My heart, this gift possessing,  
With praises overflows.

My Lord, You here have led me  
Within Your holiest place  
And here Yourself have fed me  
With treasures of Your grace;  
For You have freely given  
What earth could never buy,  
The bread of life from heaven,  
That now I shall not die.

You gave me all I wanted;  
This food can death destroy.  
And you have freely granted  
The cup of endless joy.  
My Lord, I do not merit  
The favor You have shown,  
And all my soul and spirit  
Bow down before Your throne.

Lord, grant me then, thus strengthened  
With heav'nly food, while here  
My course on earth is lengthened,  
To serve with holy fear.  
And when you call my spirit  
To leave this world below,  
I enter, through Your merit,  
Where joys unmingled flow.



## **Lesson 12**

# **The Lord—The Light of This World and the World to Come (Isaiah 58:1–61:11)**

### **Theme Verses**

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:1–3).

### **Goal**

We seek to come to the one who is the Light of the world for release from our sin and then for power to reflect His light as we live our lives to His glory.

### **What’s Going On Here?**

Isaiah continues to call people to repentance by describing how pitiful is their attempt at worship and how pitiful their lives have become because of sin. Isaiah describes how the Lord is appalled at the condition of His people and how He Himself intervenes to work salvation. Isaiah proclaims the glorious news that the Lord who is the light breaks forth over His people and shines through them to draw the nations to Himself. Isaiah declares the coming of one anointed by the Lord to bring release to those imprisoned in the darkness caused by sin, death, and Satan.

## Searching the Scriptures

1. Read **Isaiah 58:1–14**. According to **58:3–5** what underlying attitude of the people as they fast is displeasing to God? (See also **Matthew 6:16–18**.)

2. From **58:6–7** list the actions that God considers to be true fasting. (See also **Joel 2:13; Micah 6:8; James 1:27**.)

3. What does God promise in **58:8–9** when His people fast from the heart? (See also **Isaiah 60:1–3; Jeremiah 23:6**.)

4. Read **Isaiah 59:1–21**. Isaiah describes in graphic terms the sinful condition of the people. List three of the word pictures he uses. When people in this sinful condition don't recognize their sin, what might they mistakenly conclude (**59:1**)? What is really happening (**59:2**)?

5. How does God react to the people's predicament (**59:15b–17**)?

6. Who will be able to partake of the salvation the Lord works (59:20)? What is promised these people (59:21)?

7. **Isaiah 60:1–3** uses the same imagery as **chapters 58–59**. What darkness covers the people of the earth? Who is the light of Israel (see also **John 8:12**)? When that light shines through God's people, what will happen?

**Isaiah 60:4–22** further describes how the nations will flock to God's people, bringing gifts and serving them. In this picture of a restored people of God, Isaiah points forward to the glories of heaven. Read this section as you have time inside or outside of class.

Read **Isaiah 61:1–3** and **Luke 4:14–21**. Isaiah writes of one whom the Lord would anoint for certain tasks. In the Old Testament, kings, prophets, and priests were anointed to set them apart for God's service. The word *Messiah* means "Anointed One." Throughout the Old Testament, including **Isaiah 61**, God promises the coming of *the Anointed One*.

8. When Jesus reads this passage in the synagogue in Nazareth and applies it to Himself, why do you think He stops the quotation where He does?

9. From what bondage or captivity does Jesus release captives? (See **Matthew 23:2–4, 13–15; John 8:34–36; Hebrews 2:14–15.**)

10. Read **61:4–11**, where Isaiah describes the restoration of God's people in much the same vein as He does in **chapter 60**. Note **61:6**, where God says His people will be priests. According to **1 Peter 2:9** and **Revelation 1:5–6**, what functions do God's people perform as priests?

## **The Word for Us**

1. Reflect on these questions: In what ways does my own worship tend to be mere formalism, confined to a church building? In what ways am I growing in worship that comes from the heart and that expresses itself in actions outside of Sunday morning worship? Confess your failures to your Lord and ask for His power to reflect His light in all that you do.

2. Compare **Isaiah 59:16–17** with **Ephesians 6:10–17**. From where does our spiritual armor come? Why do we need this armor (**Ephesians 6:11–13**)?

3. Compare **Isaiah 60:11, 18–22** with **Revelation 21:22–27**. Created light, which is such a blessing in this life, will be absent in heaven. Why?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of “The People That in Darkness Sat”:

The people that in darkness sat  
A glorious light have seen;  
The light has shined on them who long  
In shades of death have been,  
In shades of death have been.

To hail You, Sun of Righteousness,  
The gath’ring nations come;  
They joy as when the reapers bear  
Their harvest treasures home,  
Their harvest treasures home.

Lord Jesus, reign in us, we pray,  
And make us Yours alone,  
Who with the Father ever are  
And Holy Spirit, one,  
And Holy Spirit, one.

## **Lesson 13**

# **New Heavens and a New Earth (Isaiah 62:1–66:24)**

### **Theme Verses**

“Behold, 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” (**Isaiah 65:17–18**).

### **Goal**

We seek to understand the consequences of rebellion against God, repent of the times when we have rebelled against Him, trust in His forgiveness, and look to Him for power to live righteously as we look forward to a life without sin in the new heavens and new earth.

### **What’s Going On Here?**

Isaiah’s proclamation of Law continues as He speaks of God trampling His enemies in judgment, confesses the sin of God’s people, notes that all of our “righteous” deeds are but filthy rags, and ends his book with a graphic description of the suffering in hell. But Isaiah also looks forward to the coming of God’s kingdom, the messianic age, which stretches into eternity. God through Isaiah proclaims that He will make righteousness and salvation shine forth from His people, that He will enable Jerusalem to give birth to her children and to nourish them with an overflowing abundance, and that He will create an enduring new heavens and new earth, characterized by joy, peace, and righteousness.

# Searching the Scriptures

1. Read **Isaiah 62:1–7**. Who is speaking in **verse 1** (see **verse 7**)? What will He not do? What does this imply about what He will do (again see **verse 7**)?

2. How will the Lord regard His transformed people (**62:4–5**)?

**Isaiah 62:8–12** continues the description of the time when God will visit His people with salvation. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

3. As we have seen earlier in Isaiah, the salvation of God's people is one side of a coin; the other is the defeat and judgment of their enemies and God's enemies. Read **Isaiah 63:1–6**. How is that defeat pictured?

4. Read **Isaiah 63:7–64:12**, which records a prayer consisting of praise, a recital of God's saving action in the past, confession of sin, and a plea for God to act again in salvation. The prayer opens by praising the Lord for His great deeds, especially for His kindness and compassion to His people. Why do you think it is important to begin prayer by focusing on God's attributes and praiseworthiness?

5. Compare **Isaiah 63:9a** with **Judges 10:16** and **Luke 19:41–44**. What do these verses say about our Lord's character?

6. The words of **Isaiah 63:11–14** show the activity of the Holy Spirit during Old Testament times. What work do these verses credit to this person of the Holy Trinity (see also **Numbers 11:24–30**)?

7. During a time of great rebellion and idolatry among the people of Judah, Isaiah nevertheless records this powerful prayer of intercession for the people. How is this evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit among God's people? (See **Ezekiel 22:30**.)

8. Reread **Isaiah 63:10**. What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? (See also **Hebrews 10:26–31**.) Why is this so dangerous? (Note **Isaiah 63:10b**.)

9. Reread **Isaiah 64:5–7**. How sinful are we and all people? In **Romans 7:24–25** Paul asks a question similar to the one recorded in **Isaiah 64:5**. How does Paul answer that question?



**Isaiah 65:1–16** tells how God reaches out to a people who continually spurn Him and how He spares the remnant that trusts in Him but destroys the evildoers. Read this section as you have time inside or outside of class.

10. In **Isaiah 65:17–25** Isaiah paints a portrait of the future kingdom of God using images that reflect life in his day. What characterizes this kingdom of God that stretches from the coming of the Messiah into eternity?

