ISAIAH

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



From the throne of the Holy One to the Suffering Servant
and the promise of new heavens and a new earth

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Enterprises

Isaiah Bible Study

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Isaiah Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the Book of Isaiah. My purpose in writing this Study Guide is to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

Yes, there was a time I said, Here I am. When I started writing these studies and translating the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), I did it to put God's Word in people's hands for free. I did not feel qualified. Isaiah did not either. God uses willing people, not perfect ones.

There are many books available on the book of Isaiah, and not all of them teach sound doctrine. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Isaiah. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and see what He has planned for my future and my eternity. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's Kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

When we don't understand the context of a verse, we can easily get it wrong. Many of us have heard a passage taken out of context and misused. It is up to each of us to gently correct those who quote God's Word out of context, doing so with love and understanding, since not everyone realizes how important context is. Often, a passage is pulled out of context to defend a position, and that only confuses the person hearing or reading it.

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, explained below, along with the study of interpretation itself. Sometimes people use both to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. The definitions of exegesis and eisegesis below come from www.merriam-webster.com.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (SLB)

"20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from private interpretation; 21 for prophecy was never borne by ***the*** will of man, but being borne by ***the*** Holy Spirit, holy men of God spoke."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

These passages tell us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came directly from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, the Biblical Hermeneutics approach.

We should study God's Word using what Dr. David L. Cooper called the Golden Rule of Interpretation:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

There are two ways language is used in the Bible: figurative and literal.

Figurative language uses a word or phrase with a meaning different from its basic meaning, to make a point in an interesting way. It is not meant literally. An **allegory** or **metaphor** is a figure

of speech where a term is used for something it doesn't literally mean, often with a hidden meaning inside the text.

Literal interpretation means taking words in their plain, ordinary sense, without treating them as metaphor or allegory, based on the context of the passage.

I read the Bible as it is written: literally. The Bible defines its own terms within the context of the book or passage where they appear. This study of Isaiah will take a literal approach unless I say otherwise.

Isaiah gives us a promise of its own about the Word of God. God says His word always does the job He sent it to do.

Isaiah 55:10-11 (SLB)

"10 For just as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens, and do not return there unless they have watered the earth, and made it bring forth and made it sprout, and given seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so My word that goes out from My mouth will be; it will not return to Me empty, unless it has done what I desired, and has prospered ***in that for*** which I sent it."

I approached this study without any preconceived theology. My goal, then and now, was to find out what God's Word is telling me. If I leaned on other people's interpretations, my conclusions would be swayed by them. Before writing any part of this study, I prayed for the Holy Spirit to open my eyes, my heart, and my understanding of God's Word.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew and Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (J.P. Green, ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

You will notice that the SLB prints God's name three different ways. LORD in capital letters stands for God's personal name, the name He gave Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15). Lord in regular letters translates a word that means master. When you see GOD in capitals, as in "Lord GOD," it is God's personal name again.

I used a face-value approach, seeking the plain, literal meaning of the text. I know that the meaning of some words has changed since Biblical times, so I leaned on The Interlinear Bible for help with those. Martin Luther stressed this principle, known by its Latin name, *sensus literalis*.

Since Isaiah is a book of prophecy, we need to understand that prophecy which isn't fulfilled literally isn't true prophecy at all. The Bible backs this up:

Deuteronomy 18:18-22 (SLB)

"18 A prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And it shall be ***that*** the man who does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require ***it*** of him. 20 Only, the prophet who acts presumptuously to speak a word in My name which I have not

commanded him to speak, and who speaks in the name of other gods, then that prophet shall die. 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that ***is*** the word which the LORD has not spoken; with presumption the prophet has spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him."

In this passage, God told the Israelites how to tell a true prophet, one speaking for God, from a false one. We don't need to look for some hidden, spiritual meaning in God's Word. We can be glad knowing that these prophetic events have either already happened literally, or will happen that way in the future.

As history moves forward, so does our understanding of end-time prophecy. We see this in the Bible itself. Looking back at the Old Testament, we find prophetic words that weren't clearly understood at the time they were written. In Daniel 12:4, Daniel was told to "shut up the words and seal the scroll until the time of the end" (see also 12:9).

How to Use This Study

Each chapter of this study has five parts. First is the full chapter of Isaiah, so you can read it straight through, out loud if you are in a group. Then comes a short Preview, the verse-by-verse Study, a Summary, and Study Questions. The first question in each set is an easy one to get people talking. The last ones are personal, so answer those privately in prayer or in a journal if you'd rather not share them.

Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

If you are in a group, one chapter a week works well. Some chapters are long and can be split over two weeks, and some short ones can be paired with the chapter next to them.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Isaiah. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah is the 23rd book of the Protestant Christian Bible and the first of the Major Prophets. (The "Major Prophets" are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are called "major" because of their length, not because they matter more than the others.) Isaiah is a book about the holiness of God, the sin of His people, the judgment that sin brings, and the salvation God promises in spite of it all.

- When this study uses the word "man," it means all of mankind, men, women, and children, not just one gender, unless stated otherwise.

Isaiah's name means "the LORD is salvation," and that one phrase sums up the whole book. Isaiah tells Judah plainly that judgment is coming. Assyria will sweep through the land, and later Babylon will carry the people away. But Isaiah never stops there. Again and again he looks past the judgment to the day when God will save His people, send His Messiah, and set everything right.

You might ask, "Why should a Christian today spend this much time in an Old Testament prophet?" It's simple: Isaiah shows us Jesus. Isaiah describes His virgin birth, His ministry in Galilee, His gentleness, His rejection, His suffering in our place, and His return as King, hundreds of years before He was born. The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than any other prophet. When Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth to announce His ministry, the scroll He read from was Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21).

Isaiah connects to many other books in the Bible. Some of these are:

- 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-32 (the history of Isaiah's day)
- Micah (Isaiah's fellow prophet in Judah)
- The four Gospels
- Romans
- Revelation

Isaiah has 66 chapters and 1,292 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Judgment (Chapters 1-39)

- Judah and Jerusalem on trial, and Isaiah's call (Chapters 1-6)
- The Book of Immanuel: the sign of the virgin, the Child, and the Branch (Chapters 7-12)
- Messages against the nations: Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tyre (Chapters 13-23)
- The judgment of the whole earth and the kingdom that follows (Chapters 24-27)
- Six woes, and the King who will reign in righteousness (Chapters 28-33)
- Judgment on the nations and the joy of the redeemed (Chapters 34-35)
- The bridge: Hezekiah, Assyria, and a warning about Babylon (Chapters 36-39)

Part Two: Comfort (Chapters 40-66)

- "Comfort, comfort My people": God's greatness, idols exposed, and Cyrus the deliverer (Chapters 40-48)
- The Servant of the LORD who suffers and saves (Chapters 49-57)
- True worship, the Redeemer who comes to Zion, and the new heavens and new earth (Chapters 58-66)

Many readers have noticed that Isaiah's 66 chapters line up with the 66 books of the Bible. The first 39 chapters, like the 39 books of the Old Testament, are heavy with law, sin, and judgment. The last 27 chapters, like the 27 books of the New Testament, open with a voice crying in the wilderness (40:3, the verse all four Gospels connect to John the Baptist) and close with the new heavens and new earth (65:17; 66:22), the same place Revelation ends. I don't build any doctrine on that pattern, but I think it's a wonderful picture of how God's Word holds together.

Background of the Book

Author: Isaiah the son of Amoz (1:1). He was a prophet in Jerusalem, married to a woman he calls "the prophetess" (8:3), and the father of at least two sons whose names were messages from God: Shear-jashub (7:3), whose name means "a remnant will return" (10:21), and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens" (8:1-3). Some scholars teach that chapters 40-66 were written by later, unnamed writers after the exile. I take the book's own claim at face value. The New Testament does too: John 12:38-41 quotes Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10 side by side and says plainly that Isaiah said both.

Where it was written: Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah.

When it was written: Isaiah received his visions "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah" (1:1).

- Isaiah's call came "in the year of the death of King Uzziah" (6:1), about 740 B.C.
- The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., during Isaiah's ministry.
- The Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 B.C. (chapters 36-37).
- Isaiah records the death of Sennacherib (37:38), which took place about 681 B.C., so his ministry ran for roughly 60 years.

The world of Isaiah: Assyria was the superpower of the day, and its armies were feared for their cruelty. Judah was a small kingdom caught between Assyria to the north and Egypt to the south. Its kings kept trying to save themselves by making deals with one side or the other. Isaiah's message never changed: trust the LORD, not horses, chariots, or treaties (31:1).

Purpose: To call God's people to turn from sin, to warn them of the judgment that was coming, and to comfort them with God's promise of salvation through the Messiah and of a kingdom that will never end.

A word about the text: In 1947, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, a complete scroll of Isaiah was found in a cave near Qumran. It was copied more than a hundred years before Jesus was born, and apart from small spelling differences, it reads remarkably close to the Hebrew text our Bibles were translated from. God has kept His Word.

Why Study Isaiah?

Here are six reasons why studying Isaiah matters:

1. Isaiah shows us who God is. Isaiah saw the Lord "sitting on a throne, high and lifted up" and heard the seraphim call out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of armies" (6:1-3). One of Isaiah's favorite titles for God is "the Holy One of Israel." He uses it twenty-five times. If we want to know the God we worship, Isaiah is a good place to start.

2. Isaiah shows us Jesus. Isaiah 53 describes the death of Christ so clearly that it reads like it was written at the foot of the cross. It was written about 700 years earlier.

3. Isaiah proves that God keeps His word. Isaiah named Cyrus, the Persian king who would let the Jews go home, about 150 years before Cyrus did it in 538 B.C. (44:28; 45:1). Only God can tell the future that way. God Himself makes that point in Isaiah: "declaring the end from the beginning, and from antiquity what has not been done" (46:10).

4. Isaiah teaches us how to trust God when life is falling apart. King Hezekiah faced the strongest army in the world with nothing but prayer, and God answered (chapter 37). Isaiah 40:31 has carried tired believers for thousands of years.

5. Isaiah warns us about empty religion. God told His people He was tired of their sacrifices and festivals because their hearts were far from Him (1:11-15; 29:13). That warning still fits churches, and people, today.

6. Isaiah gives us hope for the future. Isaiah looks ahead to the day when nations "will beat their swords into plowshares" (2:4), when "the wolf will sojourn with the lamb" (11:6), and when God creates "new heavens and a new earth" (65:17). These promises haven't been fulfilled yet. They will be.

Isaiah and the Messiah

"Messiah" comes from the Hebrew word for "anointed one." The Greek word for the same thing is "Christ." Isaiah gives us more prophecies about the Messiah than any other prophet. Here are some of them, with where the New Testament shows them fulfilled in Jesus:

- Born of a virgin (7:14): Matthew 1:22-23
- A great light in Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1-2): Matthew 4:12-16
- A Child born, a Son given, on the throne of David forever (9:6-7): Luke 1:31-33
- A shoot from the stump of Jesse, with the Spirit of the LORD resting on Him (11:1-2, 10): Matthew 3:16; Romans 15:12
- A voice in the wilderness preparing His way (40:3): Matthew 3:1-3; John 1:23
- The gentle Servant who won't break a battered reed (42:1-4): Matthew 12:15-21
- A light to the nations (42:6; 49:6): Luke 2:30-32; Acts 13:47
- Beaten and spat upon (50:6): Matthew 26:67; 27:26-30
- Not believed and rejected by His own (53:1-3): John 12:37-38
- Carried our sicknesses and griefs (53:4): Matthew 8:16-17
- Pierced for our transgressions, and by His wound there was healing for us (53:5): 1 Peter 2:24
- Silent before His accusers, like a lamb led to slaughter (53:7): Matthew 27:12-14; Acts 8:32-35
- Buried in a rich man's tomb (53:9): Matthew 27:57-60
- Numbered with the transgressors (53:12): Luke 22:37
- Anointed to preach good news to the poor (61:1-2): Luke 4:16-21
- Coming to Zion as Redeemer (59:20): Romans 11:26

Some of Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled at His first coming, and some are still waiting for His second. Jesus Himself showed us that. When He read Isaiah 61 in Nazareth, He stopped in the middle of a sentence, right after "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," and sat down (Luke 4:19-20). He didn't read the next line, "And a day of vengeance of our God" (61:2). That part comes when He returns.

Isaiah and the End Times

Isaiah talks often about "the day of the LORD" and about what will happen "at the end of the days" (2:2). The Day of the LORD is the time when God steps into history to judge sin. Some of Isaiah's warnings came true in his own day, when Assyria and Babylon brought judgment on the nations. But many of them reach much further, to the very end of the age. Bible prophecy often works this way: a near fulfillment that people could see, and a far one that is still ahead. I point these out as we go.

In my study of Revelation, I explained that I hold the premillennial view: a future seven-year Tribulation, the visible return of Jesus Christ at the end of it, and His literal 1,000-year reign on this earth. I believe the church will be gathered to Christ before the Tribulation begins, and that He will return with His saints at the end of it. Isaiah is one of the main reasons I believe in that reign. Isaiah describes a kingdom where Jesus rules from Jerusalem, the nations stop making war, the animal world is at peace, and people still live long lives and grow old (2:2-4; 11:6-9; 65:20-25). That isn't heaven, and it isn't the world we live in now. I believe it is the Millennium. When Christ returns, Israel will turn to the Messiah it once rejected, and during His reign God will keep every promise He made to them. As Paul wrote, quoting Isaiah 59:20, "The One who delivers will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26).

Isaiah also gives us some of the clearest pictures in the Old Testament of the Lord's return in judgment (24:1-23; 34:1-17; 63:1-6), the resurrection of the dead (26:19), the defeat of death itself (25:8), and the new heavens and new earth (65:17; 66:22). Revelation picks up many of these same pictures and finishes them. If you have worked through my Revelation study, you will see a lot of familiar ground here.

Whatever view of the end times you hold, I hope you will read Isaiah with an open Bible and an open heart, and let the text speak for itself.

Chapter 1: The Great Case

Scripture: The LORD Brings His Case Against Judah

1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, ***and*** Hezekiah, the kings of Judah.

1:2-9 Hear, heavens, and give ear, earth, for the LORD has spoken: "Sons I have reared and brought up, and they have transgressed against Me. An ox knows its owner, and a donkey the feeding trough of its master; Israel does not know; My people does not understand." Woe, sinning nation, a people heavy with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy ***One*** of Israel; they have become estranged backward. Why will you be struck again? You will add revolt. The whole head ***is*** sick, and the whole heart ***is*** faint. From the sole of the foot and to the head there is no soundness in it: bruise and welt and fresh wound; they have not been pressed out, and they have not been bound up, and it has not been softened with the oil. Your land ***is*** a desolation; your cities ***are*** burned ***with*** fire; your ground, in front of you strangers ***are*** devouring it, and ***it is*** a desolation like the overthrow of strangers. And the daughter of Zion has been left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a lodging hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Unless the LORD of armies had left us a survivor, a few, we would have been like Sodom; we would have resembled Gomorrah.

1:10-17 Hear the word of the LORD, rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, people of Gomorrah. "Why ***is*** the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the LORD. "I am sated ***with*** burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fatlings, and in the blood of bulls and lambs and male goats I do not delight. When you come to appear ***before*** My face, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Do not continue to bring a grain offering of worthlessness; incense, it ***is*** an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of a convocation: I am not able ***to endure*** wickedness and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they have become a burden on Me; I am weary of bearing ***them***. And when you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; also when you multiply prayer, I will not be hearing; your hands are full ***of*** blood. Wash; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice; set right the oppressor; vindicate the fatherless; plead ***for*** the widow."

1:18-20 "Come now, and let us argue ***the case*** together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will become white like snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you are willing and you obey, you will eat the good of the land. And if you refuse and you rebel, you will be eaten ***by the*** sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

1:21-31 How the faithful town has become a prostitute! ***She was*** full of justice; righteousness would lodge in her, and now murderers. Your silver has become dross; your drink ***is*** diluted with the water. Your princes ***are*** rebellious and companions of thieves; every one of them loves a bribe and pursues rewards. They do not vindicate the fatherless, and the case of the widow does not come to them. Therefore declares the Lord, the LORD of armies, the Mighty ***One*** of Israel: "Woe! I will get relief from My adversaries, and I will avenge Myself on My enemies. And I will turn My

hand against you, and I will refine your dross as ***with*** lye, and I will remove all your tin. And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. After this you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful town." Zion will be ransomed with justice, and her returning ones with righteousness. And the crushing of transgressors and sinners ***will be*** together, and those who forsake the LORD will come to an end. For they will be ashamed of the terebinths which you desired, and you will be abashed because of the gardens which you have chosen. For you will be like an oak whose leaf is withering, and like a garden which has no water. And the strong ***one*** will become tinder, and his work a spark, and both of them will burn together, and there is none who quenches.

Chapter 1 Preview

Isaiah opens his book like a courtroom. God calls heaven and earth to listen as He brings His case against His own people. Judah still goes to the temple and still offers sacrifices, but their hearts are far from Him and their streets are full of injustice.

Yet the very first chapter also holds out an open hand. God invites His people to come and reason with Him, and He promises to wash sins as red as scarlet until they are white as snow.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz,* ***and*** *Hezekiah, the kings of Judah.*

This first verse is the title for the whole book. Isaiah tells us who he is, who the message is for, and when he received it. Isaiah's name means "the LORD is salvation," and that is the heart of everything he wrote. He served through the reigns of four kings of Judah, from about 740 B.C. into the early 600s B.C.

Some scholars split this book among two or three writers who lived long after Isaiah. I take the book's own claim at face value, and so does the New Testament. John 12:38-41 quotes Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10 and credits both to Isaiah. I believe one prophet, Isaiah son of Amoz, wrote all sixty-six chapters.

1:2 *Hear, heavens, and give ear, earth, for the LORD has spoken: "Sons I have reared and brought up, and they have transgressed against Me.*

"Hear, heavens, and give ear, earth." God calls the whole creation as witnesses, the same way Moses did in Deuteronomy 32:1. The picture is a courtroom, and God is bringing a lawsuit against His people.

His complaint is personal. He calls them "sons," children He raised and cared for. They didn't simply break a rule. They turned their backs on their own Father. That is what makes sin so serious. It is first of all a broken relationship.