**Isaiah 66:1–6** notes that God esteems those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and it discusses God's judgment of His enemies. Read it as you have time inside or outside of class.

11. Read **66:7–13**. Isaiah has been describing the glorious restoration of God's people, which seems like a monumental task. But God assures His people that He will indeed bring Zion to the point of delivery and enable her to give birth. How does God describe Jerusalem in **66:11–13**. How is this true of the church?

12. Read **Isaiah 66:14–24**. Isaiah ends with a look forward to the end times, again colored by the details of life in Old Testament times. What will God's final judgment mean for those who have rebelled against Him (**66:24**)? What is in store for God's people (**66:20–23**)?

## The Word for Us

1. Read **Isaiah 65:13–15**. How can what God says here be true in light of the fact that in this life the wicked often prosper and the righteous often suffer? (Compare **Psalms 73**; note especially the transition in the psalm from **verse 16** to **verse 17**.)

2. Reread **Isaiah 66:10–14**. In what ways are you comforted, delighted, caused to rejoice, and sustained by your ties with “Jerusalem,” the church?

## Closing

Read or sing together the following stanzas of “Jerusalem the Golden”:

Jerusalem the golden,  
With milk and honey blest,  
Beneath your contemplation  
Sink heart and voice oppressed.  
I know not, oh, I know not  
What joys await us there,  
What radiancy of glory,  
What bliss beyond compare.

They stand, those halls of Zion,  
Conjubilant with song  
And bright with many an angel  
And all the martyr throng.  
The prince is ever in them;  
The daylight is serene;  
The pastures of the blessed  
Are decked in glorious sheen.

There is the throne of David,  
And there, from care released,  
The shout of those who triumph,  
The song of those who feast.  
And they, who with their leader  
Have conquered in the fight,  
Forever and forever  
Are clad in robes of white.

Oh, sweet and blessed country,  
The home of God's elect!  
Oh, sweet and blessed country  
That eager hearts expect!  
In mercy, Jesus, bring us  
To that dear land of rest!  
You are, with God the Father  
And Spirit, ever blest.



# ISAIAH

## Herald of the Messiah

### Leaders Notes



## Preparing to Teach Isaiah

The materials in these notes are designed to help you in leading others through this portion of the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, this booklet is to be an aid to and not a substitute for your own study of and preparation for teaching the book of Isaiah.

If you have the opportunity, you will find it helpful to make use of other biblical reference works in the course of your study. The following are two excellent commentaries on the book of Isaiah: Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1979) and Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, three volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965–72). Although it is not strictly a commentary, the section on Isaiah in *The Word Becoming Flesh* by Horace Hummel (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979) also contains much that is of value for the proper interpretation of this biblical book.

### Group Bible Study

Group Bible study means mutual learning from one another under the guidance of a leader. The Bible is an inexhaustible resource. No one person can discover all it has to offer. In a class many eyes see many things and can apply them to many life situations. The leader should resist the temptation to “give the answers” and so act as an “authority.” This teaching approach stifles participation by individual members and can actually hamper learning. As a general rule the teacher is not to “give interpretation” but to “develop interpreters.” Of course there are times when the leader should and must share insights and information gained by his or her own deeper research. The ideal class is one in which the leader guides class members through the lesson and engages them in meaningful sharing and discussion at all points, leading them to a summary of the lesson at the close. As a general rule, don’t explain what the learners can discover by themselves.

Have a chalkboard and chalk or newsprint and marker available to emphasize significant points of the lesson. Rephrase your inquiries or the inquiries of participants as questions, problems, or issues. This provokes thought. Keep discussion to the point. List on the chalkboard or newsprint the answers given. Then determine the most vital points made in the discussion. Ask additional questions to fill gaps.

The aim of every Bible study is to help people grow spiritually, not merely in biblical and theological knowledge, but in Christian thinking and living. This means growth in Christian attitudes, insights, and skills for Christian living. The focus of this course must be the church and the world of our day. The guiding question will be this: What does the Lord teach us for life today through the book of Isaiah?

## Pace Your Teaching

The lessons in this course of study are designed for a study session of at least an hour in length. If it is the desire and intent of the class to complete an entire lesson each session, it will be necessary for you to keep careful watch over the class time. At times it may be necessary for you to summarize the content of certain answers or biblical references in order to preserve time. Asking various class members to look up different Bible passages and to read them aloud to the rest of the class will save time over having every class member look up each reference.

Also, you may not want to cover every question in each lesson. This may lead to undue haste and frustration. Be selective. Pace your teaching. Spend no more than 5–10 minutes with “Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?” Take time to go into the text by topic, but not word by word. Get the sweep of meaning. Occasionally stop to help the class gain understanding of a word or concept. Allow approximately 10–15 minutes for “The Word for Us.” Allowing approximately 5 minutes for “Closing” and announcements, you will notice, allows you only approximately 30 minutes for “Searching the Scriptures.”

Should your group have more than a one-hour class period, you can take it more leisurely. But do not allow any lesson to drag and become tiresome. Keep it moving. Keep it alive. Keep it meaningful. Eliminate some questions and restrict yourself to those questions most meaningful to the members of the class. If most members study the text at home, they can report their findings, and the time gained can be applied to relating the lesson to life.

## Good Preparation

Good preparation by the leader usually affects the pleasure and satisfaction the class will experience.

## Suggestions to the Leader for Using the Study Guide

### The Lesson Pattern

This set of 13 lessons is based on a timely Old Testament book—Isaiah. The material is designed to aid *Bible study*, that is, to aid a consideration of the written Word of God, with discussion and personal application growing out of the text at hand.

The typical lesson is divided into these sections:

1. Theme Verse
2. Goal
3. What’s Going On Here?
4. Searching the Scriptures



## 5. The Word for Us

## 6. Closing

“Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?” give the leader assistance in arousing the interest of the group in the concepts of the lesson. Here the leader stimulates minds. Do not linger too long over the introductory remarks.

“Searching the Scriptures” provides the real spadework necessary for Bible study. Here the class digs, uncovers, and discovers; it gets the facts and observes them. Comments from the leader are needed only to the extent that they help the group understand the text. The questions in this guide, corresponding to sections within the text, are intended to help the participants discover the meaning of the text.

Having determined what the text says, the class is ready to apply the message. Having heard, read, marked, and learned the Word of God, proceed to digest it inwardly through discussion, evaluation, and application. This is done, as this guide suggests, by taking the truths found in Isaiah and applying them to the world and Christianity in general and then to personal Christian life. Class time may not permit discussion of all questions and topics. In preparation the leader may need to select one or two and focus on them. These questions bring God’s message to the individual Christian. Close the session by reviewing one important truth from the lesson.

Remember, the Word of God is sacred, but this study guide is not. The notes in this section offer only guidelines and suggestions. Do not hesitate to alter the guidelines or substitute others to meet your needs and the needs of the participants. Adapt your teaching plan to your class and your class period. Good teaching directs the learner to discover for himself or herself. For the teacher this means directing the learner, not giving the learner answers. Choose the verses that should be looked up in Scripture. What discussion questions will you ask? At what points? Write them in the margin of your study guide. Involve class members, but give them clear directions. What practical actions might you propose for the week following the lesson? Which of the items do you consider most important for your class?

How will you best use your teaching period? Do you have 45 minutes? an hour? or an hour and a half? If time is short, what should you cut? Learn to become a wise steward of class time.

Be sure to take time to summarize the lesson, or have a class member do it. Plan a brief opening devotion, using members of the class.

Remember to pray frequently for yourself and your class. May God the Holy Spirit bless your study and your leading of others into the comforting truths of God’s Christ-centered Word.

# Lesson 1

## Isaiah, Prophet to a Rebellious Nation

### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

### Searching the Scriptures

1. These are some of the more prominent word pictures the prophet paints:

The people have turned their backs on the Lord—**1:4**.

They are bruised, bloodied, beaten, and sick with sin—**1:5**.

The nation is burned, pillaged, and looted—**1:7**.

The people are as deserted as a hut built as temporary shelter in a melon (or cucumber) field—**1:8**.

They trample God’s house, making an unwelcome mess when they come to worship—**1:12**.

Their hands are bloody—**1:15**.

The nation that was to have been God’s bride has become instead a prostitute—**1:21**.

The nation that was as precious as silver is now worthless—**1:22**.

The nation whose love for God used to have the full-bodied bouquet of a choice wine is now watery, weak, and worthless—**1:22**.

2. Let volunteers share their thoughts.

3. Primarily, to walk in the Lord’s paths means to walk in relationship with Him through Christ Jesus. As His Spirit leads us to know Him better and better, we grow more and more like Him. We learn His ways. The accent in our walk with our Lord lies not in obedience to a set of rules or in an accumulation of information, but rather on our transformation into the image of Christ.

4. The process of transformation happened in the same way under the old covenant as it occurs under the new covenant—by God’s grace. He must lead us. He must teach us. He must strengthen us to walk in His paths and even give us the desire to do that. Careful study of the text shows God taking the initiative in each case:

**Isaiah 2:3**—*He* will teach us His ways, and then *we* shall walk in His paths.

**Psalms 86:11**—*He* teaches us His way, and then *we* will walk in His truth.

**Psalm 143:8**—*He* shows us the way and (**verse 10**) teaches us to do His will.

5. God's Old Testament people went to the tabernacle and later to the temple as the place God had set aside to meet with His people. Today God meets with His people as they gather together around His Word and the sacraments. Rather than referring to a specific geographic place, the "mountain of the LORD's temple" and the other terms used in this text refer to God's presence, particularly as He calls, gathers, and sanctifies His church, His family gathered together for worship and for the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

6. People tend to rely on their wealth or on other sources of security rather than on God.

7. In these verses, God promises to send the Branch—the Messiah. The land will again produce spiritual fruit, lush and beautiful. God's people—the true believers ("Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem" [4:3])—will be washed of the filth of their sin. God will protect, comfort, and hide them from all danger. His peace will be theirs forever.

8. The Lord gave His vineyard all the care He possibly could. He did for His people everything He could have done to ensure their fruitfulness. This is stated symbolically in Isaiah's song in terms like "cleared it of stones," "planted it with the choicest vines," "built a watchtower," and "cut out a winepress." There is no good reason for the unfruitfulness of His vineyard, His people. They, like we, have no excuse for the sin in our lives.

9. Seeing God's majesty and hearing the worship offered by the angels, Isaiah finds himself overwhelmed by his own sinfulness. He responds by confessing his own sin and the sins of his nation. By way of contrast to our own culture in which people most often see themselves simply as individuals, Isaiah's confession reflects the more scriptural view of society. We belong to each other. Each of us contributes to the whole. To be sure, we retain individual responsibility for the direction of our own lives, but we also share jointly in the responsibility for the direction our society takes.

10. God assures the prophet of His full and free forgiveness. He seals the words of that absolution with the burning coal taken from the altar. Since Isaiah will use his mouth to speak God's Word, this action, tied as it is to the spoken absolution, comforts Isaiah. God promises that the prophet's lips have been cleansed for the holy work they are to do.

11. Isaiah speaks the stirring words, "Here am I. Send me!"

12. **Verse 13** speaks about "the holy seed"—the few faithful believers who would be left in Judah. From this seed, the nation would again sprout, and from it the Messiah would come.

## The Word for Us

1. Let participants share their thoughts. Remember that an idol is anything or anyone (other than the Lord) from which we hope to gain good or to which we turn for help in times of harm and danger.

2. In Christ, God has declared us righteous and faithful (**Isaiah 1:26**). We have been redeemed by God's amazing sacrifice of His one and only Son. Together with the psalmist we can say, "If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared" (**Psalms 130:3-4**).

3. Scripture never tells us to try harder to produce the fruit of the Spirit. Rather, it points us to Christ and to deeper union with Him. As we remain united to the vine, we receive the nutrients we need to produce spiritual fruit.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

## Lesson 2

### Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel!

#### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

#### Searching the Scriptures

1. Ahaz—king of Judah (the Southern Kingdom), grandson of Uzziah, son of Jotham.

Rezin—king of Syria who joined forces with Israel to attack Judah.

Pekah—king of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) who formed an alliance with Rezin against Judah in an attempt to avoid being invaded and plundered by Assyria.

2. As this account begins, Ahaz is probably inspecting one of Jerusalem’s aqueducts in preparation for the siege that he knows is imminent. Apparently Syria and Israel have invaded Judah and have captured other strategic cities. At least, it would appear so from the fact that they are preparing a direct assault on the capital itself (7:1).

3. God takes the initiative. He comes to us when we have no desire or power to seek Him out. He is a compassionate, loving God, intimately concerned about His people and their needs. Syria and Ephraim boast that they will raze Judah’s defenses and depose Ahaz, replacing him with their puppet—the son of Tabeel. God says that together Syria and Israel amount only to smoldering stubs. Their threats will turn out to be meaningless. As history records, God’s Word about this situation came true. In 732 B.C., Syria’s capital (Damascus) fell to the Assyrians and Israel was plundered by them. Syria and Israel would threaten Judah no longer.

4. God wants Ahaz to trust Him! In addition to a word of promise, God binds that promise to something Ahaz can see and touch. The second question calls for speculation. We may logically suppose that Ahaz makes his decision not to “test God” not on some pious qualms about that process, but rather on his own rebellious unbelief. Ahaz finds himself backed into a corner. If he asks for a sign, he will have to heed the sign, and Ahaz is not ready to trust God to handle this situation for him.

5. The answers will vary, depending on whether participants focus on the virgin, on the child, or on the name of the child. All are significant.

The fact that the child will be born of a virgin suggests that this will ultimately be no ordinary birth. Even if a child is born naturally in Isaiah’s day

(to one who was still a virgin when Isaiah first spoke these words), Matthew makes it clear that the virgin birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy.

The child, of course, will be the sign that God does deliver on His promise, that what His people wait for in faith will, in fact, come to be.

Perhaps most significant in this sign is the name of the child: Immanuel, “God with us.” The sign is an earthly, tangible, real evidence of God’s very presence in the midst of His people.

6. Ahaz turns to the Assyrians and forms a pact with them. Ahaz’ plan to defuse and defeat the northern coalition by means of his treaty with Assyria will backfire, will blow up in his face. In fact, Assyria does defeat Judah’s enemies and crush the threat they pose to Judah in 732 B.C. (The complete destruction of Israel does not come until 722 B.C.)

But the Assyrian army will have no intention of stopping at Judah’s border. They will continue to march toward Jerusalem, leaving the country desolate, as though it were shaved bare by the razor of Assyria.

7. The peaceful waters of Shiloah contrast sharply with the great tidal wave that is Assyria. God’s promised peace flows from unexpected sources: a gentle stream that carries little power, the word of promise that leaves Ahaz wanting something more.

What Ahaz seeks is the great power and might of Assyria, which will now come like a great tidal wave and destroy the northern coalition. But it will keep coming, like flood waters out of control, and overflow from Israel right on into Judah, even to the doorstep of Jerusalem.

8. Point out that since Zebulun and Naphtali were located in the northernmost part of Israel, they were the first to feel the effects of foreign invasion from that direction. They lay on Israel’s periphery and thus were in closer contact with the nations—the Gentiles. To the political and religious elite in Jerusalem, especially at the time of Christ, Galilee was clearly a second-rate place to live.

But as Isaiah’s great prophecy points out, the first to feel the gloom will be the first to find the gladness! Isaiah speaks of a great light coming.