1:3 *An ox knows its owner, and a donkey the feeding trough of its master; Israel does not know; My people does not understand."*

An ox and a donkey aren't known for being smart animals. Yet even they know who feeds them and where home is. God says His people know less than a farm animal. They have forgotten who gave them everything they have.

I think this verse still speaks to us. It is easy to enjoy God's blessings every day and never stop to think about where they came from.

1:4 *Woe, sinning nation, a people heavy with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy* ***One*** *of Israel; they have become estranged backward.*

Isaiah piles up words to describe the nation's sin: sinful, weighed down, evildoers, corrupt. Then he names the root of it. They have abandoned the LORD and despised "the Holy One of Israel."

That title is one of Isaiah's favorites. He uses it about twenty-five times, and it is rarely found anywhere else in the Bible. It comes from what he saw in chapter 6. God is holy, set apart from all sin, and yet He has bound Himself to Israel.

1:5 *Why will you be struck again? You will add revolt. The whole head* ***is*** *sick, and the whole heart* ***is*** *faint.*

God asks a sad question: where can I strike you that I haven't struck already? Judah has been disciplined again and again, and still they keep rebelling. The whole nation is pictured as a body that is sick from the head to the heart.

Discipline is meant to turn us back to God. When it only makes us harder, the problem is in the heart, not in the discipline.

1:6 *From the sole of the foot and to the head there is no soundness in it: bruise and welt and fresh wound; they have not been pressed out, and they have not been bound up, and it has not been softened with the oil.*

The picture of the sick body continues. There is no healthy spot left, only bruises and open wounds. Worse, no one has cleaned or bandaged them. The nation is hurting and does nothing to treat the cause. Only God can heal wounds like these, and He is the One they have walked away from.

1:7 *Your land* ***is*** *a desolation; your cities* ***are*** *burned* ***with*** *fire; your ground, in front of you strangers* ***are*** *devouring it, and* ***it is*** *a desolation like the overthrow of strangers.*

Now Isaiah drops the picture and speaks plainly. The land is desolate, the cities are burned, and foreigners are eating up the crops. This describes real invasions. Judah was attacked several times during Isaiah's life, and the worst came in 701 B.C., when the Assyrian king Sennacherib seized

the fortified cities of Judah (2 Kings 18:13). Assyria was the great empire of that day, based in what is now northern Iraq.

1:8 *And the daughter of Zion has been left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a lodging hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.*

"The daughter of Zion." This is a tender name for Jerusalem. Zion was the hill where the city and the temple stood, and the name came to stand for the whole city and its people.

Jerusalem is left standing alone, like a flimsy watchman's hut in the middle of a field after the harvest. Everything around it has been stripped away. And that's how it went in 701 B.C., when Jerusalem was surrounded and the rest of Judah lay in ruins.

1:9 *Unless the LORD of armies had left us a survivor, a few, we would have been like Sodom; we would have resembled Gomorrah.*

Here is the first mention of an idea that runs through the whole book: the remnant. A remnant is a small group of survivors God keeps for Himself when judgment falls on the rest. If God hadn't spared a few, Judah would have been wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:29 to show that God has always kept a faithful remnant within Israel.

New Testament links: Romans 9:29 (quoted)

1:10 *Hear the word of the LORD, rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, people of Gomorrah.*

Isaiah just said Judah would have become like Sodom. Now he goes further and calls their leaders "rulers of Sodom" and the people "people of Gomorrah." That must have shocked his listeners. They thought of themselves as God's people. God says that in their behavior they look like the most wicked cities in their history.

New Testament links: Revelation 11:8 (alluded to)

1:11 *"Why **is** the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the LORD. "I am sated **with** burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fatlings, and in the blood of bulls and lambs and male goats I do not delight.*

This may surprise us. God Himself commanded these sacrifices in the Law of Moses. So why does He say He has had enough of them?

It's simple: the sacrifices had become a show. The people went through the motions while living however they wanted. God never wanted the blood of animals by itself. He wanted their hearts. Samuel told King Saul the same thing: "to listen is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

1:12 *When you come to appear **before** My face, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?*

God asks who invited them to stomp through His courts. They came to the temple as if it were their right, but they never stopped to think about who they were coming before. Worship without repentance is just trampling on holy ground.

1:13 *Do not continue to bring a grain offering of worthlessness; incense, it **is** an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of a convocation: I am not able **to endure** wickedness and solemn assembly.*

God calls their offerings worthless and their incense disgusting to Him. The new moon and the sabbath were holy days He gave them. But He can't stand to see iniquity and worship side by side. When we come to church on Sunday and live in open sin the rest of the week, we are doing the same thing Judah did.

1:14 *Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they have become a burden on Me; I am weary of bearing **them**.*

These are strong words. God says He hates their feasts and is tired of carrying them. Notice He calls them "your" festivals, not "My" festivals. The people had taken what God gave them and made it their own religious routine. God feels the weight of empty worship like a burden on His shoulders.

1:15 *And when you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; also when you multiply prayer, I will not be hearing; your hands are full **of** blood.*

Even prayer doesn't reach God when it comes from bloody hands. In Isaiah's day, people prayed standing with their hands spread out toward heaven. God says He will close His eyes to those hands, because they are stained with violence and injustice.

This doesn't mean God refuses a sinner who comes to Him in repentance. It means He won't be bribed by long prayers while we hold on to our sin (Psalm 66:18).

1:16-17 *Wash; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice; set right the oppressor; vindicate the fatherless; plead **for** the widow."*

God doesn't leave them without a way back. He tells them exactly what to do: wash, stop doing evil, and learn to do good.

Notice what "good" looks like here. It isn't more sacrifices. It is justice for the weak. Orphans and widows had no one to stand up for them in that culture, so they were easy to cheat. God expects His people to defend them. James 1:27 says the same thing: pure religion is to visit orphans and widows in their distress.

1:18 *"Come now, and let us argue **the case** together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will become white like snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.*

"Come now, and let us argue the case together." This is one of the most beautiful invitations in the whole Bible. After all of the charges God has brought, He doesn't slam the door. He opens it. The words "argue the case" here are courtroom words. God is saying, "Let's settle this case."

Scarlet and crimson were deep red dyes, so strong that they couldn't be washed out of cloth. That is a picture of sin. We can't scrub it out ourselves, no matter how hard we try. But God says He can make it as white as fresh snow and as clean as new wool. David prayed for exactly this: "Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7).

You might ask, "How can God just wash sin away? Doesn't He have to judge it?" Yes, He does. That is why this verse points forward to the cross. God could make scarlet sins white because Jesus would pay for them with His own blood. Revelation 7:14 describes believers who "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The only cleansing that works is the one God provides.

I believe this verse is still God's offer to every person today. It doesn't matter how deep the stain is. If you come to Him through faith in Jesus, He will make you clean (1 John 1:7).

1:19-20 *If you are willing and you obey, you will eat the good of the land. And if you refuse and you rebel, you will be eaten **by the** sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

The invitation comes with a choice. If they are willing and obey, they will enjoy the good of the land God promised them. If they refuse and rebel, they will be "eaten by the sword."

These two verses echo the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28. God had told Israel plainly from the beginning what obedience would bring and what rebellion would bring.

"The mouth of the LORD has spoken." This phrase seals it. God's word will stand either way.

1:21 *How the faithful town has become a prostitute! **She was** full of justice; righteousness would lodge in her, and now murderers.*

Isaiah now sings a funeral song over Jerusalem. The city that was once faithful has become a harlot. In the Bible, unfaithfulness to God is often pictured as adultery, because God's covenant with Israel was like a marriage. A covenant is a binding agreement in which God commits Himself to His people. Jerusalem was once known for justice, especially in the days of David. Now murderers live where righteousness used to.

1:22 *Your silver has become dross; your drink **is** diluted with the water.*

Two simple pictures show how far the city has fallen. Their silver has turned into dross, the worthless scum left over when metal is melted down. Their wine has been watered down. Things still look the same on the outside, but the value is gone. That is what happens to a people who keep the form of religion but lose its heart.

1:23 *Your princes **are** rebellious and companions of thieves; every one of them loves a bribe and pursues rewards. They do not vindicate the fatherless, and the case of the widow does not come to them.*

Here God puts His finger on the leaders. The rulers who should have protected the people are rebels and friends of thieves. Everyone in power can be bought. The orphan and the widow can't even get a hearing, because they have no money to offer. When leaders sell justice, the weakest always pay the price.

1:24 *Therefore declares the Lord, the LORD of armies, the Mighty **One** of Israel: "Woe! I will get relief from My adversaries, and I will avenge Myself on My enemies.*

God now speaks with three titles: the Lord, the LORD of armies, and the Mighty One of Israel. "LORD of armies" means He is the commander of heaven's armies. Then comes something shocking. God calls His own people His "adversaries" and His "enemies." Their sin has put them on the wrong side of Him.

1:25 *And I will turn My hand against you, and I will refine your dross as **with** lye, and I will remove all your tin.*

"I will turn My hand against you." This sounds terrible, but look at the purpose. God is a refiner. A refiner heats metal so the dross floats to the top and can be removed, leaving pure silver behind. God's judgment on Jerusalem is meant to purify her, not destroy her. Malachi 3:2-3 uses the same picture of the Lord as a refiner of silver.

1:26 *And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. After this you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful town."*

After the fire comes restoration. God will give Jerusalem good judges and wise counselors again, like the early days of the kingdom. Then the city will have a new name: "the city of righteousness, a faithful town."

I believe this promise will be kept for Jerusalem just as it reads. It was partly seen after the return from exile, but its full fulfillment comes when Jesus returns and reigns from Jerusalem during the Millennium, His thousand-year reign on earth. Zechariah 8:3 says Jerusalem will then be called "the City of Truth."

1:27 *Zion will be ransomed with justice, and her returning ones with righteousness.*

Zion will be redeemed, bought back, by God's justice and righteousness. Notice who is included: "her returning ones." Not every person in Jerusalem will be saved, but those who turn back to God will be. I believe this looks ahead to the day Paul describes in Romans 11:26, when "all Israel will be saved."

1:28 *And the crushing of transgressors and sinners **will be** together, and those who forsake the LORD will come to an end.*

The same fire that purifies the repentant destroys the rebel. Those who keep sinning and forsake the LORD will come to an end. God's judgment has two sides, and we each choose which side we stand on by how we respond to Him.

1:29 *For they will be ashamed of the terebinths which you desired, and you will be abashed because of the gardens which you have chosen.*

The oaks and gardens were places where people worshiped false gods. Pagan religion in that region often held its rituals under sacred trees and in special groves. God says that one day His people will be ashamed of the very places they loved. Idols always promise life and end up bringing shame.

1:30 *For you will be like an oak whose leaf is withering, and like a garden which has no water.*

Here is a fitting picture. The people loved their sacred oaks and gardens, so God says they will become like a dying oak and a garden without water. We become like what we worship. If we put our trust in something that can't give life, we will dry up along with it.

1:31 *And the strong **one** will become tinder, and his work a spark, and both of them will burn together, and there is none who quenches.*

The "strong one" is the person who thinks he doesn't need God. He will become like tinder, the dry material used to start a fire, and his own works will be the spark that lights it. In the end, sin destroys the one who commits it, and no one can put out that fire.

This is a sobering way to end the chapter. But we have already seen God's offer in verse 18. The fire doesn't have to be our story.

Chapter 1 Summary

God brings His case against Judah, calling heaven and earth as witnesses. His children have rebelled, and the nation is sick from head to foot. Their sacrifices, feasts and prayers mean nothing to Him because their hands are full of injustice. Still, God invites them to come and reason with Him, promising to make scarlet sins white as snow. He will refine Jerusalem by judgment, redeem those who repent, and one day call her the city of righteousness.

The Kings of Isaiah's Day

Uzziah (1:1): King of Judah for about fifty years. He was a strong and successful king, but late in life his pride led him to burn incense in the temple, and God struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Isaiah's call came in the year he died, about 740 B.C. (6:1).

Jotham (1:1): Uzziah's son. He did right in the sight of the LORD, but the people still acted corruptly (2 Chronicles 27:2).

Ahaz (1:1): Jotham's son, one of Judah's worst kings. He worshiped other gods and turned to Assyria for help instead of trusting the LORD (2 Kings 16; Isaiah 7).

Hezekiah (1:1): Ahaz's son and one of Judah's best kings. He trusted the LORD when Assyria surrounded Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (2 Kings 18-19; Isaiah 36-39).

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Have you ever given someone a gift that they never thanked you for? How did that feel?
2. What witnesses does God call, and what is His complaint against His people? (1:2-4)
3. How does Isaiah describe the condition of the nation? (1:5-9)
4. Why does God reject the sacrifices and prayers of His people? (1:10-15)
5. What does God tell His people to do instead? (1:16-17)
6. What invitation and promise does God give in verse 18? (1:18-20)
7. What does God promise to do for Jerusalem after He refines her? (1:24-27)
8. In what ways can our own worship become a routine that God doesn't want?
9. Is there a "scarlet" sin in your life that you need to bring to God today, trusting Him to make it white as snow?

Chapter 2: The Mountain of the LORD

Scripture: The Last Days and the Day of the LORD

2:1-5 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it will be at the end of the days ***that*** the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the top of the mountains, and it will be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us from His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion ***the*** law will go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations and will decide for many peoples, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and they will not learn war again. House of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

2:6-11 For You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob, for they are full from the east, and ***they are*** soothsayers like the Philistines, and with the children of foreigners they clap ***hands***. And its land has been filled ***with*** silver and gold, and there is no end to its treasures; and its land has been filled ***with*** horses, and there is no end to its chariots. And its land has been filled ***with*** idols; to the work of its hands they bow down, to what its fingers have made. And mankind has been humbled, and man has been brought low; and do not forgive them. Go into the rock, and hide yourself in the dust from before the dread of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty. The haughty eyes of mankind will be brought low, and the pride of men will be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

2:12-18 For the LORD of armies has a day against everything proud and lofty, and against everything lifted up, and it will be brought low, and against all the cedars of Lebanon, the lofty and the lifted up, and against all the oaks of Bashan, and against all the lofty mountains, and against all the hills that are lifted up, and against every high tower, and against every fortified wall, and against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the vessels of delight. And the haughtiness of mankind will be humbled, and the pride of men will be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols will completely pass away.

2:19-22 And they will go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the dust from before the dread of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to terrify the earth. In that day mankind will throw away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made for him to bow down ***to***, to the moles and to the bats, to go into the crevices of the rocks and into the clefts of the cliffs from before the dread of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to terrify the earth. Cease for yourselves from man, whose breath ***is*** in his nostrils; for at what is he to be accounted?

Chapter 2 Preview

Isaiah lifts our eyes from the sin of his own day to the end of history. In the last days, the mountain of the LORD in Jerusalem will be raised above every other, and the nations will come to learn God's ways. War will finally end.

But before that day of peace comes a day of reckoning. Isaiah describes the Day of the LORD, when every proud thing will be brought low, idols will be thrown away, and the LORD alone will be exalted.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

This verse opens a new section that runs through chapter 4. Isaiah says he "saw" the word. The prophets often spoke this way, and it tells us that God's message came to him as a vision, not as his own idea. 2 Peter 1:21 says the same of all true prophecy: men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2:2 *And it will be at the end of the days **that** the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the top of the mountains, and it will be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it.*

"At the end of the days." This phrase points to the end of history, the time when God finishes His plan. The New Testament teaches that the last days began with Jesus' first coming (Hebrews 1:2), but this prophecy looks to their final stage, after Jesus returns.

Isaiah sees the temple mountain in Jerusalem raised up as "the top of the mountains." In the ancient world, mountains were where people believed the gods lived. God is saying that His house will stand above every other religion and power on earth. The mountain may also be raised up physically. Zechariah 14:10 describes the land around Jerusalem being changed at the Lord's return, with the city lifted up.

Then comes a surprising picture. Water normally flows down a mountain, but here the nations "stream" up to it. People from every nation will be drawn to Jerusalem, not by force, but because they want to be there.

I read this plainly, and it has never happened yet in history. I believe it describes the Millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth after His return (Revelation 20:4-6). Zechariah 14:16 says that in that time the nations will go up to Jerusalem year after year to worship the King, the LORD of armies.

2:3 *And many peoples will come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us from His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion **the** law will go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Here we hear what the nations say to each other: "Come, and let us go up." They want to be taught God's ways and to walk in His paths. This is the opposite of what the world is like now. Today the nations ignore God's word. In the kingdom, they will seek it out.

"For from Zion the law will go forth." Jerusalem will be the world's capital, and the King will rule from there. The word "law" here means instruction, God's teaching for how to live. The whole

earth will learn from Him. Micah 4:1-3 contains almost the same prophecy word for word. Micah lived at the same time as Isaiah, and God gave both prophets this same hope.

2:4 *And He will judge between the nations and will decide for many peoples, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and they will not learn war again.*

"He will judge between the nations." Who is "He"? I believe this is the LORD Himself, Jesus Christ reigning as King. Today nations go to war because there is no one strong and fair enough to settle their disputes. In the kingdom, Jesus will be that Judge. Revelation 19:15 says He will shepherd the nations "with a rod of iron," meaning His rule will be firm and nothing will be able to resist it.

Because He judges rightly, weapons will no longer be needed. Swords will be beaten into plowshares, the blades used to break up soil, and spears into pruning hooks for trimming vines. The tools of death become tools for growing food. Joel 3:10 says the opposite before the final battle: "Beat your plowshares into swords." The world will arm itself one last time, and then Christ will end war for good.

People have quoted this verse for centuries, hoping that treaties or world governments will bring peace. I don't believe that will ever work. Lasting peace comes only when the Prince of Peace reigns (Isaiah 9:6-7). I believe this Old Testament promise to Israel will be fulfilled during the Millennium.

2:5 *House of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

Right after this glorious vision, Isaiah turns to his own people. If the nations will one day walk in God's light, how much more should Israel walk in it now? The future hope is meant to change how we live today. 1 John 3:3 says that everyone who has this hope purifies himself.