The ministry of Jesus begins in the “darkness” of remote Galilee. From there He moves toward the seat of Davidic power, bringing His ministry to culmination in Jerusalem where He enters as His people’s humble servant King and defeats their worst enemies (sin, Satan, and death) by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. Of His righteous and peaceful rule there will be no end (**Isaiah 9:7**).

9. You may want to point out that the word *wonderful* in Hebrew carries with it the meaning of wonder in the sense of the miraculous. The word *counselor* frequently referred to a human advisor who counseled royalty.

While many human kings might be described as “mighty,” the Messiah would be “Mighty God.” Ancient peoples often called their rulers “Father”; the Messiah however would be an “Everlasting Father.”

Other princes would come and go, but only the Messiah would be the “Prince of Peace” who would bring true peace to His people.

Although other kings would follow Ahaz in the Davidic line, none would fully fit Isaiah’s magnificent description of the Messiah until Jesus came. Jesus was the very Son of God, David’s Son and David’s Lord.

## The Word for Us

1. **Romans 8:32** reminds us of the truth that the heavenly Father did not withhold His only Son but gave Him up to death on the cross for our sins. That sacrifice erases the debt we owed God because of our sins. The cross and the enormity of the sacrifice God made there can also help assure our hearts that God will not withhold any other good thing from us. If our hearts wonder whether or not we can trust our God, we need only look at the cross. What more powerful answer could God provide?

2. Today the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper serve as visible, tangible signs of our Lord’s presence among us. As time permits, let volunteers share their thoughts about the second question.

3. Answers will vary.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

## Lesson 3

### “His Hand Is Still Upraised”

#### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

#### Searching the Scriptures

1. “His anger is not turned away, His hand is still upraised” express God’s judgment. The words “His hand is still upraised” carry a double meaning. God’s hand of judgment is about to fall, but it has not yet fallen. God is still allowing His people time to repent. This possibility and the knowledge that God receives and forgives penitent sinners gives sinners hope.

2. **9:8–12**—Answers will vary. Most will probably focus on the arrogance of human beings, especially the arrogance that instead of receiving God’s correction with humble repentance, plans instead ways to patch up life in such a way that it’s more comfortable than ever before.

**9:13–17**—Most will probably focus on the sins of spiritual leaders who lie about God, about His judgment on sin and their listeners’ need for repentance, who tolerate and even encourage hypocrisy by their teaching.

**9:18–21**—Again, depending on what details participants choose to focus on, responses will vary. The verses paint a picture of fiery anger and judgment, of lovelessness and famine, of infighting and intense family rivalry (“Manasseh will feed on Ephraim” [9:21]). (The judgment was historically fulfilled at Isaiah’s time and will have final fulfillment at the Last Day.)

**10:1–4**—This stanza of the song condemns injustice, especially injustice that hurts the poor and helpless, widows and orphans.

3. Assyria arrogantly takes credit for its military victories. The people of that nation assume they have been able to conquer as much territory as they have because they themselves are wise and strong. In reality, God has given them their victories. He has used them as His tool. When that task is done, He will see to it that they receive the judgment they deserve for their sin no less than Israel and Judah.

4. Israel’s remnant includes all those who return to the Lord in repentance and faith. It also includes all God’s saints of every time and place who have responded to His love in repentance and faith. Make sure all in your group understand that both repentance and faith come to us, not as



we try hard to drum them up inside ourselves, but as God's gift to us. (See **Romans 2:4; Ephesians 2:8–9.**)

In one sense, the idea of a remnant returning seems discouraging because it means that only a few will be saved. On the other hand, a few will indeed be saved. They will not be wiped out completely. God has not forgotten His promise to send a Savior through the line of David. He will keep that promise.

5. Answers will vary. Sin in the lives of others and the sin in our own hearts lies at the center of all our “peace deficits.”

6. Note Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:3**: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” These people are the spiritually poor—those who need the riches of Christ's mercy—and the spiritually meek—those who humbly look to Christ for the goodness, the righteousness, that is missing in their own hearts.

7. The Prince of Peace will judge the poor “with righteousness” (**Isaiah 11:4**). It's critical to note that He gives us His own righteousness. He can do this because He has taken our punishment. (See **2 Corinthians 5:21**.) This is very good news indeed!

8. Isaiah portrays animals that are natural enemies coexisting peacefully. His extended description symbolizes the kind of peace of heart and mind that the Messiah will bring in its fullness when He “has put everything [including death] under His feet” (**1 Corinthians 15:27**). We experience the foreglow of this peace even now as we look forward to our heavenly home. This peaceful kingdom will come in its fullness when Christ comes in His glory to judge the world and to take His people home with Him forever.

9. Similar thoughts recur in all three hymns, as do some of the same words and phrases. Most notable are these words from **Exodus** and **Isaiah**: “The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation.” All three hymns reflect a concern that God's glory be declared among the nations. All three exalt God for His greatness.

Let participants comment on the second question. We may, for example, deduce that God's people have always looked to Him for the same things and have always found Him faithful to provide what He has promised—salvation, deliverance, hope, forgiveness. God's people have always worshiped Him for His majesty, His mercy, His greatness, and His glory. We will worship Him for those same attributes throughout eternity. These similarities point out the unity of the church, the communion of saints as the Apostles' Creed calls it, throughout all time and place and even into eternity itself.

## The Word for Us

1. The first question is for personal reflection by participants. Don't ask anyone to share their answers. Do, however, ask for comments on what makes taking credit for our own accomplishments so spiritually deadly. If no one mentions it, point out that such actions spring from sinful pride. On the one hand, our Lord does want us to enjoy seeing the results of our efforts. But even as we note what He has done through us, we must never forget that that is exactly what has happened—He has done them through us. This is never more true than when we go about the work of His kingdom. As time will allow, refer participants to **Isaiah 26:12**. The NIV translation of this verse makes the point crystal clear.

2. Answers will vary. We can take great comfort in knowing that God controls world events for the sake of His church (see **Isaiah 10:5–6**).

3. Let participants respond if they wish.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# Lesson 4

## Fallen Is Babylon the Great

### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

### Searching the Scriptures

1. “The day of the LORD” will be horrible, filled with fear, pain, death, and destruction.

2. The description of “the day of the LORD” given in **Isaiah 13:10** sounds much like that of the prophet Joel and of Jesus Himself as they prophesied about Judgment Day. The shaking of heaven and earth (**verse 13**) corresponds closely to the description given in **Hebrews 12:26** of the Last Day. In **Isaiah 13:11**, God announces that He will punish the world for its wickedness. For all these reasons, we may conclude that God is not here addressing ancient Babylon exclusively, but also anyone who would identify with the powers of this world.

3. The people of Babel banded together in their rebellion against God and their refusal to worship Him. In pride, they chose instead to build a city and a tower. God had commanded that human beings fill the earth. Instead, these people decided to stick together on the plain of Shinar. God scattered them by confusing their languages. This plain later became the geographic center of the Babylonian Empire.

4. Isaiah's taunt song against the king of Babylon tells of the pomp of that king's reign (**verse 11**), of his arrogance (**verses 12–14**), of his power (**verses 16–17**), of his lack of compassion (**verse 17**—"would not let his captives go home"), and of his heartlessness or immorality (**verse 20**—"you have destroyed your [own] land and killed your [own] people").

5. Both the king of Babylon and Babel's builders sought to elevate themselves to heaven. In pride, they wanted to live as their own ultimate authority, higher in power than God Himself.

6. "The man of lawlessness" (elsewhere in the New Testament called "the Antichrist") speaks in the same boastful, self-aggrandizing way as the king of Babylon and as the original inhabitants of Babel. The rebellion is the same; the opposition to God is the same; the pride is the same; the desire to "be god" is the same; and—most significant of all—the destruction is the same.

7. God promises to show mercy to His people. He has chosen them as His own. He will not forget or abandon them. He will restore them to their land, and they will triumph over their enemies. Isaiah speaks of "aliens" ("strangers") who will join "the house of Jacob." These are Gentile believers.

8. Answers will vary. God's concern for even those who are His enemies is evident throughout **19:18–22**, such as His promise that He will save and rescue the Egyptians when they call out to Him (**19:20**) and His promise that Egypt and Assyria will be included in His people (**19:25**).

9. Shebna occupies himself with building an elaborate tomb or sepulchre in which he plans to be buried, indicating his self-interest and pride. Eliakim will be as a father to his people.

10. Let volunteers share their thoughts.

## The Word for Us

1. Let participants name some. Help the group see that persecution need not involve physical violence. Job discrimination, snide remarks, and the anguish of heart we feel as we see the violence and wickedness of our society all contribute to the oppression and turmoil God's people experience as we confront the world system, Babylon, in which we are immersed in this life.

2. Sometimes when we see the wickedness of the world and especially when we face persecution, ridicule, or other opposition because of our faith, we can become discouraged. But our Lord promises us that evil will not win forever, even though it appears to be winning now. God will call a halt to sin. God will avenge His people. He will punish the wicked even as He comforts His children.

3. These questions are intended for personal reflection. Ask volunteers to share any insights as time permits.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# Lesson 5

## “In That Day”

## The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verses,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

## Searching the Scriptures

1. The judgments in **Isaiah 24:1–25:5** differ from the Gentile oracles in that

- judgment falls on the entire earth and all its people (e.g., **24:6**);
- the physical planet will be destroyed (**24:19**); see also **2 Peter 3:10**;
- the destruction is an eternal one (**Isaiah 24:20b**);
- God will punish the powers in the heavens (Satan and his angels) and the kings of the earth (earthly rulers and their followers; **24:21**);
- God will establish His final, eternal, perfect rule (**24:23; 25:1–5**).

2. God’s great banquet features

- sumptuous food and choice wine (**25:6**);
- an absence of death and tears (**25:7–8**);
- an absence of shame (**25:8**—“the disgrace of His people”);
- total joy (**25:9**).

3. Perhaps the most important additional detail included in the New Testament readings referenced here is the fact that the banquet celebrates the marriage of the Lamb. It’s the feast God gives in celebration of His

Son's wedding. The church is Jesus' bride. We are honored guests at the banquet. Only in Christ and because of Christ can we attend this banquet. Only in Christ and because of Christ will hell, sin, and death be swallowed up for us. (See also **1 Corinthians 15:51–57**.)

4. The city here, as elsewhere in Isaiah, refers to "Zion" or "Jerusalem" and here foresees the restoration of the city and nation as the people of Israel return from exile. But especially, as the cross-references indicate, the city also refers to heaven. "That day" (**Isaiah 26:1**) is the day of final victory when God's enemies will experience judgment and God's people will experience the ultimate joy of their Lord in the new Jerusalem, in the heaven He has prepared for them.

5. Because Jesus took our sin, God has imputed Christ's righteousness—His right-standing before the Father—to us. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus' holiness, Jesus' faithfulness. What an awesome concept, especially for those of us who are painfully aware of our sin, our unfaithful words and actions!

6. God keeps us in His peace—note that it's His action—as we look to Him for help and strength. When we ignore His promises, when we neglect His Word, we lapse into fear, doubt, confusion, and perhaps even panic.

7. **Verse 12**—Both parts of this verse credit God with His work in the lives of His people: "Lord, You establish peace for us" and "all that we have accomplished You have done for us."

**Verse 14**—The phrases in this verse that point out the hopelessness of finding salvation apart from the Lord include those that emphasize human mortality (e.g., "they are now dead"; "they live no more"; "those departed spirits do not rise"; "You wiped out all memory of them").

**Verses 17–18**—"We gave birth to wind"; "we have not brought salvation to the earth"; "we have not given birth to people of the world"—all this, despite our labor, despite pain so intense it felt like childbirth. These verses kill any hope human beings have that they will, by trying hard and suffering long, bring themselves new life.

8. All "masters" whom human beings serve will die. All memory of them dissolves (**Isaiah 26:14**). Thus, how can they give life to those over whom they ruled in this life? But the Lord's dead ("Your dead" [**26:19**])—or as St. John would later put it, "the dead who die in the Lord" (**Revelation 14:13**)—will live. Their dead bodies will rise from the dust. They will awaken and shout for joy (**Isaiah 26:19**).

9. Satan, the ancient serpent, is Leviathan who invaded Eden and has been stealing, killing, and destroying (**John 10:10**) on earth ever since. The Lord will punish him, will slay him, "in that day" (**Isaiah 27:1**)—the Day of Judgment. The twisted serpent who has caused so much suffering

and pain will trouble God's people no longer.

10. In **Isaiah 5** God's vineyard yielded only bad fruit. **Isaiah 27:6** describes a time when God's people will respond to His loving care in this way: "In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit."

11. These verses speak forcefully also of the day Christians call Good Friday, on which God's wrath at our sin fell on our Lord Jesus. By this, our sin was taken away and our guilt atoned for. (Note the similarity in the language here and in **Isaiah 6:7**.)

12. The sounding of the trumpet; God's people being gathered from all places in the world; worship on the holy mountain—Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, the holy city, symbol of heaven; all these are vivid pictures of the coming realities of the Last Day, judgment, resurrection of the body, and heaven.

## The Word for Us

1. Answers will vary.

2. Let participants share their thoughts. In the Holy Supper we receive the most nourishing and most joy-producing food and drink of all—Christ's holy body and precious blood. With these He earned salvation for us and through them He has destroyed forever the power of hell, sin, death, and Satan.

3. Lead participants to personalize and to express this truth: "Jesus died for me." Be alert to the special needs of any non-Christians in the group. Be ready to personally witness to them of your faith in Christ and to pray for them, that the Spirit may indeed lead them to faith in Christ.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# **Lesson 6**

## **Sight for the Spiritually Blind**

### **The Class Session**

Have volunteers read “Theme Verses,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

### **Searching the Scriptures**

1. Jesus the Messiah, the stone, is the cornerstone of the church, which is all who trust in Him for salvation. In Isaiah’s time, now, and until the Day of Judgment, it is people’s unbelief that causes them to stumble and thus condemns them to judgment. God’s forgiveness is there, won by Christ. God yearns to have sinners repent and believe.

2. The people of Judah have closed their eyes to God’s truth so often that they have become stupefied as though drunk. They are numb and blind. In fact, everything Isaiah has said to them has become like a closed book presented to someone who is illiterate. They couldn’t get God’s message even if they wanted to. Their worship is lip-service only and is not rooted in their hearts; it is not real worship, only a pretense.

3. The vision that had been sealed and unreadable becomes open and intelligible so even the deaf will hear it and the blind will see. Not only that, the message brings great joy. This is God’s work. For ancient Judah as for us today, repentance comes as God’s gift. He works it in our hearts through His Word. In that sense, His Law is a wonderful gift to us in that it points out our sin and our need for our Savior.

4. The people demand that Isaiah and God’s other prophets stop seeing and hearing from God; that they stop speaking the truth and rather proclaim what the people want to hear; and that they get God out of the way so that the people can get on with living their lives in the way they want to live them.

5. God brings us to the point where we see our sins as He sees them. He works contrition in our hearts. Then, when we confess our sins, He assures us that He forgives us for Jesus’ sake. There is simply no peace like the peace that flows from sins forgiven and from knowing that our fellowship with our heavenly Father has been restored.

6. Answers may vary somewhat.

**Verse 18**—God promises grace and mercy to repentant sinners.

**Verse 19**—God promises to dry the tears of His people and to hear their prayers, their cries for help.

**Verses 20–21** (see also **Psalms 5:8**)—God promises to direct the steps of His people, to lead them into right (righteous) paths.

**Verses 23–24** (see also **Matthew 6:33**)—God promises to supply His people’s physical needs for food and clothing, and to do so in abundance.