2:6 *For You have abandoned Your people, the house of Jacob, for they are full from the east, and* ***they are*** *soothsayers like the Philistines, and with the children of foreigners they clap* ***hands****.*

Now Isaiah explains why God has set His people aside for a time. They have filled the land with the practices of the nations around them. They are "full from the east," which probably means fortune-telling and magic from places like Syria (Aram) and Mesopotamia. They were consulting soothsayers, people who claimed to tell the future, like the Philistines did. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 strictly forbids all of this.

2:7 *And its land has been filled* ***with*** *silver and gold, and there is no end to its treasures; and its land has been filled* ***with*** *horses, and there is no end to its chariots.*

Judah was rich in Isaiah's early years. Under Uzziah, the nation grew strong, with plenty of silver, gold, horses and chariots (2 Chronicles 26:8-15). But Deuteronomy 17:16-17 warned Israel's kings not to multiply horses or gold. Wealth and military power made the people feel safe without God. Prosperity isn't wrong, but it can quietly take God's place in our hearts.

2:8 *And its land has been filled **with** idols; to the work of its hands they bow down, to what its fingers have made.*

For the third time Isaiah says, "Its land has been filled." First silver and gold, then horses and chariots, and now idols. The three go together. When people trust in money and power, they soon start worshiping the things their own hands have made. It sounds foolish to bow down to something you carved yourself, yet every idol in every age is just that: something we made and then started to serve.

2:9 *And mankind has been humbled, and man has been brought low; and do not forgive them.*

Everyone will be brought low, from the ordinary man to the important one. Then Isaiah says something hard: "Do not forgive them." That may sound harsh, but he's agreeing with God's judgment on people who refuse to repent. Forgiveness is always open to those who turn back (1:18), but those who hold on to their idols will face what they have chosen.

2:10 *Go into the rock, and hide yourself in the dust from before the dread of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty.*

"Go into the rock, and hide yourself in the dust." Isaiah tells the people to run and hide. They won't be hiding from an enemy army, but from the terror of the LORD Himself. When God shows His majesty, sinful people won't be able to stand in His presence. This verse is repeated almost word for word in verses 19 and 21.

New Testament links: 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (alluded to)

2:11 *The haughty eyes of mankind will be brought low, and the pride of men will be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.*

"In that day." This phrase is used again and again in Isaiah. It usually points to the Day of the LORD. The Day of the LORD is the time when God steps into history to judge sin and set things right. In Isaiah, it can mean a near judgment in his own day, like the Assyrian invasion, and also the final judgment at the end of this age. I believe this passage has both in view, but it reaches its full meaning at Christ's return.

On that day, human pride will be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted. That line is the theme of the whole passage.

2:12 *For the LORD of armies has a day against everything proud and lofty, and against everything lifted up, and it will be brought low,*

"For the LORD of armies has a day against everything proud and lofty." The Day of the LORD is aimed at one thing above all: pride. Everything that is "lifted up" against God will be brought down. Pride was the first sin, and it is the root of every other one. James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

2:13-16 *and against all the cedars of Lebanon, the lofty and the lifted up, and against all the oaks of Bashan, and against all the lofty mountains, and against all the hills that are lifted up, and against every high tower, and against every fortified wall, and against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the vessels of delight.*

Isaiah gives a long list of things that are tall and impressive. The cedars of Lebanon were the finest trees in that part of the world, and the oaks of Bashan, east of the Jordan, were famous too. Then come high mountains, towers, fortified walls and the great trading ships of Tarshish, a distant port far to the west.

These were the things people admired and trusted: nature's grandeur, military defenses and commercial wealth. God says He will bring every one of them low. Nothing man builds or admires can stand when God arises.

2:17 *And the haughtiness of mankind will be humbled, and the pride of men will be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.*

Isaiah repeats the refrain from verse 11, almost word for word. Repetition in Hebrew poetry is a way of underlining something. God wants His people to be sure of this: on that day, human pride will fall, and the LORD alone will be lifted up.

2:18 *And the idols will completely pass away.*

The verse is only a few words long, and it's all the stronger for it. The idols "will completely pass away." They won't be defeated in a great battle. They will simply be gone, because they were never anything to begin with.

2:19 *And they will go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the dust from before the dread of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to terrify the earth.*

This verse returns to the picture of verse 10. People will run into caves and holes in the ground when God "arises to terrify the earth."

I believe Revelation 6:15-17 describes the fulfillment of this verse. When the sixth seal is opened, the kings of the earth and the great men hide themselves "in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains," crying out to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb. Isaiah saw the same scene some eight hundred years before John did. The earthquake is real, and so is the terror.

New Testament links: Revelation 6:15 (alluded to); 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (alluded to)

2:20 *In that day mankind will throw away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made for him to bow down* ***to****, to the moles and to the bats,*

In that day, people will throw their gold and silver idols to the moles and the bats, animals that live in dark holes and ruins. The things they once spent fortunes on and bowed before will be tossed aside like trash. When the true God appears, every false god is exposed as worthless.

2:21 *to go into the crevices of the rocks and into the clefts of the cliffs from before the dread of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to terrify the earth.*

They throw away their idols so they can run faster into the caves. The very things they trusted are now just extra weight. Isaiah repeats the line from verse 19 one more time to drive the point home. When God arises, there is nowhere to hide except in Him.

2:22 *Cease for yourselves from man, whose breath **is** in his nostrils; for at what is he to be accounted?*

"Cease for yourselves from man." Isaiah ends with a simple piece of advice. Stop trusting in people. Man's life is only a breath in his nostrils. It can be gone in a moment. Psalm 146:3-4 says the same: "Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who has no deliverance."

This is a good word for us. We are tempted to put our hope in leaders, experts or even ourselves. Isaiah says to put it in the LORD, who alone will be exalted.

Chapter 2 Summary

Isaiah sees the last days, when the mountain of the LORD in Jerusalem will be raised above all others and the nations will stream there to learn God's ways. Christ will judge between the nations, and war will end. Then Isaiah turns to Judah, full of wealth, horses and idols. The Day of the LORD is coming against everything proud and lofty. People will hide in caves and throw away their idols, and the LORD alone will be exalted.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. When you hear the words "world peace," what comes to your mind?
2. What will happen to the mountain of the LORD in the last days? (2:2)
3. Why will the nations come to Jerusalem, and what will they learn there? (2:3)
4. What will happen to the weapons of war, and why? (2:4)
5. What three things had filled the land of Judah? (2:6-8)
6. What is the main target of the Day of the LORD? (2:11-17)
7. How do people respond when the LORD arises to make the earth tremble? (2:19-21)
8. What are some "idols" people trust in today that will one day be thrown to the moles and the bats?
9. In what area of your life are you tempted to trust in man instead of the LORD? (2:22)

Chapter 3: A Nation Without Leaders

Scripture: Judgment on Judah's Leaders and Daughters

3:1-7 For look, the Lord, the LORD of armies, is about to remove from Jerusalem and from Judah support and prop, every support of food and every support of water; warrior and man of war, judge and prophet, and diviner and elder; commander of fifty and ***one*** lifted up of face, and counselor and skilled ***one*** of magic arts, and discerning ***one*** of charm. And I will make youths their leaders, and caprices will rule over them. And the people will be oppressed, man by man and man by his neighbor; they will act insolently, the youth against the elder, and the lightly esteemed against the honored. For a man will seize his brother ***in*** the house of his father: "You have a cloak; you shall be a ruler for us, and this heap of ruins ***shall be*** under your hand." He will lift up ***his voice*** in that day, saying, "I will not be one who binds ***wounds***, and in my house ***there is*** no food and no cloak; you shall not make me a ruler of ***the*** people."

3:8-12 For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, for their tongue and their deeds ***are*** against the LORD, to rebel against the eyes of His glory. The expression of their faces has testified against them, and they have declared their sin like Sodom; they have not hidden ***it***. Woe to their soul! For they have dealt evil to themselves. Say ***of the*** righteous that it is good, for they will eat the fruit of their deeds. Woe to ***the*** wicked! It is evil, for the recompense of his hands will be done to him. My people, its oppressors ***are*** acting like children, and women have ruled over it. My people, those who guide you are leading ***you*** astray, and they have swallowed up the way of your paths.

3:13-15 The LORD is taking His stand to contend, and is standing to judge peoples. The LORD will come in judgment with the elders of His people and its leaders: "And you, you have consumed the vineyard; the plunder of the afflicted ***is*** in your houses. What ***is it*** to you ***that*** you crush My people and grind the faces of ***the*** afflicted?" declares the Lord GOD of armies.

3:16-23 And the LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and they walk ***with*** neck stretched out and ogling ***with*** eyes, walking and mincing they go, and with their feet they tinkle ***their anklets***, the Lord will make scabby the scalp of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will lay bare their forehead. In that day the Lord will remove the splendor of the anklets and the headbands and the crescent ornaments, the pendants and the bracelets and the veils, the headdresses and the ankle chains and the sashes and the perfume boxes and the charms, the signet rings and the rings of the nose, the festal robes and the overtunics and the cloaks and the purses, and the mirrors and the linen garments and the turbans and the shawls.

3:24-26 And it will be ***that*** instead of perfume ***there*** will be rottenness, and instead of a belt, a rope, and instead of a work of well-set hair, baldness, and instead of a robe, a girding of sackcloth; branding instead of beauty. Your men will fall by the sword, and your might in the battle. And her gates will lament and mourn, and she will be emptied; she will sit on the ground.

Chapter 3 Preview

Chapter 2 ended with a warning to stop trusting in man. Chapter 3 shows what happens when God takes away the people Judah trusted. Food and water run short, and the nation's leaders disappear. Children and the incompetent end up in charge, and society falls apart.

Then Isaiah turns to the proud women of Jerusalem, dressed in all their finery. Their beauty will be traded for mourning, because the city's men will fall in battle.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *For look, the Lord, the LORD of armies, is about to remove from Jerusalem and from Judah support and prop, every support of food and every support of water;*

"The Lord, the LORD of armies, is about to remove." God is about to take away what Judah leaned on. Isaiah calls it "support and prop," meaning everything that held the nation up. It starts with the most basic needs, bread and water. When a city is under siege, those are the first things to run out. History bears this out: it happened when the Babylonians surrounded Jerusalem more than a century later (2 Kings 25:3).

3:2 *warrior and man of war, judge and prophet, and diviner and elder;*

Next God removes the people the nation counted on. The warrior protected them, the judge kept order, and the prophet and elder gave guidance. Notice the "diviner" is on the list too. Judah trusted fortune-tellers right alongside true leaders. God says He will sweep all of them away, the good and the false together.

3:3 *commander of fifty and **one** lifted up of face, and counselor and skilled **one** of magic arts, and discerning **one** of charm.*

The list continues with military officers, respected men, counselors and skilled craftsmen. Every kind of person a healthy nation needs will be gone. This happened when the Babylonians carried off the leaders and the craftsmen of Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14). A country can survive a lot, but it can't survive losing the people who know how to lead and build.

3:4 *And I will make youths their leaders, and caprices will rule over them.*

With the grown men gone, God says, "I will make youths their leaders, and caprices will rule over them." These are rulers who act on a whim, with no wisdom or self-control. This is a judgment in itself. When God gives a people foolish leaders, it is often because the people rejected wisdom first.

3:5 *And the people will be oppressed, man by man and man by his neighbor; they will act insolently, the youth against the elder, and the lightly esteemed against the honored.*

When there is no real authority, people turn on each other. Neighbors oppress neighbors. Young people show no respect for the old, and the low-class man sneers at the honorable one. This is

what happens when a society loses its foundation. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes, as in the days of the judges (Judges 21:25).

3:6 *For a man will seize his brother **in** the house of his father: "You have a cloak; you shall be a ruler for us, and this heap of ruins **shall be** under your hand."*

Things get so bad that people beg anyone with a coat to be their ruler. Owning a cloak is enough to make a man a leader! It shows how poor the nation has become. The city is called "this heap of ruins," and nobody is left to take charge of them.

3:7 *He will lift up **his voice** in that day, saying, "I will not be one who binds **wounds**, and in my house **there is** no food and no cloak; you shall not make me a ruler of **the** people."*

The man refuses. He says, "I will not be one who binds wounds." He has no bread and no cloak to spare, and he knows he can't fix what is broken. No one wants the job, because there is nothing left to lead. A nation that rejects God eventually finds that no human being can bind up its wounds.

3:8 *For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, for their tongue and their deeds **are** against the LORD, to rebel against the eyes of His glory.*

Isaiah now gives the reason for all of this. Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, because their words and their actions were against the LORD. They rebelled right in front of His glorious presence. God's glory lived in the temple in their own city, and they sinned against Him anyway.

3:9 *The expression of their faces has testified against them, and they have declared their sin like Sodom; they have not hidden **it**. Woe to their soul! For they have dealt evil to themselves.*

"They have declared their sin like Sodom; they have not hidden it." The people weren't even trying to hide their sin anymore. It showed on their faces. There is something worse than sinning in secret, and that is sinning openly and without shame. Jeremiah 6:15 describes the same people: "They do not know how to blush." When a culture is proud of its sin, judgment is near.

3:10 *Say **of the** righteous that it is good, for they will eat the fruit of their deeds.*

In the middle of all this judgment, God has a word for the righteous: it will go well with them. They will eat the fruit of their actions. God doesn't forget the faithful, even when the whole nation around them is falling. He knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19).

3:11 *Woe to **the** wicked! It is evil, for the recompense of his hands will be done to him.*

The wicked will get what their own hands have done. This is the other side of verse 10. Galatians 6:7 says, "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." God doesn't have to invent punishments for the wicked. Very often, He simply lets their sin come back on their own heads.

3:12 *My people, its oppressors **are** acting like children, and women have ruled over it. My people, those who guide you are leading **you** astray, and they have swallowed up the way of your paths.*

"My people!" You can hear God's sorrow in these words. Their oppressors are like children, and women rule over them. In that culture, this was a picture of weak and unfit leadership. Some take it to mean that the king's mother and wives had real power over him, which was true in some reigns.

The leaders who should guide the people are leading them astray. They have confused the paths. That is the saddest part of bad leadership. The people who follow it get lost too.

3:13 *The LORD is taking His stand to contend, and is standing to judge peoples.*

Now the scene changes to a courtroom again. The LORD stands up to argue His case and to judge. In a court of that time, the judge stood to give his verdict. God isn't a distant observer of injustice. He rises to deal with it.

3:14 *The LORD will come in judgment with the elders of His people and its leaders: "And you, you have consumed the vineyard; the plunder of the afflicted **is** in your houses.*

God names the defendants: the elders and princes of His people. He accuses them of devouring the vineyard. The vineyard is Israel itself, as chapter 5 will explain. The leaders were supposed to tend it, but they ate it up. The proof is in their own houses, which are full of what they took from the poor.

3:15 *What **is it** to you **that** you crush My people and grind the faces of **the** afflicted?" declares the Lord GOD of armies.*

"Grind the faces of the afflicted?" This is a vivid picture, like grinding grain between two millstones. The rich were crushing the poor for their own gain. God asks them what they think they are doing. He calls the poor "My people." When someone harms the weak, they are dealing with God Himself. Proverbs 14:31 says that whoever oppresses the poor taunts his Maker.

3:16 *And the LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and they walk **with** neck stretched out and ogling **with** eyes, walking and mincing they go, and with their feet they tinkle **their anklets**,*

God now turns to the women of Jerusalem, called "the daughters of Zion." Their sin is pride. They walk with their noses in the air, flirting with their eyes, taking small dainty steps so the bangles on their ankles jingle. Everything about them says, "Look at me."

Isaiah isn't saying that beauty or jewelry is sinful in itself. The problem was the heart behind it, along with the fact that their luxury came while the poor were being crushed (3:14-15).

3:17 *the Lord will make scabby the scalp of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will lay bare their forehead.*

Judgment will strike the very thing they were proud of. Their scalps will be covered with scabs, and their heads will be uncovered, which was a mark of shame. The beauty they trusted will be gone. In the Bible, God often humbles us at the exact point of our pride.

3:18-20 *In that day the Lord will remove the splendor of the anklets and the headbands and the crescent ornaments, the pendants and the bracelets and the veils, the headdresses and the ankle chains and the sashes and the perfume boxes and the charms,*

Isaiah now gives a long list of their fashion items: anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, sashes, perfume boxes and amulets. Some of these were tied to pagan religion. The crescent ornaments were moon symbols, and amulets were charms worn for good luck or protection.

The list itself makes a point. These women owned so many things that it takes a whole paragraph to name them. God sees every piece, and He will take them all away.

3:21-23 *the signet rings and the rings of the nose, the festal robes and the overtunics and the cloaks and the purses, and the mirrors and the linen garments and the turbans and the shawls.*

The list goes on with rings, nose rings, robes, cloaks, purses, mirrors, undergarments and turbans. It is a whole wardrobe of luxury. All of it will be stripped away "in that day," in the coming invasion.

Peter gives the opposite picture for women who follow Christ. He says their beauty shouldn't be merely outward, but "the hidden man of the heart," which is "of great worth before God" (1 Peter 3:3-4). That kind of beauty can never be carried away by an enemy.

3:24 *And it will be **that** instead of perfume **there** will be rottenness, and instead of a belt, a rope, and instead of a work of well-set hair, baldness, and instead of a robe, a girding of sackcloth; branding instead of beauty.*

Five pictures show the great reversal. Perfume turns to the stench of rot. A fine belt becomes a rope, likely the rope used to lead captives away. Styled hair becomes a shaved head. Fine clothes become sackcloth, the rough cloth worn in mourning. Instead of beauty, there is branding, the mark burned onto slaves. Every bit of their pride turns into shame.

3:25 *Your men will fall by the sword, and your might in the battle.*

Here is the cause of their grief. The men of the city will fall by the sword, and the mighty warriors in battle. The women's husbands, sons and brothers will be killed. This is a judgment on pride, but it's also a deep tragedy, and God takes no pleasure in it (Ezekiel 33:11).

3:26 *And her gates will lament and mourn, and she will be emptied; she will sit on the ground.*

The city itself is pictured as a widow. Her gates, where people gathered and where business and judgment took place, will mourn. Jerusalem will sit on the ground, emptied and alone, the way a mourner sat in the dust. The Book of Lamentations opens with the same picture of Jerusalem after the Babylonians destroyed it (Lamentations 1:1).

Chapter 3 Summary

God will take away everything Judah relied on, from bread and water to soldiers, judges and counselors. Children and fools will rule, and society will collapse. The reason is plain: the people sinned openly against the LORD, and their leaders crushed the poor. God promises good to the righteous and judgment to the wicked. The proud women of Jerusalem will lose their finery, their men will fall in battle, and the city will sit on the ground in mourning.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Who is a leader you have looked up to, and why?
2. What does God say He will remove from Jerusalem and Judah? (3:1-3)
3. What happens to a society when its leaders are taken away? (3:4-7)
4. Why did Jerusalem stumble and Judah fall? (3:8-9)
5. What promise does God give to the righteous in the middle of judgment? (3:10-11)
6. What charges does God bring against the elders and princes? (3:13-15)
7. What was the sin of the daughters of Zion, and how would God answer it? (3:16-24)
8. Why do you think open, unashamed sin is so serious to God?
9. Where do you find your sense of worth: in outward things, or in the inner disposition of your heart?

Chapter 4: The Branch of the LORD

Scripture: The Cleansing and Glory of Zion

4:1 And seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our food and we will wear our clothing; only let your name be called over us; take away our reproach."

4:2-6 In that day the branch of the LORD will be for beauty and for glory, and the fruit of the land for majesty and for splendor for the escaped remnant of Israel. And it will be ***that*** the one who remains in Zion and the one who is left in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who is written for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and cleanses the bloodshed of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. And the LORD will create over every site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory ***there will be*** a canopy. And a booth will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from the storm and from the rain.

Chapter 4 Preview

This short chapter moves from the deepest shame to the brightest hope. It begins with the aftermath of the war in chapter 3, when so many men have died that women beg to marry. Then, suddenly, Isaiah sees "the branch of the LORD."

After God washes Jerusalem clean, everyone left in Zion will be called holy. The glory cloud that once led Israel through the wilderness will rest over Mount Zion, sheltering God's people.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *And seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our food and we will wear our clothing; only let your name be called over us; take away our reproach."*

This verse belongs with the end of chapter 3. So many men have fallen in battle (3:25) that seven women take hold of one man. They offer to provide their own food and clothing. All they want is his name, so they won't be shamed as unmarried and childless.

In that culture, a woman without a husband or children was looked down on. The pride of the daughters of Zion has come to this: begging for the protection of a man's name. It is a sad picture of a city emptied by war.

4:2 *In that day the branch of the LORD will be for beauty and for glory, and the fruit of the land for majesty and for splendor for the escaped remnant of Israel.*

"In that day the branch of the LORD will be for beauty and for glory." After so much darkness, a great light breaks through. The word "branch" means a shoot or sprout that grows up from a plant.

Some read this as the crops of the land growing again. I believe it means more than that. Later prophets use "the Branch" as a name for the Messiah. Messiah means "anointed one," the King God promised to send from David's line. Jeremiah 23:5 says God will raise up for David "a righteous Branch," a King who will reign wisely. Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 call Him "the Branch" too. Isaiah 11:1 describes Him as a shoot from the stump of Jesse, David's father.

So I take "the branch of the LORD" to be Jesus Christ. Calling Him the Branch "of the LORD" points to His divine origin, while "the fruit of the land" points to His human birth. He is fully God and fully man. On that day, He will be beautiful and glorious to the survivors of Israel, the remnant who are left. Zechariah 12:10 says they will look on the One they pierced and mourn for Him. Then they will see Him as their pride and their glory.

4:3 *And it will be **that** the one who remains in Zion and the one who is left in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who is written for life in Jerusalem,*

"Everyone who is written for life in Jerusalem." Those left in Zion will be called holy. The idea of being written down for life goes back to Exodus 32:32-33, where Moses speaks of God's book. In Revelation, it is "the book of life" (Revelation 20:15). God knows by name every person who belongs to Him.

These survivors aren't holy because they were tougher or luckier than others. They are holy because God has set them apart and cleansed them, as the next verse explains.

4:4 *when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and cleanses the bloodshed of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.*

Before Jerusalem can be called holy, it must be washed. God will wash away "the filth of the daughters of Zion," the pride and sin we saw in chapter 3, and remove the guilt of the blood shed in the city.

He will do it "by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning." This is the refining fire of 1:25. I believe this looks ahead to the Tribulation, the coming seven years of trouble at the end of this age, which Jeremiah 30:7 calls "a time of distress for Jacob." Zechariah 13:9 says God will bring a remnant of Israel through the fire and refine them like silver. Then they will call on His name, and He will answer.

4:5 *And the LORD will create over every site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory **there will be** a canopy.*

After the cleansing comes the glory. God will create a cloud by day and a flaming fire by night over Mount Zion. This is the same cloud and fire that led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22). It was the visible sign that God Himself was with them.

"Over all the glory there will be a canopy." The word for canopy is the word used for a wedding canopy. God will spread His glory over His people like a bridegroom over His bride. I believe this

describes Jerusalem during the Millennium, when Christ reigns there and God's presence is seen plainly over the city.

4:6 *And a booth will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from the storm and from the rain.*

God's presence will be a shelter. It will give shade from the burning heat of the day and protection from the storm and the rain. The people who once trusted in walls and horses will find their true safety in God.

This is a promise for the future, but it also tells us who God is today. Psalm 91:1 says that whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Whatever storm you are in, He is still a refuge.

Chapter 4 Summary

After war has taken Jerusalem's men, seven women beg one man for his name. Then Isaiah sees a new day, when the Branch of the LORD, the Messiah, will be beautiful and glorious to the survivors of Israel. God will wash Jerusalem clean by a spirit of judgment and burning, and everyone left in Zion will be called holy. The cloud and fire of God's presence will rest over Mount Zion as a shelter for His people.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What does a safe place look like for you when life gets stormy?
2. What does the request of the seven women show about the condition of Jerusalem? (4:1)
3. Who do you believe "the branch of the LORD" is, and why? (4:2)
4. Who will be called holy in Jerusalem? (4:3)
5. How will God cleanse Zion? (4:4)
6. What signs of God's presence will rest over Mount Zion? (4:5)
7. What will God's presence be for His people? (4:6)
8. How does it encourage you that God knows by name everyone who belongs to Him?
9. Is there an area of your life where God is using a hard season to wash you clean?

Chapter 5: The Vineyard

Scripture: The Song of the Vineyard and Six Woes

5:1-7 Let me sing, please, for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard: My well-beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. And He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it ***with*** a choice vine, and built a tower in its midst, and also hewed out a wine vat in it; and He waited ***for it*** to produce grapes, and it produced wild grapes. And now, inhabitant of Jerusalem and man of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What ***is there*** to do still for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, ***when*** I waited ***for it*** to produce grapes, did it produce wild grapes? And now, please, let Me make known to you what I am about to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge, and it will be for consuming; I will break down its wall, and it will be for trampling. And I will make it a waste; it will not be pruned and it will not be hoed, and thorn and thornbush will come up; and I will command the clouds not to send rain on it. For the vineyard of the LORD of armies ***is*** the house of Israel, and the man of Judah ***is*** the plant of His delight; and He waited for justice, and look, bloodshed; for righteousness, and look, an outcry.

5:8-12 Woe ***to*** those who make house touch house; field to field they bring near, until ***there is*** no room, and you are made to dwell by yourselves in the midst of the land! In my ears the LORD of armies ***said***, "Surely many houses will become a desolation, great and fine, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard will produce approximately 6 gallons (one bath), and approximately 6 bushels (a homer) of seed will produce approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah)." Woe ***to*** those who rise early in the morning; strong drink they pursue; who stay late in the twilight; wine inflames them! And lyre and harp, tambourine and flute, and wine are their feast; and the deed of the LORD they do not regard, and the work of His hands they have not seen.

5:13-17 Therefore My people have gone into exile for lack of knowledge; and its glory ***is*** men of hunger, and its multitude ***is*** parched ***with*** thirst. Therefore Sheol has enlarged her appetite and opened her mouth without limit; and her splendor and her multitude and her uproar and the one exulting in her will go down. And mankind has been humbled, and man has been brought low, and the eyes of the haughty will be brought low. And the LORD of armies has been exalted in justice, and the holy God shows Himself holy in righteousness. And lambs will graze as ***in*** their pasture, and sojourners will eat the ruins of the fat ones.

5:18-25 Woe ***to*** those who draw iniquity with cords of emptiness, and sin as ***with*** the rope of the cart; who say, "Let Him hurry, let Him hasten His work, so that we may see; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, so that we may know!" Woe ***to*** those who say of evil "good," and of good "evil"; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe ***to the*** wise in their eyes, and discerning before their faces! Woe ***to*** mighty ones at drinking wine, and men of strength at mixing strong drink; who justify ***the*** wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of ***the*** righteous from him! Therefore, as a tongue of fire eats stubble, and dry grass sinks down in the flame, their root will be like rottenness, and their blossom will go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of armies, and have spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of the LORD has burned against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against it and struck it, and the

mountains have quaked, and their corpses became like offal in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand ***is*** still stretched out.

5:26-30 And He will lift up a banner for the nations from afar, and whistle for it from the end of the earth; and look, quickly, swiftly it will come. ***There is*** none weary and none stumbling among it; none will slumber and none will sleep; and the waistband of its loins has not been opened, and the thong of its sandals has not been torn apart; whose arrows ***are*** sharpened, and all its bows bent; the hooves of its horses are regarded as flint, and its wheels as the whirlwind. Its roaring ***is*** like the lion; it roars like the young lions; and it growls and seizes prey and carries ***it*** off, and ***there is*** no deliverer. And it will growl over it in that day like the growling of the sea; and one will look to the land, and look, darkness, distress; and the light has become dark in its clouds.

Chapter 5 Preview

Isaiah begins this chapter with a love song about a vineyard. The owner did everything he could for it, yet it produced only wild grapes. Then comes the twist: the vineyard is Israel, and the owner is the LORD.

What follows is a series of six woes, each one naming a sin that had spread through the land. The chapter ends with God whistling for a distant nation to come and carry out His judgment.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *Let me sing, please, for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard: My well-beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.*

Isaiah starts out like a singer at a harvest festival. He says he will sing a song for his "beloved" about His vineyard. The listeners would have leaned in, expecting a happy love song.

The vineyard was planted "on a very fertile hill," the best spot anyone could ask for. The beloved here is God, though Isaiah doesn't say so yet. He lets the story draw his listeners in first.

New Testament links: Matthew 21:33 (alluded to); Mark 12:1 (alluded to); Luke 20:9 (alluded to)

5:2 *And He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it **with** a choice vine, and built a tower in its midst, and also hewed out a wine vat in it; and He waited **for it** to produce grapes, and it produced wild grapes.*

The owner did everything a good farmer could do. He dug the ground, cleared out the stones and planted the best vines. He built a watchtower to guard it and cut a wine vat out of the rock, because he fully expected a harvest.

But the vineyard produced only "wild grapes." The Hebrew word describes small, sour, rotten fruit. After all that care, the result was useless.

New Testament links: Matthew 21:33 (alluded to); Mark 12:1 (alluded to); Luke 20:9 (alluded to)

5:3 *And now, inhabitant of Jerusalem and man of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.*

Now the singer becomes the owner, and he speaks directly to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. He asks them to judge between him and his vineyard. This is a clever move. Like the prophet Nathan's story to David (2 Samuel 12:1-7), the listeners are being asked to pass judgment before they realize they are the ones on trial.

5:4 *What **is there** to do still for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, **when** I waited **for it** to produce grapes, did it produce wild grapes?*

"What is there to do still for My vineyard that I have not done in it?" This is the question at the center of the song. God had done everything for Israel. He chose them, brought them out of Egypt, gave them His law and planted them in a good land. The failure wasn't on His side.

When we look at our own lives, we can't blame God for a lack of fruit either. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

5:5 *And now, please, let Me make known to you what I am about to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge, and it will be for consuming; I will break down its wall, and it will be for trampling.*

The owner announces his verdict. He will take away the hedge and break down the wall. Without protection, the vineyard will be eaten by animals and trampled underfoot. For Israel, this meant God would remove His protection and let foreign armies overrun the land. That is exactly what happened under Assyria and later Babylon.

5:6 *And I will make it a waste; it will not be pruned and it will not be hoed, and thorn and thornbush will come up; and I will command the clouds not to send rain on it.*

The vineyard will be left to grow wild with briars and thorns. Then the owner says something no ordinary farmer could say: he will command the clouds not to rain on it. Only God controls the rain. With this line, Isaiah lets his listeners know who the owner really is.

5:7 *For the vineyard of the LORD of armies **is** the house of Israel, and the man of Judah **is** the plant of His delight; and He waited for justice, and look, bloodshed; for righteousness, and look, an outcry.*

"For the vineyard of the LORD of armies is the house of Israel." Now Isaiah says it plainly. God is the owner, Israel is the vineyard, and the men of Judah are "the plant of His delight."

There is a wordplay in Hebrew that is hard to bring into English. God looked for justice (mishpat) but found bloodshed (mispach). He looked for righteousness (tsedaqah) but heard a cry of distress (tseaqah). The words sound almost the same, but the meaning is the opposite. Judah looked right on the surface, but underneath it was rotten.

Jesus picked up this very song in His parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-41). In His story, the tenants even killed the owner's son. Jesus was showing that He is that Son.

5:8 *Woe **to** those who make house touch house; field to field they bring near, until **there is** no room, and you are made to dwell by yourselves in the midst of the land!*

Here is the first of six woes. A "woe" is a cry of grief and a warning of judgment at the same time. This woe is against greedy landowners who keep buying up houses and fields until no one else has room. In Israel, the land was meant to stay with each family as their inheritance (Leviticus 25:23). The rich were pushing the poor off their land. Think of Ahab taking Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21).

5:9 *In my ears the LORD of armies **said**, "Surely many houses will become a desolation, great and fine, without inhabitant.*

God Himself has spoken into Isaiah's ears. The great houses the rich built will stand empty, with no one living in them. They grabbed more and more, but they won't get to enjoy it. That is the way of greed. It always wants more, and in the end it is left with nothing.

5:10 *For ten acres of vineyard will produce approximately 6 gallons (one bath), and approximately 6 bushels (a homer) of seed will produce approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah)."*

The land will also stop producing. Ten acres of vineyard will make only one "bath" of wine, about six gallons. A homer of seed will produce only an ephah of grain, and an ephah is one tenth of a homer (Ezekiel 45:11). In other words, the harvest will be smaller than what was planted. The land they stole won't even feed them.

5:11 *Woe **to** those who rise early in the morning; strong drink they pursue; who stay late in the twilight; wine inflames them!*

The second woe is against people who live for drinking. They start drinking early in the morning and keep going late into the night. Their whole lives revolve around strong drink. Ephesians 5:18 tells believers, "do not be drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit." What fills us is what controls us.

5:12 *And lyre and harp, tambourine and flute, and wine are their feast; and the deed of the LORD they do not regard, and the work of His hands they have not seen.*

Their parties are full of music and wine. There is nothing wrong with music or a good meal. The problem is in the second half of the verse. They never think about what the LORD is doing. They are so busy entertaining themselves that they never notice God's hand at work, or the judgment coming toward them.

5:13 *Therefore My people have gone into exile for lack of knowledge; and its glory **is** men of hunger, and its multitude **is** parched **with** thirst.*

"Therefore My people have gone into exile for lack of knowledge." Because they wouldn't pay attention to God, they will be carried away. Hosea 4:6, from the same time period, says, "My people have been destroyed for lack of the knowledge." Both the honorable men and the common people will suffer hunger and thirst. Those who feasted without God will end up starving.

5:14 *Therefore Sheol has enlarged her appetite and opened her mouth without limit; and her splendor and her multitude and her uproar and the one exulting in her will go down.*

"Sheol has enlarged her appetite." Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave. Isaiah pictures it as a monster opening its mouth wide to swallow Jerusalem's partygoers. All the noise and celebration of the city will go down into it. The people who partied as if there were no tomorrow will find out that death is real.

5:15 *And mankind has been humbled, and man has been brought low, and the eyes of the haughty will be brought low.*

This verse repeats the theme of chapter 2 (2:9, 11, 17). The common man and the important man will both be brought low. The proud will be humbled. God keeps returning to this because pride is at the root of every sin in this chapter.

5:16 *And the LORD of armies has been exalted in justice, and the holy God shows Himself holy in righteousness.*

While man is brought low, the LORD of armies will be lifted up. He will show Himself holy by judging righteously. God's holiness is His purity, and it's also seen in what He does. When He judges sin, the whole world sees that He is holy and that He is right.

5:17 *And lambs will graze as **in** their pasture, and sojourners will eat the ruins of the fat ones.*

After the people are gone, lambs will graze in the ruins as if it were their pasture. Strangers will eat what grows in the waste places of the rich. The great estates that were built by crushing the poor will become a field for sheep. God turns the greedy man's empire into an empty pasture.

5:18 *Woe **to** those who draw iniquity with cords of emptiness, and sin as **with** the rope of the cart;*

The third woe is against people who are so tied to their sin that they drag it behind them, like an ox pulling a cart. They are bound to it with "cords of emptiness." Sin always starts as something we pull on lightly, but before long it is pulling us. Proverbs 5:22 says the wicked one is held "by the cords of his sin."

5:19 *who say, "Let Him hurry, let Him hasten His work, so that we may see; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, so that we may know!"*

These people mock God's warnings. They say, "Let Him hurry up and do it, so we can see it!" They don't believe judgment is really coming, so they dare God to prove it.

People still talk this way today. Peter warned that in the last days mockers will say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4). God's patience isn't weakness. He is giving people time to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

5:20 *Woe **to** those who say of evil "good," and of good "evil"; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*

"Woe to those who say of evil 'good,' and of good 'evil.'" This fourth woe describes people who turn morality upside down. They call darkness light and bitter sweet.

This is more than doing wrong. It is changing the definition of wrong so you can feel good about doing it. I believe we see this all around us today. When a culture starts praising what God calls sin and mocking what God calls good, it is standing under this same woe.

5:21 *Woe **to the** wise in their eyes, and discerning before their faces!*

The fifth woe is against those who are wise in their own eyes. They don't need God's word, because they think they already know better. Proverbs 3:7 says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn aside from evil." True wisdom always starts with humility before God.