**Verses 25–33**—God promises to defeat His people’s enemies and to give them a song in the night (**30:29**)—continuing joy.

7. King Hezekiah is no doubt meant, a king who indeed reigned in righteousness, as the **2 Kings** text indicates. The deeper, ultimate fulfillment is in Christ, the King of righteousness, who was born and lived and died so that we might receive God’s righteousness.

8. The spiritually blind (**Isaiah 32:3**) will now see clearly, the ears once deaf to God’s truth will listen and will hear. Those who rejected God’s Word as mere babbling (**Isaiah 28:10, 13**) will now hear it spoken plainly to them (**32:4**). Those who foolishly rely on the world’s wisdom (**32:5**) will no longer be considered wise, and the wickedness of their schemes will be revealed for what it is.

9. The verses of this passage list fruitfulness of life, righteousness, peace, quietness, and security as all resulting from the Holy Spirit’s work in the lives of God’s people.

It’s no accident that the fruit mentioned in **Galatians 5:22–23** is called “the fruit of the Spirit.” Just as we are justified by God’s grace, freely as His gift, so we are also sanctified (made more like Christ) freely as God works the needed changes in our hearts. As we continue to confess our sins and receive His forgiveness, the Holy Spirit cleanses us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**).

## The Word for Us

1. Participants will likely not want to respond orally to the first question. Ignoring God’s wisdom is so dangerous because doing so leads to pain and despair and perhaps ultimately to the shipwrecking of our faith.

Remind participants that God Himself promises to open the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind when we return to Him in repentance. He will fill our hearts with joy—the peace and joy of sins forgiven and fellowship restored.

2. Trust in something or someone other than God (including ourselves) is so deadly that God warns against it again and again throughout Scripture. God’s people in Judah not only looked to their own foolish human wisdom and religious ritual to carry them through the dangers they faced, they refused even to consider the possibility that these things might fail them. Such complacency led to the destruction of their nation. Spiritual complacency can lead to an even worse fate—eternal death in hell.



Encourage participants to comment on the dangers of falling asleep on our faith, of taking our relationship with Christ for granted and drifting away from the Word, from the sacraments, from worship with God's people, from prayer, and—eventually—from Christ Himself.

3. God works through His Word and sacraments to accomplish this. Also invite participants to mention some of the people through whom God's Word comes to them.

Participants will likely want to keep the answer to the last question to themselves, but do encourage them to thank God for His holy work in their lives.

## **Closing**

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

## Lesson 7

### God's Judgment and Grace Validated in History

#### The Class Session

Have volunteers read "Theme Verse," "Goal," and "What's Going On Here?"

#### Searching the Scriptures

1. The destruction described in **Isaiah 34:4** will occur on Judgment Day.

2. Though the Edomites were related to the Israelites they always opposed Israel and rejoiced over her problems. They took advantage of Israel's misfortunes and were themselves a bloodthirsty people. (As you have time, see **Numbers 20:14–21**; **Obadiah 8–14** for examples of Edom's hostility to Israel.)

3. God's judgment on the nations means retribution for the cause of God's people who have suffered under those nations.

4. The main point of Isaiah's portrait is that the effects of sin will be reversed. The desert will blossom. The blind will see. Sin and danger will be banished. The redeemed of the Lord will rejoice in their salvation. Gladness and joy will overtake them as sorrow and sighing flee.

5. God had chosen Jerusalem as the only place to worship Him with sacrifices. Hezekiah was not defying God when he destroyed the other places of worship, which were an offense to God.

6. They do not want the citizens of Jerusalem, sitting on the walls, to hear the threats in a language they understand and thus be tempted to become discouraged and give up.

7. Hezekiah takes the letter to the temple, spreads it out before the Lord, and puts the matter into the Lord's hands. This indicates trust in the Lord and His ability and willingness to save His people.

8. God had given Sennacherib his victories, but Sennacherib took credit for what God had done. God had already determined the outcome according to His own plans.

9. The Lord sends His angel to slaughter Sennacherib's army. After Sennacherib withdraws and returns home, two of his sons kill him. The Lord does this for the sake of His name and for the sake of His faithful servant David (**37:35**).

10. Hezekiah asks the Lord to remember that he walked faithfully before the Lord and gave wholehearted devotion to God and did good. Hezekiah's

prayer may surprise us because we all know that we have not been perfect in our obeying and doing good. This is true also of Hezekiah.

If we have living faith, our conduct will reflect this. Faith without works is dead. It's not that our good works earn answered prayer, but rather that relying in faith on God's forgiveness, our lives grow to be more and more in harmony with God's will. (See also **1 John 1:5–7; 3:6–10.**)

11. God uses the king of Babylon's gift as a salutary test of Hezekiah's faith.

12. Jesus warns that our heart is where our treasure is. Pride in earthly treasures keeps our hearts earthbound.

## **The Word for Us**

1. We can continue to trust in the Lord and commit our problems to Him in prayer. We need not despair or give up. Our Lord will handle our problems and grant us His peace.

2. In His goodness, God our Father always gives us more than we can ask for or imagine. Therefore He does not always act according to our plans or our solutions, which may not be for our ultimate good. Trusting God's greater wisdom and His love for us in Christ, we therefore pray, "Thy will be done."

3. We recognize that we can do nothing on our own. Nor can we control our life, how long we live, or even what the next day will bring. Our Lord enables us to accomplish all that we do.

## **Closing**

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

## Lesson 8

### “Comfort, Comfort My People”

#### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verse,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

#### Searching the Scriptures

1. Preparations are necessary because the Lord is coming and will reveal His glory.

2. John the Baptist is the voice in the wilderness calling people to prepare for the Lord’s coming (the coming of the Messiah) by repenting of their sins and producing the fruit that God desires in their lives.

3. The power to restore God’s people will come from His enduring Word, not from fragile, fleeting human accomplishment.

4. The bearer of good news announces the coming of the Lord in power and gentleness to accomplish His purposes of ruling and of tending his flock.

5. The one who tends His people as His flock and carries them close to His heart (**40:11**) is all-powerful and has no equal. He knows all things and never grows weary. He renews the strength of those who trust in Him.

6. The Servant in **Isaiah 42:1–4** is Christ Jesus. **Isaiah 61** explains that the Spirit was on Him because He was anointed (set aside) to preach the message of comfort. In the Luke passage, Jesus applies this prophecy to Himself.

7. The passages show that Jesus dealt gently with those who had weak faith.

8. God ushered in a new covenant with the incarnation of Christ. Christ did not falter or fail in being God’s servant, in being the mediator of the new covenant of the forgiveness that comes through faith in His blood shed for us.

9. God does not promise that we will not have to pass through the waters, but He does promise that they will not overwhelm us. Answers to the second question will vary. The God who has created, formed, redeemed, and summoned us is our Savior, and we need not fear for He is with us at all times—including the times of trial.

10. God’s people are witnesses to the fact that there is no God and no Savior but the Lord.

## The Word for Us

1. Answers will vary but should focus on the greatness of the Lord and His mercy toward us.

2. God sends even difficult things to bring (even drive) us back to Him for help, leading us thereby to repent of our sins and to grow closer to Him as we live in the rich forgiveness of sins we have in Christ. He uses trials to help us mature in our faith. God, in His infinite love for us in Christ, works even through the wickedness of people and events, turning to our good what our enemies intended for our harm.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# Lesson 9

## The Lord Alone Is God, the Savior

### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verses,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

### Searching the Scriptures

1. God will summon Cyrus and work His purposes through him for the sake of His chosen people.

2. People have repeatedly looked to idols, political alliances, and other human endeavors for what only God can provide. God wants His people and people from the ends of the earth to know that He alone is God, that He alone is the Savior. Ultimately all people will bow before the Lord and acknowledge that He alone is God. Those who have raged against Him will do so in shame. Those who are the descendants of Israel, meaning those who have trusted in the Lord (see **Romans 2:28–29**; **Galatians 3:29**), will be found righteous and will exult in His salvation.