5:22 *Woe **to** mighty ones at drinking wine, and men of strength at mixing strong drink;*

The sixth woe returns to drinking, but with a twist. These are "mighty ones" and "men of strength," but only at the wine table. Their courage shows up in how much they can drink. Many of them were leaders and judges, as the next verse shows. They should have been strong for the people. Instead they were strong only at the bar.

5:23 *who justify **the** wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of **the** righteous from him!*

These drunken leaders take bribes to let the guilty go free, and they strip the innocent of their rights. Justice is for sale. When the people who sit in judgment are drunk and greedy, the righteous have nowhere to turn. God had commanded judges never to take a bribe (Exodus 23:8).

5:24 *Therefore, as a tongue of fire eats stubble, and dry grass sinks down in the flame, their root will be like rottenness, and their blossom will go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of armies, and have spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.*

Now comes the sentence. Like fire burning through dry stubble, judgment will sweep through them. Their root will rot, and their blossom will blow away like dust. The reason is given plainly: they rejected the law of the LORD and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Every woe in this chapter comes back to that one choice.

5:25 *Therefore the anger of the LORD has burned against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against it and struck it, and the mountains have quaked, and their corpses became like offal in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand* ***is*** *still stretched out.*

God's anger has burned against His people, and He has already struck them. The mountains shook, and bodies lay in the streets like garbage. Some see this as a past earthquake. Amos 1:1 mentions a great earthquake in the days of Uzziah, and that may be what Isaiah has in mind.

"For all this His anger has not turned back." This refrain will be repeated four more times (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). God's hand is still stretched out. The judgments so far haven't turned the people back, so more is coming.

5:26 *And He will lift up a banner for the nations from afar, and whistle for it from the end of the earth; and look, quickly, swiftly it will come.*

"He will lift up a banner for the nations from afar." A banner is a flag on a pole used to gather troops. God raises it and whistles for a faraway nation to come. He doesn't even have to go to war Himself. He simply calls, and the nations come. In Isaiah's day, this was Assyria. Later it would be Babylon. Deuteronomy 28:49 warned long before that God would bring "a nation from far away."

5:27 ***There is*** *none weary and none stumbling among it; none will slumber and none will sleep; and the waistband of its loins has not been opened, and the thong of its sandals has not been torn apart;*

This army is tireless. No one in it is weary or stumbles. No one sleeps. Every belt is tight, and every sandal strap holds. Assyria's army was the most feared fighting force of its time, and Isaiah describes it as perfectly ready for war.

5:28 *whose arrows* ***are*** *sharpened, and all its bows bent; the hooves of its horses are regarded as flint, and its wheels as the whirlwind.*

Their arrows are sharp, and their bows are already bent for shooting. Their horses' hooves are hard as flint, and their chariot wheels spin like a whirlwind. Assyria was known for its chariots and archers. Judah had trusted in its own horses and chariots (2:7). God sends a better army against them.

5:29 *Its roaring* ***is*** *like the lion; it roars like the young lions; and it growls and seizes prey and carries* ***it*** *off, and* ***there is*** *no deliverer.*

The enemy roars like a lion seizing its prey. It carries off its victim, and no one can rescue it. A lion doesn't negotiate with its prey. Isaiah says that roar will be heard in Judah, and Judah will be the prey. Only God can deliver from a lion like this, and later in the book He does (37:36).

5:30 *And it will growl over it in that day like the growling of the sea; and one will look to the land, and look, darkness, distress; and the light has become dark in its clouds.*

The chapter ends in darkness. The roar of the enemy is like the roar of the sea. If anyone looks over the land, all he will see is distress, and even the light is covered by clouds.

It is a grim ending. But the next chapter opens with Isaiah seeing the LORD on His throne. Even when the whole land is dark, God is still on His throne.

Chapter 5 Summary

Isaiah sings of a vineyard that the owner cared for perfectly, yet it produced only wild grapes. The vineyard is Israel, and the owner is the LORD, who looked for justice and found bloodshed. Six woes follow, against greed, drunkenness, mocking God, calling evil good, pride and corrupt judges. Because the people rejected the law of the LORD, His hand is still stretched out, and He will whistle for a fierce nation from far away to come against them.

I have worked hard on things that did not turn out the way I hoped. I was disappointed and discouraged. Isaiah 5 is God's own song about a vineyard that disappointed Him. He understands that feeling better than anyone.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. Have you ever worked hard on something that didn't turn out the way you hoped? How did you feel?
2. What did the owner do for his vineyard, and what did it produce? (5:1-2)
3. Who is the vineyard, and what did God look for in it? (5:7)
4. What six woes does Isaiah pronounce? (5:8-23)
5. What do the mockers say about God's judgment? (5:18-19)
6. Why is God's anger "not turned back"? (5:24-25)
7. How does Isaiah describe the nation God will call? (5:26-30)
8. Where do you see people who "say of evil 'good,' and of good 'evil'" today? (5:20)
9. If God looked at your life as His vineyard today, what kind of fruit would He find?

Chapter 6: Holy, Holy, Holy

Scripture: Isaiah Sees the LORD and Is Sent

6:1-7 In the year of the death of King Uzziah, and I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and His skirts were filling the temple. Seraphim were standing above Him; six wings, six wings ***belonged*** to each one: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And this one called to this one and said, "Holy, holy, holy ***is*** the LORD of armies; the fullness of all the earth ***is*** His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the house was filled ***with*** smoke. And I said, "Woe to me! For I am destroyed, for I ***am*** a man of unclean lips, and in the midst of a people of unclean lips I dwell; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of armies." And one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand ***was*** a live coal; with tongs he had taken ***it*** from on the altar. And he made ***it*** touch my mouth and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is removed, and your sin is atoned for."

6:8-13 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom will I send, and who will go for Us?" And I said, "Here I ***am***; send me." And He said, "Go, and say to this people, 'Hear indeed, and do not understand; and see indeed, and do not know.' Make the heart of this people fat, and make its ears heavy, and smear over its eyes, lest it see with its eyes, and hear with its ears, and its heart understand, and it return, and ***one*** heal it." And I said, "Until when, O Lord?" And He said, "Until cities lie desolate without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the ground is devastated, a desolation, and the LORD sends mankind far away, and the forsaken ***places*** become many in the midst of the land. And still a tenth ***will be*** in it, and it will return and be for burning, like the terebinth and like the oak, in which, in the felling, a stump ***remains***; the seed of holiness ***is*** its stump."

Chapter 6 Preview

This is the chapter where Isaiah tells us how his ministry began. In the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne, high and lifted up, with seraphim crying out that He is holy.

Faced with God's holiness, Isaiah saw his own sin. God cleansed him and then asked, "Whom will I send?" Isaiah answered, "Here I am; send me." But the message he was sent to carry was a hard one.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *In the year of the death of King Uzziah, and I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and His skirts were filling the temple.*

"In the year of the death of King Uzziah." Isaiah gives us a date, and it matters. Uzziah had ruled Judah for about fifty years, and most scholars date his death to about 740 B.C. He had been a strong king, and the nation had prospered under him. But late in life, his pride drove him into the

temple to burn incense, a job God gave only to the priests, and God struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). He died as a leper, cut off from the house of the LORD.

So the earthly throne was empty, and the future looked uncertain. Assyria was growing stronger every year. At that very moment, Isaiah saw the true King.

"I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." The throne of heaven wasn't empty. God was still in control.

Who did Isaiah see? John answers that for us. After quoting Isaiah 6:10, he writes, "Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory, and he spoke concerning Him" (John 12:41). In context, "Him" is Jesus. I believe Isaiah saw the glory of the Son of God before He came to earth as a man.

The train of His robe filled the temple. A long robe was a sign of royalty and honor. Here, the hem of God's robe alone fills the whole building. If just the edge of His garment fills the temple, how great must He be?

When the leaders we trust fail or pass away, this verse reminds us to look up. Our King is still on His throne.

New Testament links: John 12:41 (alluded to); Revelation 4:2 (alluded to)

6:2 *Seraphim were standing above Him; six wings, six wings **belonged** to each one: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*

Above the Lord stood the seraphim. This is the only place in the Bible where they are called by this name. "Seraphim" comes from a Hebrew word that means "burning ones." They blaze with the holiness of the God they serve.

Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces, because even these perfect, sinless beings can't look straight at God's glory. With two they covered their feet, a sign of humility in His presence. With two they flew, ready to do whatever He commands.

I believe these are the same kind of beings John saw around the throne in Revelation 4:8, each with six wings, never ceasing to call out "Holy, holy, holy." What a lesson for us. If the seraphim cover their faces before God, how much more should we come before Him with reverence?

New Testament links: Revelation 4:8 (alluded to); John 12:41 (alluded to)

6:3 *And this one called to this one and said, "Holy, holy, holy **is** the LORD of armies; the fullness of all the earth **is** His glory."*

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of armies." The seraphim call out to one another, over and over. In Hebrew, repeating a word is the way to make it as strong as possible. Saying it twice is emphatic. Saying it three times is the highest degree there is. This is the only attribute of God that the Bible raises to the third degree. It never says God is "love, love, love" or "mercy, mercy, mercy." It says He is holy, holy, holy.

To be holy means to be set apart, completely separate from all sin and far above everything He made. Every other attribute of God is holy. His love is holy love, and His justice is holy justice.

Many Christians also see in the threefold "holy" a hint of the Trinity, one God in three persons. Notice the "Us" in verse 8. I think that is a fair reading, as long as we remember the main point is God's absolute holiness.

"The fullness of all the earth is His glory." God's glory isn't only in the temple. It fills the whole world, even when people refuse to see it. One day it will be seen by all (Habakkuk 2:14).

New Testament links: Revelation 4:8 (alluded to)

6:4 *And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the house was filled **with** smoke.*

The voices of the seraphim were so powerful that the foundations of the doorposts shook. Then the temple filled with smoke. In the Bible, smoke and cloud often surround the presence of God, as at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18) and when Solomon dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). Revelation 15:8 says the heavenly temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God. The smoke both reveals God's presence and hides His full glory, because no sinner could survive seeing it all.

New Testament links: Revelation 15:8 (alluded to)

6:5 *And I said, "Woe to me! For I am destroyed, for I **am** a man of unclean lips, and in the midst of a people of unclean lips I dwell; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of armies."*

"Woe to me! For I am destroyed." In chapter 5, Isaiah pronounced six woes on the people. Now he pronounces one on himself. When he saw God as He really is, he finally saw himself as he really was.

Notice what Isaiah focused on: his lips. He was a prophet, and his mouth was the tool God would use. Yet in the presence of the Holy One, he realized that even his words were unclean. He also confessed that he lived among a people of unclean lips. He didn't set himself above the nation he had been preaching to.

The reason for his cry is in the last line: "My eyes have seen the King, the LORD of armies." Seeing God's holiness is what shows us our sin. Peter had the same reaction when he saw Jesus' power, falling down and saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord" (Luke 5:8). If we never feel our sin, it may be because we have never really looked at God.

6:6 *And one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand **was** a live coal; with tongs he had taken **it** from on the altar.*

Isaiah didn't have to stay in his ruin. One of the seraphim flew to him with a burning coal taken from the altar with tongs. The coal was so holy that even the seraph wouldn't hold it in his hand.

The altar is the place of sacrifice. That is where atonement was made for sin. Atonement means covering sin and making peace between God and man. The cleansing Isaiah needed came from

the place where a sacrifice had already been offered. That is a picture of the cross. Our cleansing comes from the sacrifice Jesus made in our place.

6:7 *And he made **it** touch my mouth and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is removed, and your sin is atoned for."*

"Your iniquity is removed, and your sin is atoned for." The seraph touched Isaiah's lips, the very place he had confessed was unclean. God met him exactly at the point of his need.

Notice the order. Isaiah confessed first, and then God cleansed him. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Isaiah did nothing to earn this. He could only receive it. The cleansing was painful, but it was complete. His guilt was gone.

6:8 *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom will I send, and who will go for Us?" And I said, "Here I **am**; send me."*

"Whom will I send, and who will go for Us?" Now that Isaiah was cleansed, he could hear God's call. God speaks as "Us." I believe this points to the Trinity, the same way God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image" in Genesis 1:26. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, sending one messenger.

"Here I am; send me." Isaiah didn't ask where he was going or what the job would cost. He had seen the King, and he had been forgiven. That was enough. A heart that has been forgiven much is ready to go anywhere.

This is the right order for every believer. First we see God, then we see our sin, then we receive His cleansing, and then we are ready to serve. Romans 10:14-15 asks how anyone can hear the good news unless someone is sent. God is still asking the same question today.

6:9 *And He said, "Go, and say to this people, 'Hear indeed, and do not understand; and see indeed, and do not know.'*

God's answer is surprising. Isaiah is to tell the people to keep listening but never understand, and to keep looking but never see. This isn't a message most preachers would want.

God isn't saying He wants the people to be lost. He is telling Isaiah ahead of time what will happen. The people had already hardened their hearts. Isaiah's preaching would make the truth clearer, and that would make their refusal plainer and harder.

Jesus quoted this verse to explain why He taught in parables (Matthew 13:13-15). Paul quoted it at the end of Acts, when the Jewish leaders in Rome rejected his message (Acts 28:25-27).

New Testament links: Matthew 13:14-15 (quoted); Luke 8:10 (quoted); Mark 4:12 (quoted); John 12:40 (quoted); Acts 28:26-27 (quoted)

6:10 *Make the heart of this people fat, and make its ears heavy, and smear over its eyes, lest it see with its eyes, and hear with its ears, and its heart understand, and it return, and* ***one*** *heal it."*

"Make the heart of this people fat." That means to make the heart dull, so that nothing gets through. Their ears would grow heavy and their eyes would close. God's word is like the sun. The same sun that melts wax hardens clay. When people keep rejecting the truth, the truth itself begins to harden them.

This is a sobering verse. It tells us there can come a point when God gives people over to what they keep choosing (Romans 1:24). It is dangerous to keep hearing God's word and keep saying no.

John 12:39-41 quotes this verse and says it explains why many in Israel didn't believe in Jesus, even after His miracles. John adds that Isaiah said these things "when he saw His glory," the glory of Jesus. John credits this verse to Isaiah, just as he credits Isaiah 53:1 to him in the same passage. I'm content to take John's word for it.

Even so, the hardening isn't final for Israel as a nation. Paul says in Romans 11:25-26 that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and then all Israel will be saved.

New Testament links: Matthew 13:14-15 (quoted); Mark 4:12 (quoted); John 12:40 (quoted); Acts 28:26-27 (quoted)

6:11 *And I said, "Until when, O Lord?" And He said, "Until cities lie desolate without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the ground is devastated, a desolation,*

"Until when, O Lord?" Isaiah asks the natural question. How long will he have to preach to people who won't listen?

God's answer is hard. Until the cities are ruined and empty, the houses have no people, and the land is completely desolate. The hardening would last until judgment had run its course. Isaiah lived to see Assyria destroy the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and lay waste much of Judah in 701 B.C. More than a century after his call, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem itself in 586 B.C.

Like Isaiah, we may preach to people who don't seem to listen. God doesn't call us to be successful. He calls us to be faithful.

6:12 *and the LORD sends mankind far away, and the forsaken* ***places*** *become many in the midst of the land.*

The LORD will send the people far away, and the land will be left empty. This is exile. The northern kingdom was carried off by Assyria, and Judah was later taken to Babylon. The land God gave them would sit forsaken. Disobedience had led them away from the very place God had planted them.

6:13 *And still a tenth **will be** in it, and it will return and be for burning, like the terebinth and like the oak, in which, in the felling, a stump **remains**; the seed of holiness **is** its stump."*

Even if only a tenth of the people remain, that tenth will be burned again. The judgment will be thorough. Isaiah compares the nation to a great tree that has been cut down. All that is left is a stump.

"The seed of holiness is its stump." This is the hope at the end of a hard chapter. A stump may look dead, but life is still in its roots, and it can sprout again. God will keep a holy remnant, and out of it new life will grow.

This picture sets up Isaiah 11:1, where "a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse." The Messiah Himself will come out of that stump. God's judgment is never His last word for Israel. He always keeps a remnant (Romans 11:5), and from that remnant He brings salvation.

Chapter 6 Summary

In the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord on a high throne, the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of armies." Isaiah cried out that he was ruined and unclean, and a seraph touched his lips with a coal from the altar, taking away his sin. When God asked whom He should send, Isaiah said, "Here I am; send me." He was sent to a people who wouldn't listen, until judgment came, but a holy seed would remain like a stump.

The Seraphim

Seraphim (6:2): Heavenly beings who stand above the throne of God. Their name means "burning ones." Each has six wings, two to cover the face, two to cover the feet and two to fly. They cry "Holy, holy, holy" to one another. This is the only chapter in the Bible that calls them seraphim.

The Living Creatures (Revelation 4:6-8): John saw four living creatures around God's throne, each with six wings, calling out day and night, "Holy, holy, holy." As in my Revelation study, I take these to be the same kind of beings Isaiah saw.

Cherubim (Genesis 3:24; Ezekiel 10): A different order of angels, often linked with guarding God's holiness. Ezekiel describes them with four faces and four wings.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. Think of a time you met someone important or famous. How did you feel and act?
2. Why is it significant that Isaiah saw the Lord in the year King Uzziah died? (6:1)
3. What did the seraphim do, and what did they say? (6:2-3)
4. How did Isaiah react when he saw the King, the LORD of armies? (6:5)
5. How was Isaiah cleansed, and what does the coal from the altar point to? (6:6-7)
6. What was Isaiah's response to God's call, and what message was he given? (6:8-10)
7. What hope does God give at the end of the chapter? (6:13)

8. How does seeing God's holiness change the way we see our own sin?

9. God is still asking, "Whom will I send?" Where might He be asking you to say, "Here I am; send me"?

Chapter 7: Immanuel

Scripture: The Sign of Immanuel

7:1-9 And it was in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, ***that*** Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up ***to*** Jerusalem for battle against it, and he was not able to fight against it. And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria has settled on Ephraim." And his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before a wind. And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, please, to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, at the highway of the launderer's field, and say to him, 'Be careful and be quiet; do not be afraid, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, at the heat of the anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria has planned evil against you, ***with*** Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us break it open for ourselves, and let us make a king reign in its midst, the son of Tabeel," thus says the Lord GOD: It will not stand, and it will not happen. For the head of Syria ***is*** Damascus, and the head of Damascus ***is*** Rezin; and within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from ***being*** a people. And the head of Ephraim ***is*** Samaria, and the head of Samaria ***is*** the son of Remaliah. If you do not believe, surely you will not be established.'"

7:10-16 And the LORD again spoke to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make ***it*** deep ***as*** Sheol or make ***it*** high above." And Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not test the LORD." And he said, "Hear, please, house of David! ***Is it too*** little for you to weary men, that you will weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Look, the virgin ***is*** pregnant and bearing a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He will eat, when He knows to reject the evil and to choose the good. For before the boy knows to reject the evil and to choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.

7:17-25 The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father days that have not come since the day Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria. And it will be in that day ***that*** the LORD will whistle for the fly which ***is*** at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee which ***is*** in the land of Assyria. And they will come and settle, all of them, in the wadis of the cliffs and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes and on all the watering places. In that day the Lord will shave with the razor hired beyond the River, with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it will sweep away the beard also. And it will be in that day ***that*** a man will keep alive a heifer of the herd and two sheep. And it will be ***that*** from the abundance of the producing of milk he will eat curds; for curds and honey everyone who is left in the midst of the land will eat. And it will be in that day ***that*** every place where there were a thousand vines, at a thousand ***pieces of*** silver, will become thorn and thornbush. With arrows and with bow ***one*** will go there, for all the land will be thorn and thornbush. And all the hills which used to be hoed with the hoe, you will not go there ***for*** fear of thorn and thornbush; and it will become a place for sending out oxen and a trampling place of sheep."

Chapter 7 Preview

Two kings have joined forces to attack Jerusalem, and King Ahaz is shaking with fear. God sends Isaiah to tell him to stay calm and trust the LORD. God even offers Ahaz a sign, any sign he wants, but Ahaz refuses.

So God gives a sign of His own choosing: a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and His name will be Immanuel, "God with us." Then Isaiah warns that the king Ahaz is leaning on, the king of Assyria, will one day sweep over Judah itself.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *And it was in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah,* ***that*** *Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up* ***to*** *Jerusalem for battle against it, and he was not able to fight against it.*

Here the book shifts from poetry to history. Ahaz, grandson of Uzziah, is now king of Judah. Two neighboring kings have teamed up against him. Rezin was king of Syria (Aram), with its capital at Damascus. Pekah was king of Israel, the northern kingdom.

Their plan was to force Judah to join them in standing against Assyria. When Ahaz refused, they marched on Jerusalem, about 734 B.C. Isaiah tells us at the start how it ended: "he was not able to fight against it." The story is also told in 2 Kings 16:5 and 2 Chronicles 28.

7:2 *And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria has settled on Ephraim." And his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before a wind.*

"Syria has settled on Ephraim." Ephraim was the largest tribe of the northern kingdom, so the name was often used for Israel as a whole. The news that Syria and Israel had joined forces terrified Ahaz and his people. Their hearts shook like trees in the wind.

Fear is a normal human reaction to danger. What matters is what we do with it. Ahaz was about to be given a choice between trusting God and trusting in man.

7:3 *And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, please, to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, at the highway of the launderer's field,*

God sends Isaiah to meet Ahaz, and to bring along his son Shear-jashub. That name means "a remnant will return." Even the boy's name was a message. Judah would face judgment, but God would keep a remnant.

The meeting place was the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the road to the Launderer's Field. Ahaz was probably inspecting the city's water supply to get ready for a siege. Years later, an Assyrian official called the Rabshakeh would stand at this same spot and mock Hezekiah's trust in God (36:2).

7:4 *and say to him, 'Be careful and be quiet; do not be afraid, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, at the heat of the anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.*

"Be careful and be quiet; do not be afraid." God's message to Ahaz was simple: stay calm and trust Me. The two kings he feared so much were only "two tails of smoking firebrands." They were like the burned-out ends of sticks, still smoking but almost gone. They looked dangerous, but their fire was nearly out. Within a few years both would be dead (2 Kings 15:30; 16:9).

So many of the things we fear are just like that. They smoke and look threatening, but God knows how little fire is left in them.

7:5-6 *Because Syria has planned evil against you, **with** Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us break it open for ourselves, and let us make a king reign in its midst, the son of Tabeel,"*

God tells Ahaz exactly what the two kings were planning. They wanted to invade Judah, break through its walls and put their own man on the throne, "the son of Tabeel." We don't know who he was, but the plan is clear. They meant to remove David's family from the throne of Judah.

That made this more than a political threat. God had promised David that his line would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16). Satan has always tried to wipe out the line through which the Messiah would come. This attack was one more attempt.

7:7 *thus says the Lord GOD: It will not stand, and it will not happen.*

"It will not stand, and it will not happen." A few short words from the Lord GOD settle the matter. The kings had made their plans, but God's plan was the one that would stand. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in the heart of a man, and the counsel of the LORD, it will stand."

7:8 *For the head of Syria **is** Damascus, and the head of Damascus **is** Rezin; and within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from **being** a people.*

God puts these kings in their place. The head of Syria is only Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. In other words, they are just men. They aren't God.

Then comes a prophecy: within sixty-five years, Ephraim would be shattered so it would no longer be a people. Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., only about twelve years later. Assyria then brought in foreigners to live in the land (2 Kings 17:24), and later Assyrian kings kept doing so (Ezra 4:2). Many believe the sixty-five years run to that final resettlement, when the northern tribes no longer existed as a separate nation.

7:9 *And the head of Ephraim **is** Samaria, and the head of Samaria **is** the son of Remaliah. If you do not believe, surely you will not be established.'"*

The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Pekah. Verse 1 gives his full name, but in God's message to Ahaz he is just "the son of Remaliah." God doesn't even bother to name him. That is how small this threat is in God's eyes.

"If you do not believe, surely you will not be established." This is the heart of the chapter. In Hebrew there is a play on words: if you won't stand firm in faith, you won't be made to stand firm. Faith in God is the only firm ground there is. Ahaz had to decide whether he would trust the LORD or not. 2 Chronicles 20:20 says the same thing: "Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established."

7:10 *And the LORD again spoke to Ahaz, saying,*

God speaks to Ahaz again. This is grace. Ahaz hadn't responded in faith the first time, but God didn't give up on him. He came back with another offer.

7:11 *"Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make **it** deep **as** Sheol or make **it** high above."*

God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign, and He sets no limits. It can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven. God was willing to do any miracle Ahaz asked for to prove that He could be trusted. It is hard to think of a more generous offer anywhere in Scripture.

7:12 *And Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not test the LORD."*

"I will not ask, and I will not test the LORD." This sounds very spiritual. Deuteronomy 6:16 does say not to put the LORD to the test.

But this was false humility. God Himself had told Ahaz to ask. His refusal was disobedience dressed up in religious words, not faith. The truth was that Ahaz had already made up his mind. 2 Kings 16:7-8 tells us he sent silver and gold from the temple to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, begging for help. He didn't want a sign, because a sign would have forced him to trust God instead of Assyria.

7:13 *And he said, "Hear, please, house of David! **Is it too** little for you to weary men, that you will weary my God also?*

Isaiah now speaks to "the house of David," not to Ahaz alone. In Hebrew the "you" in verses 13 and 14 is plural. The sign that follows is for David's whole royal line, not only for this one faithless king.

Isaiah asks whether it isn't enough that they try the patience of men. Now they are trying the patience of God. Notice that Isaiah says "my God." In verse 11 it was "the LORD your God." Ahaz had pushed God away.

7:14 *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Look, the virgin **is** pregnant and bearing a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign." Since Ahaz wouldn't choose a sign, God chose one Himself. It was as deep and as high as any sign could be.

"Look, the virgin is pregnant and bearing a son." The Hebrew word here is almah. It means a young woman of marriageable age, and in the Bible it is never clearly used of a married woman. When Jewish scholars translated Isaiah into Greek before the time of Jesus, they chose parthenos, the Greek word for virgin. A young woman having a baby the normal way would be no sign at all. A virgin conceiving would be a true miracle.

"And she will call His name Immanuel." Immanuel means "God with us." This child wouldn't only be sent by God. He would be God, come to be with His people. Isaiah 9:6 calls the same child "Mighty God."

Matthew settles who this is. Telling of Jesus' birth to the virgin Mary, he quotes this verse and says it was fulfilled (Matthew 1:22-23). Bible teachers disagree on whether there was also a child in Ahaz's own day. Here is how I read it. The sign was given to the house of David and fulfilled in Jesus, born of a virgin, the Son of David. Verses 15 and 16 then use a child's early years as a measure of time for what would happen to Ahaz's enemies.

God didn't stay far away from our sin and trouble. He came to be with us, and He promises to be with us always (Matthew 28:20).

New Testament links: Matthew 1:23 (quoted); Luke 1:27 (fulfilled); Luke 1:31 (fulfilled); Luke 2:7 (fulfilled)

7:15 *Curds and honey He will eat, when He knows to reject the evil and to choose the good.*

"Curds and honey he will eat." Curds were a kind of thick yogurt or butter. Curds and honey were simple food. Verse 22 shows they would be what people ate when the land was stripped and farming had stopped.

So this child would grow up in humble, hard times. Jesus was laid in a manger, not a palace bed, and He grew up in a land under foreign rule. He came in lowliness, sharing the hardships of His people.

7:16 *For before the boy knows to reject the evil and to choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.*

"Before the boy knows to reject the evil and to choose the good." Isaiah gives a short time frame. Before a child born now would be old enough to know right from wrong, the lands of the two kings Ahaz feared would be deserted. Here is how I put verses 15 and 16 together. The child of the sign is Jesus, and the early years of a child are used as a yardstick for how soon Ahaz's enemies would fall.

That is what happened. In 732 B.C., about two or three years later, Tiglath-pileser captured Damascus and killed Rezin (2 Kings 16:9). Pekah was murdered about the same time (2 Kings 15:30). The two kings Ahaz trembled over were gone within a few years, just as God said.

7:17 *The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father days that have not come since the day Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.*

But there was bad news too. Because Ahaz chose Assyria over God, God would bring the king of Assyria on Judah itself. These would be days unlike any since the kingdom split in two, after the death of Solomon (1 Kings 12).

The very thing Ahaz trusted would turn on him. That is often how it goes. What we lean on instead of God can become the thing that crushes us.

7:18 *And it will be in that day **that** the LORD will whistle for the fly which **is** at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee which **is** in the land of Assyria.*

God will whistle, as He did in 5:26, and two great powers will come like insects. The fly is Egypt, from the far branches of the Nile. The bee is Assyria. Judah would be caught between these two empires for years to come. Ahaz thought he was playing politics with world powers, but God was the One calling them.

7:19 *And they will come and settle, all of them, in the wadis of the cliffs and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes and on all the watering places.*

The flies and bees will settle everywhere: in the steep ravines, on the cliffs, on the thorn bushes and at the watering holes. There will be no place in the land they don't reach. An invading army covers a country the way a swarm covers a field.

7:20 *In that day the Lord will shave with the razor hired beyond the River, with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it will sweep away the beard also.*

"The Lord will shave with the razor." The razor is the king of Assyria, "hired" from beyond the Euphrates River. There is irony here. Ahaz paid Assyria with silver and gold to help him (2 Kings 16:8). God says that hired razor will shave Judah itself.

Shaving the head, the body and the beard was a terrible humiliation in that culture. When David's servants had half their beards shaved off, they were too ashamed to come home (2 Samuel 10:4-5). Judah would be stripped and shamed by the very ally it paid for.

7:21-22 *And it will be in that day **that** a man will keep alive a heifer of the herd and two sheep. And it will be **that** from the abundance of the producing of milk he will eat curds; for curds and honey everyone who is left in the midst of the land will eat.*

After the invasion, a man might be left with only one young cow and two sheep. Yet with so few people left, there would be plenty of milk, and the survivors would eat curds and honey. This isn't

a picture of plenty. It is a picture of a land where the fields have gone wild and only a few people remain, living off what grows by itself.

7:23 *And it will be in that day **that** every place where there were a thousand vines, at a thousand **pieces of** silver, will become thorn and thornbush.*

Vineyards that once held a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, would turn into briars and thorns. The land that God had blessed would go back to wilderness. This echoes the song of the vineyard in 5:6, where God said briars and thorns would come up.

7:24 *With arrows and with bow **one** will go there, for all the land will be thorn and thornbush.*

People would come to these places only with bows and arrows, to hunt wild animals. The farmland would become hunting ground. Where families once worked their fields, there would be only thorns and wild game.

7:25 *And all the hills which used to be hoed with the hoe, you will not go there **for** fear of thorn and thornbush; and it will become a place for sending out oxen and a trampling place of sheep."*

Even the hills that had been carefully worked with a hoe would be left to thorns. No one would want to go there. They would only be good for cattle and sheep to roam.

The chapter ends sadly because Ahaz chose fear and Assyria over faith in God. But the sign of Immanuel stands right in the middle of it. Even when kings fail, God keeps His promise to send the Son of David who is God with us.

Chapter 7 Summary

Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel march against Jerusalem, and King Ahaz is terrified. God sends Isaiah to tell him to be calm, because these kings are only smoldering stubs, and their plan won't stand. God offers Ahaz any sign he wants, but Ahaz refuses. So God gives His own sign: a virgin will bear a son named Immanuel, fulfilled in Jesus. The two kings will soon be gone, but Assyria, the power Ahaz trusted, will sweep over Judah.

The People and Places of Isaiah 7

Ahaz (7:1): King of Judah, son of Jotham. He didn't trust the LORD and paid Assyria to rescue him (2 Kings 16:7-8).

Rezin (7:1): King of Syria, whose capital was Damascus. He was killed by the Assyrians when Damascus fell about 732 B.C. (2 Kings 16:9).

Pekah son of Remaliah (7:1): King of Israel, the northern kingdom. He was killed by Hoshea, who took his throne (2 Kings 15:30).

Ephraim (7:2): The largest northern tribe, used here as a name for the whole northern kingdom of Israel. Its capital was Samaria.

Shear-jashub (7:3): Isaiah's son. His name means "a remnant will return."

Assyria (7:17): The great empire of that time, centered on the Tigris River in what is now northern Iraq. Its king in these years was Tiglath-pileser.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What is something that has made your heart shake "as the trees of the forest shake before a wind"?

2. Who was coming against Jerusalem, and how did Ahaz and his people react? (7:1-2)

3. What did God tell Ahaz about the two kings he feared? (7:4-9)

4. What does "If you do not believe, surely you will not be established" mean for Ahaz? (7:9)

5. Why do you think Ahaz refused to ask for a sign? (7:10-12)

6. What sign did God give, and how does Matthew show it was fulfilled? (7:14; Matthew 1:22-23)

7. What would the king of Assyria do to Judah? (7:17-20)

8. What does the name Immanuel, "God with us," mean to you personally?

9. Is there something you are leaning on instead of trusting God? What would it look like to trust Him with it this week?

Chapter 8: God With Us

Scripture: The Flood from Assyria and the Stone of Stumbling

8:1-4 And the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself a large tablet, and write on it with the stylus of a man, 'For Maher-shalal-hash-baz.'" And I will call reliable witnesses to testify for me, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I drew near to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the boy knows to call out, 'My father' and 'My mother,' ***one*** will carry off the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria before the king of Assyria."

8:5-10 And the LORD again spoke to me further, saying, "Because this people has rejected the waters of the Shiloah that go gently, and ***is*** rejoicing with Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, look, the Lord is about to bring up on them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks. And it will sweep on into Judah; it will overflow and pass through; it will reach to the neck; and the spreading of its wings will be the fullness of the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. Be broken, peoples, and be shattered; and give ear, all distant places of ***the*** earth; gird yourselves and be shattered; gird yourselves and be shattered. Plan a plan, and it will be frustrated; speak a word, and it will not stand; for God ***is*** with us."

8:11-15 For thus the LORD said to me with strength of the hand, and He instructed me against walking in the way of this people, saying, "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, and do not be in dread. The LORD of armies, Him you shall regard as holy, and He ***shall be*** your fear, and He your dread. And He will become a sanctuary, and a stone of striking and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many will stumble over them, and they will fall and be broken, and be ensnared and be captured."

8:16-22 Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope for Him. Look, I and the children whom the LORD has given me ***are*** for signs and for portents in Israel from the LORD of armies, who dwells on Mount Zion. And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult its God? On behalf of the living ***should they consult*** the dead? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, ***it is*** because ***there is*** no dawn for it. And he will pass through it, hard pressed and hungry; and it will be ***that*** when he is hungry, he will be enraged and curse by his king and by his God, and turn upward. And he will look to the earth, and look, distress and darkness, gloom of anguish; and ***he will be*** thrust into thick darkness.

Chapter 8 Preview

Isaiah's second son is given a strange name that becomes a prophecy: Damascus and Samaria are about to be plundered by Assyria. Because the people rejected God's gentle care, the Assyrian flood will sweep into Judah too, up to the neck.

God tells Isaiah not to fear what the people fear, but to fear the LORD alone. To those who trust Him, He is a sanctuary. To those who don't, He is a stone to stumble over. Isaiah closes by calling the people back to God's word.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *And the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself a large tablet, and write on it with the stylus of a man, 'For Maher-shalal-hash-baz.'"*

God tells Isaiah to take a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters, the kind anyone could read. The message was "The spoil speeds, the prey hastens." In Hebrew that is the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. It was meant to be a public sign, like a billboard, so that no one could say later that they hadn't been warned.

8:2 *And I will call reliable witnesses to testify for me, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.*

Isaiah had two reliable witnesses confirm the writing: Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah. Under the Law, a matter was confirmed by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). When the prophecy came true, these men could testify that Isaiah wrote it beforehand.

This Uriah is probably the priest who later built a copy of a pagan altar for Ahaz (2 Kings 16:10-11). If so, even a witness who sided with the king would have to admit Isaiah's word was written down first.

8:3 *And I drew near to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz;*

"And I drew near to the prophetess." The prophetess is Isaiah's wife. She may have been called this because she was a prophet herself, or simply because she was married to one. She conceived and had a son, and God told Isaiah to give him the name written on the tablet. Every time someone called the boy, they would hear God's warning.