3. The Lord has upheld His people since their conception and carried them from birth (rather than they carrying Him). He made them and will sustain and rescue them. He knows the end from the beginning and works out His purposes. He will bring righteousness and salvation to His people.

4. God condemns Babylon for its ruthlessness (**47:6**), for its pride

(47:7–8), for its use of and trust in magic and sorcery (47:9, 12), and because it trusted in its wickedness (47:10).

5. The Servant is called before He is born and formed in the womb. The mission of the Servant is to bring Israel back to the Lord and bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The result of the Servant's ministry will be that "kings ... and princes will see and bow down," giving God honor and glory (49:7).

6. Through the words of Isaiah, a foreshadowing is given of the suffering that the Servant, Jesus, would endure: "I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6). According to Eastern thinking, there is nothing worse than to be spit upon and to have the hair of one's beard pulled out. But the Servant willingly submits Himself to that treatment. Though He suffers, He knows God the Father will not put Him to shame; He trusts the Father to vindicate and help Him (Isaiah 50:7–9).

7. Because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, we can be assured that no one can bring an accusation against us before God. Why? Because God has justified us (declared us not guilty) through the blood of Jesus Christ. No one can condemn us because "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

8. A person can reach out in the darkness of his or her own need to "trust in the name of the LORD" (Isaiah 50:10). Or one can light fires and provide oneself with flaming torches, that is, one can try to dispel the darkness by strategies of one's own devising. The fate of such people is that they "will lie down in torment," earthly torment and ultimately the torment of hell itself.

## The Word for Us

1. Allow volunteers to share their experiences.
2. People forfeit the peace and righteousness God gives to those who trust Him, as well as many other earthly and eternal blessings.
3. In this passage, the Lord assures the people of Israel that just as a mother cannot forget her child, so He would not forsake Zion. His love for His people would not change. Their names were engraved on His palms. Jerusalem's walls would not be forgotten. Let volunteers share their experiences in response to the second question.
4. Invite participants to share any incidence of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse they now suffer due to their faith. Scripture reminds us that we need to encourage and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). We can do this with our words and actions. You might even ask the partic-

ipants to write down some of the special concerns of different members of the study group and to agree to pray daily for them.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# Lesson 10

## The Lord's Servant Stricken for Us

### The Class Session

Have volunteers read "Theme Verse," "Goal," and "What's Going On Here?"

### Searching the Scriptures

1. God's people are not to fear other people who are but mortal and whose lives are fleeting from the perspective of eternity. God's people instead can rest on the solid foundation of God's salvation, which will last forever, and on His righteousness, which will not fail (**51:6, 8**), and on the Lord Himself, who created the heavens and the earth (**51:13**).

2. God's wrath is pictured as a cup of wine that people are forced to drink to its dregs and that makes them stagger. Although Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of God's wrath might be taken from Him, He willingly submitted to His Father's will that He drink it to its dregs by His death on the cross. Because He drank the cup of God's wrath, we don't have to.

3. God's name (God's reputation), which would be blasphemed among the nations because of Israel's captivity, would be shown to be holy when He would bring them home. Both His people and the nations would know that He is God.

4. The beautiful feet of **Isaiah 52:7** belong to those "who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation" to the people of Israel and who announce that their God reigns (in spite of the fact that the coming captivity may make it seem otherwise). Isaiah was one such prophet with beautiful feet. St. Paul labels gospel preachers who bring the Good News of salvation through Jesus as having beautiful feet (**Romans 10:15**).

5. **Isaiah 52:13** predicts that the Servant will act wisely, which in Hebrew includes the thought that what He does will prosper. The verse indicates that He will be lifted up and highly exalted, which would only happen if He were successful. The hymn of praise in **Revelation** shows a fulfillment of the prophecy.

6. The phrase refers to the Servant sprinkling people from many nations with His cleansing blood. In the Old Testament, cleansing by sprinkling blood was essential to acceptable worship of the holy God. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (**Hebrews 9:22**). The blood of animals shed in Old Testament sacrifices was but a shadow that pointed forward to the sacrifice of God's Servant. "Many nations" (**Isaiah 52:15**) shows the universal extent of the atoning work of Christ. He shed His blood not merely for the nation of Israel but for the whole world.

7. Jesus quotes **Isaiah 53:12** and says that it is fulfilled in Him. Philip uses this section of Isaiah, which the Ethiopian eunuch was reading, to begin his explanation of what Jesus did for the salvation of the world.

8. The Servant would suffer and die to bear the punishment for our transgressions and thus to bring us the peace of sin forgiven. The Lord lays on Him the burden of our iniquity (**53:6**). *We*, *our*, and *us* refer not only to Israel at Isaiah's time and Jesus' time, but also to us. Jesus died for all sinners, whether or not an individual sinner believes and thereby receives the forgiveness that Jesus so wonderfully won for all. (The word *many* used in **53:12** is used in the sense of many as opposed to few, rather than many as opposed to all.)

9. In the last two statements in **53:5** the blessed results of vicarious atonement are added: "peace" and "healed."

10. **Matthew 26:62–63** and **27:12–14** show the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that the Servant would not open His mouth in response to his oppression (**Isaiah 53:7**). **Matthew 27:38** and **27:57–60** show the fulfillment of **Isaiah 53:9**. Jesus died the death of a criminal, among other criminals, and was buried in a rich man's tomb.

11. Christ's offspring are those who trust in Him for salvation; they make up the church. **Isaiah 53:10** indicates that the will of the Lord will prosper in the hand of His Servant, thus indicating that the offspring will be many.

12. The words point to Christ's resurrection.

## The Word for Us

1. Participants can share opportunities and strategies as well as pray for and encourage one another to share the Good News of what God has done in Jesus for the salvation of the whole world.



2. Just as God supervised their journey during the exodus (**Exodus 14:19**), the Israelites were assured of God's protection as they left Babylon. We are assured of the same protection and direction as we journey toward heaven.

3. Answers will vary. It is a great comfort that our Lord prays for us that we might be forgiven, protected from spiritual danger while on earth, and finally brought safely home to heaven.

## **Closing**

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# **Lesson 11**

## **God's Gracious Invitation**

### **The Class Session**

Have volunteers read "Theme Verses," "Goal," and "What's Going On Here?"

### **Searching the Scriptures**

1. God's wife commits spiritual adultery by worshiping idols.

2. God commands Israel to sing and shout for joy because she would have many children. To accommodate them all she is told to enlarge her tent. She is promised that her family will dispossess nations. Paul applies this to the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, to the church, and to her children, who are the children of promise and children of God through faith in Christ (see **Galatians 4:4–7**).

3. God comforts His people with the promise that although He would be angry with them for a moment, with compassion and everlasting kindness He would bring them back. He promises that His unfailing love would not be shaken, nor His covenant of peace be removed. God's people would be ready to receive His love only after God's judgment had convicted them of their sin of adultery. While proudly sleeping with other lovers, they could only spurn such love. God longs to show people His compassion and love, and it pains Him to have to turn against them in anger.

4. God promises that Israel's children will be taught by Him and that their peace will be great.

5. God is extending this invitation to those who are spiritually thirsty, who thirst and hunger for what can make their souls live (**Isaiah 55:2–3**). They will find nourishment by responding to God's invitation to come to Him and partake of His banquet—all free of charge.

6. **Isaiah 55:3** refers to God's promise to David that his house and his kingdom would endure forever. That promise was fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus, who will reign over the house of David forever (**Luke 1:32–33**). The Lord again promises that the Messiah will be a witness to the people and their leader.

7. God promises to have mercy on and freely pardon all who seek Him in repentance and faith, but people must do this while He has made Himself available and is near. The time will come when it will be too late.