8:4 *for before the boy knows to call out, 'My father' and 'My mother,' **one** will carry off the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria before the king of Assyria."*

Before this baby is old enough to call out "My father" and "My mother," Assyria will carry off the riches of Damascus and Samaria. That would be within a year or two. It came true. Tiglath-pileser took Damascus in 732 B.C. and stripped much of Israel's territory at the same time (2 Kings 15:29; 16:9).

This timeline matches the one in 7:16. Some Bible teachers see this child as the near sign of chapter 7. I believe the Immanuel promise is fulfilled in Jesus, while Isaiah's son served as a sign of the near events of that day (8:18).

8:5 *And the LORD again spoke to me further, saying,*

The LORD speaks to Isaiah again. A new message begins, and this time it is for Judah. Chapter 7 dealt with Ahaz's choice. This section shows what that choice will cost the people.

8:6 *"Because this people has rejected the waters of the Shiloah that go gently, and **is** rejoicing with Rezin and the son of Remaliah,*

"The waters of the Shiloah that go gently." Shiloah was a small, quiet channel that carried water from the Gihon spring to the city. The pool of Siloam in John 9:7 takes its name from it. It was a picture of God's quiet, steady care for Jerusalem and the line of David.

The people despised it. It didn't look impressive next to the power of the nations. Some of them were even pleased with Rezin and Pekah. God's care often looks small to people who want something loud and powerful.

8:7 *therefore, look, the Lord is about to bring up on them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks.*

Since they rejected the gentle stream, God will send a flood. The "waters of the River, mighty and many," meaning the Euphrates, the great river of Mesopotamia, stand for the king of Assyria and all his army. The river will rise over all its channels and spill over its banks. Ahaz wanted Assyria's power. He was going to get far more of it than he wanted.

8:8 *And it will sweep on into Judah; it will overflow and pass through; it will reach to the neck; and the spreading of its wings will be the fullness of the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.*

The flood wouldn't stop at Israel and Syria (Aram). It would sweep into Judah, and "it will reach to the neck." That is a careful picture. The head stays above the water. Assyria would cover almost all of Judah, but Jerusalem, the head, wouldn't be taken. That is exactly what happened in 701 B.C., when Sennacherib took the fortified cities of Judah but couldn't take Jerusalem (36:1; 37:33-36).

"O Immanuel." The land belongs to Immanuel. Even when the enemy covers it like wings spread over it, Judah is still His land. God hasn't forgotten His promise.

8:9 *Be broken, peoples, and be shattered; and give ear, all distant places of **the** earth; gird yourselves and be shattered; gird yourselves and be shattered.*

Now Isaiah turns and speaks to the nations. He dares them to make an uproar, to arm themselves and prepare for war. It will do them no good. They will be shattered. He repeats it twice for emphasis. No nation that comes against God's people and God's plan will succeed in the end.

8:10 *Plan a plan, and it will be frustrated; speak a word, and it will not stand; for God **is** with us."*

"For God is with us." In Hebrew, this is the word Immanuel. The nations can make their plans and give their speeches, but none of it will stand, for one reason. God is with His people.

This is a promise we can hold on to as well. Paul asks, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31). The world's plans against God's people never get the last word.

8:11 *For thus the LORD said to me with strength of the hand, and He instructed me against walking in the way of this people, saying,*

God spoke to Isaiah "with strength of the hand," like a strong hand gripping him. He warned the prophet not to walk in the way of this people. It is easy to get swept along with the crowd, especially when everyone around you is afraid. Isaiah needed God's firm hand to keep him from it, and so do we.

8:12 *"Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, and do not be in dread.*

"Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy." Everyone in Jerusalem was talking about plots and alliances. Who was working with whom? Who was going to betray whom? God told Isaiah not to get caught up in it, and not to fear what everyone else feared.

Peter quotes this verse to believers facing persecution: "do not fear their fear, nor be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14). Fear spreads quickly. Faith has to choose to stand apart from it.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 3:14-15 (quoted)

8:13 *The LORD of armies, Him you shall regard as holy, and He* ***shall be*** *your fear, and He your dread.*

"The LORD of armies, Him you shall regard as holy." Here is the cure for fear. Instead of fearing men, fear God. To regard Him as holy means to set Him apart in your heart as the One who really matters.

Peter goes on to say, "but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (1 Peter 3:15). Peter takes what Isaiah said about the LORD of armies and applies it to believers under pressure. When we fear God, we won't need to fear anything else.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 3:14-15 (quoted)

8:14 *And He will become a sanctuary, and a stone of striking and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

To those who fear Him, God will be a sanctuary, a holy place of safety. But to both houses of Israel, the north and the south, He will be a stone they trip over and a rock that makes them fall. The same God is a refuge to one person and a stumbling block to another. It all depends on how we respond to Him.

The New Testament applies this verse to Jesus. Paul joins it with Isaiah 28:16 in Romans 9:33 to explain why many in Israel stumbled over Christ. Peter does the same in 1 Peter 2:8. Simeon said of the baby Jesus that He was "appointed for the falling and rising up of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34). Jesus is either the rock we stand on or the rock we stumble over.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:8 (quoted); Romans 9:32-33 (quoted); Matthew 21:44 (alluded to); Luke 20:18 (alluded to)

8:15 *And many will stumble over them, and they will fall and be broken, and be ensnared and be captured."*

Many will stumble over Him, fall, be broken, and be caught like an animal in a trap. Isaiah piles up these words to show how complete their ruin will be. God isn't setting a trap for innocent people here; they're tripping over the One they refused to trust. Unbelief always ends in a fall.

New Testament links: Matthew 21:44 (alluded to); Luke 20:18 (alluded to)

8:16 *Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples.*

"Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples." Isaiah's message has been rejected by the nation, so it is to be wrapped up and kept safe among his followers. In those days, an important document was tied up and sealed to protect it until the day it was needed.

This is the first time we hear that Isaiah had disciples. While the nation turned away, a faithful few gathered around God's word. That remnant would keep the message until it was fulfilled.

8:17 *And I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope for Him.*

"I will wait for the LORD." God is hiding His face from the house of Jacob. That means He has turned away from them in judgment for a time. Isaiah doesn't give up. He will wait, and he will look eagerly for God.

Waiting on God is one of the great themes of Isaiah (40:31). It isn't sitting around doing nothing. It is trusting God's timing when we can't see what He is doing. Hebrews 2:13 quotes the Greek version of this verse, "I will be trusting in Him," and puts the words in the mouth of Christ.

New Testament links: Hebrews 2:13 (quoted)

8:18 *Look, I and the children whom the LORD has given me **are** for signs and for portents in Israel from the LORD of armies, who dwells on Mount Zion.*

Isaiah and his children are signs from the LORD. Their very names were messages. Isaiah means "the LORD is salvation." Shear-jashub means "a remnant will return." Maher-shalal-hash-baz means "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens." Every time the family walked through Jerusalem, they were a living sermon.

Hebrews 2:13 quotes this verse too, "Look, I and the children whom God has given Me," and applies it to Jesus and those He saves. As Isaiah stood with his children, Christ stands with all who belong to Him, and He isn't ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

New Testament links: Hebrews 2:13 (quoted)

8:19 *And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult its God? On behalf of the living* ***should they consult*** *the dead?*

In times of fear, people look for answers anywhere. Some were telling the people to consult mediums and spiritists, who claimed to speak with the dead in whispers and mutters. Isaiah asks a simple question: shouldn't a people ask their own God? Why would the living ask the dead?

God had forbidden this kind of thing (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). King Saul tried it at Endor on the night before he died (1 Samuel 28). People today still turn to psychics and horoscopes. The answer is the same as it was in Isaiah's day. Go to God.

8:20 *To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word,* ***it is*** *because* ***there is*** *no dawn for it.*

"To the law and to the testimony!" This is the test for every message. Does it agree with God's word? If it doesn't, there is no light in it. For the people who reject God's word, "there is no dawn for it." They are stuck in the night.

The Bereans in Acts 17:11 did this well. They checked even the apostle Paul's teaching against the Scriptures. We should test every teacher, every book and every idea the same way.

8:21 *And he will pass through it, hard pressed and hungry; and it will be* ***that*** *when he is hungry, he will be enraged and curse by his king and by his God, and turn upward.*

Those who turn away from God's word will wander through the land, hungry and worn out. When they are hungry enough, they will become angry and curse their king and their God. Instead of turning to God in their trouble, they will blame Him for it.

Revelation 16:11 describes the same response at the end of the age, when people blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains, "and they did not repent of their works."

8:22 *And he will look to the earth, and look, distress and darkness, gloom of anguish; and* ***he will be*** *thrust into thick darkness.*

They look up to heaven and get no answer, so they look down to the earth. All they find is distress, darkness and the gloom of anguish. They are driven into the dark.

This is where life without God's word ends. But the very next verse, 9:1, begins, "For there will be no gloom for her who was in distress." Out of this darkness, God will bring a great light. Matthew 4:15-16 tells us that light is Jesus.

Chapter 8 Summary

God has Isaiah write a public message and name his newborn son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, because Assyria will soon plunder Damascus and Samaria. Since Judah despised the quiet waters of God's care, the Assyrian flood will reach to its neck, yet the land belongs to Immanuel and the nations' plans will fail. Isaiah is told to fear the LORD, not what the people fear. God is a sanctuary to some and a stone of stumbling to others. Those who turn from His word to mediums will end in darkness.

Isaiah's Family as Signs

Isaiah (1:1): His name means "the LORD is salvation."

Shear-jashub (7:3): Isaiah's first son. His name means "a remnant will return." It carried both a warning and a hope. Judgment was coming, but God would keep a remnant.

Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4): Isaiah's second son. His name means "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens." It promised that Damascus and Samaria would soon be plundered by Assyria.

The prophetess (8:3): Isaiah's wife and the mother of his son.

Immanuel (7:14; 8:8, 10): Not Isaiah's son, but the promised Child whose name means "God with us." I believe He is Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23).

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been warned about something ahead of time and ignored it? What happened?
2. What did Isaiah write on the tablet, and why did he need witnesses? (8:1-2)
3. What did the name of Isaiah's son predict, and when would it happen? (8:3-4)
4. What did the people reject, and what would God bring in its place? (8:6-8)
5. What did God tell Isaiah not to fear, and whom should he fear instead? (8:12-13)
6. How can the LORD be both a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling? (8:14-15)
7. What test does Isaiah give for every message people listen to? (8:19-20)
8. What are some of the "conspiracies" and fears people talk about today, and how can fearing God free us from them?
9. When you need direction, where do you usually turn first? How could you make God's word your first stop this week?

Chapter 9: A Child Is Born

Scripture: The Prince of Peace and the Lord's Outstretched Hand

9:1-7 For ***there will be*** no gloom for her who ***was*** in distress. As ***at*** the former time He treated with contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, so at the latter ***time*** He will make glorious the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walk in the darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, a light has shone on them. You have multiplied the nation; You have made great the joy for it; they rejoice before You as ***with*** the joy at the harvest, as ***men*** are glad when they divide plunder. For the yoke of its burden and the staff of its shoulder, the rod of the one who oppresses it, You have shattered as ***in*** the day of Midian. For every boot of the one who tramps with tumult, and the cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel of fire. For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and the dominion is on His shoulder; and ***one*** has called His name Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of the dominion and of peace ***there will be*** no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and until forever. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.

9:8-12 The Lord has sent a word into Jacob, and it will fall on Israel. And the people will know, all of it, Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, in pride and in greatness of heart, saying, "Bricks have fallen, and ***with*** hewn ***stone*** we will build; sycamores have been cut down, and cedars we will put in ***their*** place." And the LORD set on high the adversaries of Rezin against him, and He stirs up his enemies: Syria from the east and ***the*** Philistines from the west; and they have devoured Israel with all ***their*** mouth. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand ***is*** still stretched out.

9:13-17 And the people have not turned back to the One who struck it, and the LORD of armies they have not sought. And the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed, in one day. The elder and ***the one*** lifted up of face, he ***is*** the head; and the prophet who teaches falsehood, he ***is*** the tail. And those who guide this people were leading ***them*** astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up. Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over its young men, and on its fatherless and its widows He has no compassion; for every one of it ***is*** godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand ***is*** still stretched out.

9:18-21 For wickedness has burned like the fire; it eats thorn and thornbush, and it has kindled the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward, a rising of smoke. By the wrath of the LORD of armies the land has been scorched, and the people became like fuel of fire; a man does not spare his brother. And he cut on the right, and was hungry; and he ate on the left, and they were not satisfied; each eats the flesh of his arm. Manasseh ***against*** Ephraim, and Ephraim ***against*** Manasseh; together they ***are*** against Judah. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand ***is*** still stretched out.

Chapter 9 Preview

Chapter 8 ended in thick darkness. Chapter 9 opens with light. Isaiah looks past the Assyrian armies and sees a Child born in the line of David, a Son who carries names no mere man could carry, and who will rule forever.

Then the prophet turns back to his own day. The northern kingdom of Israel refuses to repent, and three times we hear the same heavy refrain: His anger has not turned back, and His hand is still stretched out. The fourth comes at the start of chapter 10.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1 *For **there will be** no gloom for her who **was** in distress. As **at** the former time He treated with contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, so at the latter **time** He will make glorious the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

Zebulun and Naphtali were the northern tribes around the Sea of Galilee. They were the first to feel the Assyrian sword. About 732 B.C. the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III took this region and carried its people away (2 Kings 15:29). Isaiah says the land that was humbled first will be honored first.

"Galilee of the nations." Gentiles are people who aren't Jewish. This was a mixed region, looked down on by many in Judah. Yet God promised to make it glorious. Matthew tells us exactly how this came true. When Jesus began His ministry, He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, "so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled" (Matthew 4:13-16). The light of the world started shining in the very place where the darkness had first fallen.

New Testament links: Matthew 4:15-16 (quoted)

9:2 *The people who walk in the darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, a light has shone on them.*

Isaiah speaks of the future as if it has already happened. That is how certain God's promises are. A people sitting in darkness see a great light, and Matthew 4:16 quotes this verse about Jesus' preaching in Galilee.

Darkness in Scripture stands for more than trouble. It is the darkness of sin, of not knowing God, of living without hope. Jesus called Himself "the light of the world" and promised that His followers wouldn't walk in darkness (John 8:12). If you are in a dark place right now, this verse is for you too. The Light has come, and He still shines on those who look to Him.

New Testament links: Matthew 4:15-16 (quoted); Luke 1:79 (alluded to)

9:3 *You have multiplied the nation; You have made great the joy for it; they rejoice before You as* ***with*** *the joy at the harvest, as* ***men*** *are glad when they divide plunder.*

The light brings joy. Isaiah compares it to two kinds of happiness his readers knew well: the farmer bringing in a full harvest, and the soldier sharing the spoil after a victory. Both come after long labor and danger.

"You have multiplied the nation." This looks ahead to a people grown large under God's blessing. I believe this reaches beyond Isaiah's day to the Messiah's kingdom, when Israel is restored and the nations come to Him as well.

9:4 *For the yoke of its burden and the staff of its shoulder, the rod of the one who oppresses it, You have shattered as* ***in*** *the day of Midian.*

"As in the day of Midian." Isaiah reaches back to Gideon. In Judges 7, God gave Israel victory over the huge army of Midian with only three hundred men, so that no one could boast that Israel saved itself. The coming deliverance will be like that. The yoke, the staff and the rod are pictures of slavery and oppression. God Himself will break them. Israel won't win this freedom by its own strength, and neither do we. Our freedom from sin is God's work from start to finish.

9:5 *For every boot of the one who tramps with tumult, and the cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel of fire.*

When the war is truly over, you burn the equipment of war. The soldier's boots and the blood-soaked cloaks go into the fire because they will never be needed again. This is a picture of lasting peace, and it matches Isaiah 2:4, where nations "will beat their swords into plowshares." That kind of peace has never yet come to this world. I believe it will come when Christ returns and reigns.

9:6 *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and the dominion is on His shoulder; and* ***one*** *has called His name Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.*

This is one of the greatest verses in the Old Testament. Isaiah has already promised a sign in 7:14, a virgin who would bear a son called Immanuel. Now he tells us more about that Son.

"A child has been born to us." Isaiah adds, "a son has been given to us." Notice the two halves. The child is born, so He is truly human, born into our world like any baby. The Son is given, so He came from somewhere else. The Father gave Him (John 3:16). Jesus was both from the start: fully man, and the eternal Son sent from heaven.

"The dominion is on His shoulder." The yoke of the oppressor sat on Israel's shoulders in verse 4. Now the weight of ruling the world rests on His. He carries what we could never carry.

Then come His names. Wonder and Counselor: He is beyond anything human, and His wisdom never needs anyone's advice. Mighty God: in Hebrew this is "El Gibbor," and Isaiah uses the same title for the LORD Himself in 10:21. This child is God. Father of Eternity: not that the Son is the Father, but that He cares for His people like a father, forever. Prince of Peace: He makes peace

between God and man by His cross (Colossians 1:20), and He will one day bring peace to the whole earth. No king of Judah ever fit these names. Only Jesus does.

9:7 *Of the increase of the dominion and of peace **there will be** no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and until forever. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.*

His kingdom keeps growing and never ends. It sits "on the throne of David," the throne God promised would last forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). When the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, he used this same promise. God would give her Son "the throne of David His father," and His kingdom would have no end (Luke 1:32-33).

Good teachers land in different places on how this is fulfilled. Some say Jesus is fulfilling it now from heaven, and only that. I read it plainly. Christ reigns now at the Father's right hand, but this verse also promises a real throne and a real kingdom of justice on earth. That is what I believe the Millennium will be: a thousand years when Jesus rules from Jerusalem, and the promises to Israel are kept (Revelation 20:4-6). After that His kingdom goes on into eternity.

"The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this." "LORD of armies" means He is the commander of heaven's angels. His passion guarantees the outcome. It doesn't depend on Israel, or on us.

New Testament links: Luke 1:32-33 (alluded to)

9:8 *The Lord has sent a word into Jacob, and it will fall on Israel.*

Now the tone changes sharply. From verse 8 to 10:4 is a single poem of judgment against the northern kingdom, called Israel, Jacob, or Ephraim. Its four stanzas each end with the same line. God's word isn't empty sound. When He sends a word, it will "fall" and land where He aims it.