8. In our sinful state, we find it very difficult to be merciful and forgiving. Our way would be to seek vengeance. God's mercy and forgiveness and His abundant, free grace all testify to the fact that His ways and thoughts are higher than ours.

9. Like the moisture God sends from heaven fulfills His purpose in making plants blossom and flourish and produce food, so His Word which He speaks accomplishes the purpose for which He sends it.

10. Joy and peace would characterize the release of God's people from captivity. Isaiah's picture language paints a picture of joy so compelling that the mountains, hills, and trees join in the celebration. The memorial will be to the Lord's renown, and it will be an everlasting memorial that will not be destroyed.

## The Word for Us

1. Give participants the opportunity to discuss this.

2. **Isaiah 55:10–11** encourages us that God's Word is powerful and will accomplish His purpose. We may not know that purpose or understand God's timing, but we can rest assured that His Word is not spoken in vain.

3. Answers will vary. Members of a congregation pray for their spiritual leaders. They expect and insist that their pastors speak both the Law and the Gospel as appropriate. Rather than chafing under the preaching of the Law, people should see it as God's call to repentance and respond accordingly.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

## Lesson 12

# The Lord—The Light of This World and the World to Come

### The Class Session

Have volunteers read “Theme Verses,” “Goal,” and “What’s Going On Here?”

### Searching the Scriptures

1. The people are fasting as a way to earn God’s favor instead of as a way to reflect on their sins and look to His mercy. They concentrate on the outward ritual instead of on glorifying God and seeking to grow in love for Him and other people.

2. These actions comprise the kind of fasting God desires: working for justice; sharing food with the hungry; providing shelter and clothes for those in need; meeting the needs of our families. The other passages list similar acts of worship.

3. The Lord who is the people’s light will break forth like the dawn after the night and will bring healing. The Lord who is their righteousness will go before them and the glory of the Lord will protect them as during the exodus (see **Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19–20**).

4. Isaiah uses quite a number of word pictures to describe the sinfulness of the people so answers will vary. These word pictures include hatching eggs of vipers; spinning useless cobwebs; feet rushing to sin; lack of justice, integrity, and truth; blind groping in the darkness. People might mistakenly conclude that the Lord is unable to hear their prayer and to save them. However, what is really happening is that their sins have separated them from God so that He will not hear.

5. The Lord is displeased at the lack of justice and appalled that there is no one to intervene, so He Himself intervenes. Sustained by His own righteousness, He works salvation.

6. God will come as Redeemer to those who repent of their sins. These people are promised that God’s Spirit and His words will never depart from their mouths or the mouths of their children.

7. The darkness of sin covers the peoples of the earth until the Lord, the light of Israel, appears over His people. When the Lord shines through them, nations will come to their light, that is, to the Lord.

8. Jesus stops the quotation before the phrase “the day of vengeance of our God” because that will be part of His second coming, when He comes

in glory to judge the nations; it is not part of the ministry of His first coming, which He is describing in Nazareth.

9. Jesus frees captives from the bondage of human-constructed religion, such as the elaborate laws the Pharisees had created, and from bondage to sin, death, and Satan.

10. God's people declare His praises and serve Him.

## **The Word for Us**

1. Participants may not wish to share their reflections.

2. As Paul notes, this is the "armor of God" (**Ephesians 6:11, 13**). In **Isaiah 59:16–17**, the Lord, who doesn't need the protection, nevertheless is pictured as clothing Himself with righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet as He goes out to work salvation. He graciously gives us these same garments and others as well that we (who do need the protection) might stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

3. The Lord Himself will give heaven light.

## **Closing**

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.

# **Lesson 13**

## **New Heavens and a New Earth**

### **The Class Session**

Have volunteers read "Theme Verses," "Goal," and "What's Going On Here?"

### **Searching the Scriptures**

1. The Lord, who is speaking in **62:1**, will not keep silent, that is, remain inactive, until righteousness and salvation shine forth from His people. This implies that He will give His people the righteousness and salvation that will transform them and make them a beacon for the nations.

2. The Lord will take delight in His transformed people and rejoice over them as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

3. Isaiah pictures the Lord trampling His enemies and the enemies of His people as one tramples grapes in a winepress. There is a hint also of the

imagery used in **Isaiah 51:17, 21–22** of the Lord making people drink from the cup of His wrath until they are drunk.

4. Answers will vary. God is worthy of all praise, and one of the chief purposes of our life is to praise Him, something that we will do throughout eternity. When we come to Him in prayer, by focusing on God and His love, faithfulness, glory, and all the rest, we shut out the clutter of our own thoughts and move into a listening stance, more aware that we are in God's presence. We remind ourselves of who He is and of who we are, attentive children waiting for our Father—our marvelous, glorious God—to hear us and to speak to us in His Word.

5. It is a great comfort to know that our God feels for us and that in spite of our sins, He has compassion on us.

6. The words of **Isaiah 63:11–14** depict the Holy Spirit living among His people and giving them rest.

7. The fact that someone in Judah was still praying for God's people shows that God had not given up on them. He was still raising up intercessors, people who could “stand ... in the gap” (cf. **Ezekiel 22:30**) and plead with Him to forgive and restore the erring.

8. We grieve the Holy Spirit by rebelling, by persisting in behavior that we know God has forbidden, behavior that hurts us, hurts other people, and injures our relationship with our Lord.

Rebellion puts our very faith at risk. To continue knowingly in sin leads to disaster. We cry out to God to keep us from such foolishness, to convict us of our sin, and to give us the gift of repentance (**Romans 2:4**) and the power to die to sin and live to righteousness (**Romans 6:11–14; Philippians 2:13**), so that we do not end up giving back God's great gift of eternal life.

9. We are so sinful that even our “righteous” deeds are like filthy rags (in Hebrew these rags refer to the cloths a woman uses during her menstrual period). Our sin makes us shrivel up and die. Paul answers his question of who will rescue us from this body of death by praising God for our Lord Jesus Christ.

10. Note that in this kind of prophecy, some of the details (such as planting vineyards; **Isaiah 65:21**) belong to life in Isaiah's day, while the fulfillment of the concepts those details convey will far surpass the details themselves. Also note that the distinction between life on this earth (where people still die although they live long; **65:20**) and life in heaven (where there will be new heavens and a new earth; **65:17**) is not a concern of Isaiah here. He blends together images from both ages.

The future kingdom of God is characterized by new heavens and a new earth, where the former things will not be remembered and where God's

people will be a delight and a joy. The sound of weeping will be heard no more there. Longevity of life and peaceful enjoyment of work and its fruit will be part of that kingdom. God will hear and answer prayer before and while it is still being spoken. Wild beasts will live peacefully together and no harm or destruction will occur there.

11. Jerusalem is pictured as a mother who nurtures and nourishes her children with an overflowing abundance. God uses the church, where His Word is proclaimed and His sacraments are administered, to nurture and nourish His people's faith.

12. God's final judgment means eternal suffering in hell for those who have rebelled against Him. God's people will be brought from all nations to the new Jerusalem. There they will serve (**66:21**) and worship (**66:23**) God and endure before Him just as the new heavens and earth will endure (**66:22**).

## The Word for Us

1. God can say what He says in **Isaiah 65:13–15** because He stands outside of time. We see only what is true for us and for those around us in the present moment, but God sees the whole story, from beginning to end (including the “final destiny” [**Psalms 73:17**] of the wicked).

2. Let volunteers comment. Help participants see that we treasure our congregation and our part in the larger holy Christian church not because of the beauty of the building where we worship, but most of all for the encouragement in our faith and the spiritual nourishment we receive in Christ's church. As we live, study, and worship together, we are led to deeper repentance, deeper faith, deeper comfort and assurance of God's forgiveness. As we study His Word and receive the Sacrament, we grow more like Christ, and we grow in our ability to serve God and one another.

## Closing

Follow the suggestion in the study guide.