9:9-10 *And the people will know, all of it, Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, in pride and in greatness of heart, saying, "Bricks have fallen, and **with** hewn **stone** we will build; sycamores have been cut down, and cedars we will put in **their** place."*

Ephraim was the largest tribe of the northern kingdom, and Samaria was its capital. The people had already been hit hard, but they weren't humbled. Their answer was a boast: we lost mud bricks, so we will build with cut stone; we lost cheap sycamore wood, so we will use fine cedar.

That is the voice of pride. They saw the damage, but they wouldn't see God's hand in it. Many of us respond to trouble the same way. We promise ourselves we will rebuild bigger and better, when God is asking us to turn back to Him.

9:11-12 *And the LORD set on high the adversaries of Rezin against him, and He stirs up his enemies: Syria from the east and **the** Philistines from the west; and they have devoured Israel with all **their** mouth. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand **is** still stretched out.*

Rezin was the king of Syria (Aram), with its capital at Damascus. He had been Israel's ally against Judah (7:1), but God would turn Israel's friends and neighbors into its attackers, Syria from the east and the Philistines from the west.

"His hand is still stretched out." Here is the refrain for the first time in this section. We first heard it in 5:25. Isn't God's outstretched hand a good thing? Sometimes it is, but here it is a hand raised to strike, because the people still refuse to repent. The judgment isn't over.

9:13 *And the people have not turned back to the One who struck it, and the LORD of armies they have not sought.*

This verse names the real problem. The purpose of God's discipline was to bring Israel back. Pain was meant to turn them. But they "have not turned back to the One who struck it," and they didn't seek Him. Hebrews 12:11 tells us discipline "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" to those trained by it. The same hardship can soften one heart and harden another.

9:14-15 *And the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed, in one day. The elder and **the one** lifted up of face, he **is** the head; and the prophet who teaches falsehood, he **is** the tail.*

God would cut off the whole nation's leadership in one day, from top to bottom. Isaiah gives two pictures: head and tail, like an animal, and palm branch and bulrush, the tall tree and the lowly reed.

Then he explains his own picture. The head is the elders and men of rank. The tail is the false prophet. Why the tail? A tail follows behind and wags. These prophets didn't lead the people toward God. They simply said what the powerful wanted to hear.

9:16 *And those who guide this people were leading **them** astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.*

Bad leaders produce confused followers. The leaders "guide," but they lead astray, and the people who trust them end up lost. Jesus said something very similar about the religious leaders of His day. When the blind lead the blind, both fall into a pit (Matthew 15:14). It matters who we let teach us. We should test every teacher against God's Word, including this one.

9:17 *Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over its young men, and on its fatherless and its widows He has no compassion; for every one of it **is** godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand **is** still stretched out.*

This is a hard verse. God, who defends the orphan and the widow all through Scripture, says He won't pity them here. Why? Because the sin had spread to everyone. The young men, the orphans, the widows, the whole nation: "every one of it is godless." No group was untouched. When a whole society turns from God, judgment falls on the whole society. The refrain sounds a second time.

9:18 *For wickedness has burned like the fire; it eats thorn and thornbush, and it has kindled the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward, a rising of smoke.*

Isaiah shows us that sin is self-destroying. Wickedness itself "has burned like the fire." It starts small among the briars and thorns, then spreads until the whole forest is ablaze and the smoke

rolls up into the sky. Sin never stays the size it begins. Left alone, it consumes everything around it.

9:19 *By the wrath of the LORD of armies the land has been scorched, and the people became like fuel of fire; a man does not spare his brother.*

Verse 18 said wickedness burns. Verse 19 says the fury of the LORD burns. Both are true. God's judgment often comes by letting sin run its course (Romans 1:24-28 describes this). The people become the fuel, and the fire turns them against one another until "a man does not spare his brother."

9:20 *And he cut on the right, and was hungry; and he ate on the left, and they were not satisfied; each eats the flesh of his arm.*

Here is a picture of a starving society. People grab whatever is to the right and left of them and are never filled. Then they turn on their own flesh. I take "the flesh of his arm" to mean their own kinsmen, their own neighbors, since the next verse explains it as tribe against tribe. Life without God is a hunger that nothing in this world can satisfy.

9:21 *Manasseh **against** Ephraim, and Ephraim **against** Manasseh; together they **are** against Judah. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand **is** still stretched out.*

Manasseh and Ephraim were brother tribes, both sons of Joseph. Yet they fought each other, and then joined only to attack Judah, their brothers to the south. This happened in Israel's last years, when one king after another was murdered by the next (2 Kings 15). The refrain sounds a third time. In about 722 B.C. Samaria fell to Assyria, and the northern kingdom came to an end, just as Isaiah warned.

Chapter 9 Summary

Isaiah promises that Galilee, the first region darkened by Assyria, will see a great light. Matthew shows that light was Jesus. A Child will be born and a Son given, called Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace, who will reign on David's throne forever. Then Isaiah warns proud Israel. Because the people refuse to turn back to God, His anger has not turned back, and His hand is still stretched out in judgment.

The Four Names of the Child (9:6)

Wonder, Counselor: He is beyond anything human, and His wisdom is perfect. Compare Isaiah 11:2, where the Spirit of counsel rests on Him.

Mighty God: Hebrew "El Gibbor." Isaiah uses the same title for the LORD in 10:21.

Father of Eternity: He cares for His people like a father, with no end to His care.

Prince of Peace: He makes peace with God for us now (Romans 5:1), and He will bring peace to the earth when He reigns.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. What is the darkest place or season you have ever been in, and what brought light into it?

2. Where did God promise the light would shine, and how did Matthew see this fulfilled? (9:1-2; Matthew 4:13-16)

3. What does Isaiah say will happen to the boots and cloaks of war? (9:5)

4. What names are given to the Child, and what does each one tell us about Him? (9:6)

5. Where will He reign, and how long will His kingdom last? (9:7)

6. How did Ephraim respond to the first blows of judgment? (9:9-10)

7. What refrain keeps repeating in this chapter, and what does it mean here? (9:12, 17, 21)

8. Which of the names of Jesus in 9:6 do you most need to lean on this week, and why?

9. When hard times come, how can you tell whether you are turning back to God or simply trying to rebuild on your own?

Chapter 10: The Rod of His Anger

Scripture: Woe to Assyria and the Return of the Remnant

10:1-4 Woe ***to*** those who decree decrees of wickedness, and ***to*** writers ***who*** have written trouble, to turn aside the poor from judgment, and to rob the afflicted of My people of ***their*** justice, so that widows may be their plunder, and they may despoil the fatherless! And what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation ***that*** will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory? Nothing ***is left*** but ***that one*** has bowed down under the prisoners, and they will fall under the slain. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand ***is*** still stretched out.

10:5-11 Woe ***to*** Assyria, the rod of My anger; and the staff in their hand, it ***is*** My indignation. Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of My wrath I command him, to take plunder and to seize spoil, and to make it a trampling place like the mud of the streets. And he does not intend so, and his heart does not plan so; for to destroy ***is*** in his heart, and to cut off nations not a few. For he says, "Are not my commanders kings, all alike? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idol, and their carved images ***were more*** than Jerusalem and than Samaria, shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and to her idols, so do to Jerusalem and to her images?"

10:12-19 And it will be, when the Lord has finished all His work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, ***that*** I will punish the fruit of the greatness of heart of the king of Assyria, and the splendor of the haughtiness of his eyes. For he has said, "By the strength of my hand I have done ***it***, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; and I remove the boundaries of peoples, and I have plundered their stores, and like a mighty one I bring down the inhabitants. And my hand has found, like a nest, the wealth of the peoples; and as one gathers abandoned eggs, I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that fluttered a wing or opened a mouth or chirped." Does the axe glorify itself over the one who hews with it? Or does the saw magnify itself over the one who wields it? As if a rod should wield those who lift it up! As if a staff should lift up ***one who is*** not wood! Therefore the Lord, the LORD of armies, will send leanness among his fat ones, and under his glory a burning will burn like the burning of fire. And the light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and eat his thornbush and his thorn in one day. And the glory of his forest and of his fruitful land He will bring to an end, from soul even to flesh; and it will be as when a sick ***man*** wastes away. And the remnant of the trees of his forest will be ***few in*** number, and a boy will write them down.

10:20-27 And it will be in that day ***that*** the remnant of Israel and the escaped remnant of the house of Jacob will no longer again lean on the one who struck him, and will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God. For though your people, Israel, be like the sand of the sea, a remnant within it will return; destruction is decided, overflowing ***with*** righteousness. For a complete destruction, and ***one that is*** decided, the Lord GOD of armies is about to make in the midst of all the land. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of armies: "Do not be afraid, My people who dwell ***in*** Zion, of Assyria; with the rod he will strike you, and he will lift up his staff against you in the way of Egypt. For yet a very little ***while***,

and the indignation will be finished, and My anger ***will be*** for their destruction." And the LORD of armies will stir up a whip against him, like the striking of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and His staff ***will be*** over the sea, and He will lift it up in the way of Egypt. And it will be in that day ***that*** his burden will turn aside from on your shoulder, and his yoke from on your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of fatness.

10:28-34 He has come against Aiath; he has passed through Migron; at Michmash he deposits his baggage. They have passed over the pass; Geba ***is*** a lodging place for us; Ramah has trembled; Gibeah of Saul has fled. Cry aloud ***with*** your voice, daughter of Gallim! Pay attention, Laishah! O afflicted Anathoth! Madmenah has fled; the inhabitants of Gebim have taken refuge. Yet today ***he will*** stand at Nob; he will shake his hand ***at*** the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. Look, the Lord, the LORD of armies, is about to lop off the boughs with a crash; and the exalted of height ***will be*** cut down, and the lofty will be brought low. And He will cut down the thickets of the forest with the iron, and the Lebanon will fall by a mighty one.

Chapter 10 Preview

The poem of judgment from chapter 9 ends with a woe on unjust lawmakers. Then God turns to Assyria, the empire He is using to punish His people. Assyria thinks its victories are its own doing, so God will cut it down too.

In the middle of all this comes a word of hope. A remnant of Israel will return to the mighty God. The chapter closes with the Assyrian army marching to the very edge of Jerusalem, and the Lord felling it like a forest.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-2 *Woe **to** those who decree decrees of wickedness, and **to** writers **who** have written trouble, to turn aside the poor from judgment, and to rob the afflicted of My people of **their** justice, so that widows may be their plunder, and they may despoil the fatherless!*

The fourth and last stanza of the poem that began in 9:8 targets the people who wrote the laws. They didn't break the law. They made bad laws, and they used paperwork to rob the poor. Widows and orphans, the people God told Israel to protect (Exodus 22:22), became their prey.

God notices injustice that is legal. A thing can be permitted by the courts and still be wicked in His sight. Notice too that He calls the poor "My people." He takes their side.

10:3 *And what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation **that** will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory?*

Isaiah asks three hard questions. What will you do? Where will you run? Where will you leave your money? The "day of punishment" is coming, and the "devastation" will come from afar, from Assyria. The wealth these men stole can't save them. Jesus asked a similar question about the man who "gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his life" (Matthew 16:26).

10:4 *Nothing **is left** but **that one** has bowed down under the prisoners, and they will fall under the slain. For all this His anger has not turned back, and His hand **is** still stretched out.*

There are only two outcomes left: crouch among the prisoners led away into exile, or lie among the dead. The refrain sounds for the fourth and final time. Even after all these warnings, God's anger has not turned back, because the people haven't turned back.

10:5 *Woe **to** Assyria, the rod of My anger; and the staff in their hand, it **is** My indignation.*

Here Isaiah teaches a lesson worth slowing down for. Assyria was the great empire of Isaiah's day, centered in the region we now call northern Iraq, with Nineveh as its chief city. It was famous for its cruelty.

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger." God calls Assyria His rod, the stick in His hand. Assyria didn't know it, but it was a tool. God was using a wicked nation to discipline His own people. That doesn't make God the author of Assyria's evil, but it does mean no nation, however powerful, ever moves outside His control.

10:6 *Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of My wrath I command him, to take plunder and to seize spoil, and to make it a trampling place like the mud of the streets.*

The "godless nation" here is God's own people, Israel and then Judah. That is a painful thing to read. God commissions Assyria to plunder them and trample them "like the mud of the streets." When God's people live like the world, God may let the world discipline them. Judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17).

10:7 *And he does not intend so, and his heart does not plan so; for to destroy **is** in his heart, and to cut off nations not a few.*

Here is the twist. Assyria has no idea it is serving God. Its plan is simply to destroy and to conquer as many nations as it can. God's purpose was discipline. Assyria's purpose was greed and conquest. The same event had two very different aims behind it, and God would judge Assyria for its own motives. Joseph said something like this to his brothers: "you planned evil against me; God planned it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

10:8-9 *For he says, "Are not my commanders kings, all alike? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?*

Now we hear the king of Assyria boasting. His commanders are so great that each one is like a king. Then he lists cities he has crushed: Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Damascus and Samaria. His point is simple. They all fell. Why would any other city be different?

These were real cities across Syria and the upper Euphrates, and Assyria took them all. Damascus fell in 732 B.C. and Samaria in about 722 B.C. To the Assyrian king they were just names on a list of trophies.

10:10-11 *As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idol, and their carved images **were more** than Jerusalem and than Samaria, shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and to her idols, so do to Jerusalem and to her images?"*

The king's logic is that the gods of these nations couldn't save them, and their idols were greater than anything in Jerusalem. So Jerusalem's God will fail too. He puts the LORD on the same shelf as the idols of Samaria.

That was his fatal mistake. Years later Sennacherib's officer said almost the same thing outside Jerusalem's walls (Isaiah 36:18-20). He learned the hard way that the living God isn't one more idol.

10:12 *And it will be, when the Lord has finished all His work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, **that** I will punish the fruit of the greatness of heart of the king of Assyria, and the splendor of the haughtiness of his eyes.*

God will finish His work of discipline on Jerusalem first. Then He will turn to Assyria. Notice what He punishes: "the fruit of the greatness of heart of the king of Assyria." Assyria's pride is the root, and its cruelty is the fruit. God lets proud men go only so far, and then He brings them down.

10:13-14 *For he has said, "By the strength of my hand I have done **it**, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; and I remove the boundaries of peoples, and I have plundered their stores, and like a mighty one I bring down the inhabitants. And my hand has found, like a nest, the wealth of the peoples; and as one gathers abandoned eggs, I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that fluttered a wing or opened a mouth or chirped."*

Count how many times the king says "my" and "I." My hand, my wisdom, I did this, I have understanding. He takes all the credit. He moved borders and robbed nations, and he says it was as easy as taking eggs from an abandoned nest. No one even chirped.

This is how pride talks. It forgets that every breath and every strength is a gift. Daniel 4 tells the story of another proud king, Nebuchadnezzar, who said nearly the same thing and was humbled until he confessed that God rules. We would do well to watch for the word "I" in our own boasting.

10:15 *Does the axe glorify itself over the one who hews with it? Or does the saw magnify itself over the one who wields it? As if a rod should wield those who lift it up! As if a staff should lift up **one who is** not wood!*

Isaiah answers the boast with a question that almost makes you smile, though his point is serious. Does the axe brag over the woodsman? Does the saw think it is the carpenter? Assyria is a tool, and tools don't lift the hand that uses them. A club doesn't swing the man. The same is true of us. Whatever God accomplishes through us, the glory is His.

10:16 *Therefore the Lord, the LORD of armies, will send leanness among his fat ones, and under his glory a burning will burn like the burning of fire.*

"The Lord, the LORD of armies" is how the SLB shows two Hebrew names together: Adonai, meaning Lord or Master, and Yahweh, God's personal name. The Master of heaven's armies will send a wasting sickness among Assyria's strong warriors. Under all their glory a fire is smoldering, ready to break out.

10:17 *And the light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and eat his thornbush and his thorn in one day.*

"The light of Israel will become a fire." God is light and comfort to His people, and He is also a consuming fire to His enemies (Hebrews 12:29). In chapter 9 Israel's sin was a fire among briars and thorns. Now Assyria is the thicket, and God will burn it "in one day." I believe Isaiah saw this plainly fulfilled in 701 B.C., when the angel of the LORD struck the Assyrian camp outside Jerusalem in one night (Isaiah 37:36).

10:18 *And the glory of his forest and of his fruitful land He will bring to an end, from soul even to flesh; and it will be as when a sick* ***man*** *wastes away.*

Assyria's army is pictured as a great forest and a lush garden. God will destroy it "from soul even to flesh," completely, and the empire will waste away like a sick man. Assyria didn't fall overnight. After the disaster at Jerusalem it lasted almost another hundred years, and it even conquered Egypt. But God's word stood, and Nineveh fell in 612 B.C.

10:19 *And the remnant of the trees of his forest will be* ***few in*** *number, and a boy will write them down.*

So few trees will be left that a child could count them and write the number down. The mighty empire that boasted of gathering the whole earth like eggs will be reduced to a handful. God has a way of making the proud very small.

10:20 *And it will be in that day* ***that*** *the remnant of Israel and the escaped remnant of the house of Jacob will no longer again lean on the one who struck him, and will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.*

Now Isaiah turns to hope. The "remnant" is a key word in this book. It means the small part left over after judgment, the faithful survivors God preserves for Himself.

"Will no longer again lean on the one who struck him." King Ahaz had trusted Assyria instead of the LORD (2 Kings 16:7). That alliance turned into a beating. The remnant will learn the lesson. They will lean on the Holy One of Israel, and on Him alone. Hardship had done its work in them.

10:21 *A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God.*

"A remnant will return." In Hebrew that is "Shear-jashub," the very name Isaiah gave his son (7:3). Every time Isaiah called his boy to dinner, he was preaching this promise.

Notice whom they return to: "the mighty God." This is "El Gibbor," the same title given to the Child in 9:6. The remnant will return to the very One who was promised as the Son born to us. I believe this is a clear hint that the coming Messiah is God Himself.

10:22 *For though your people, Israel, be like the sand of the sea, a remnant within it will return; destruction is decided, overflowing **with** righteousness.*

Israel had been promised descendants like the sand of the sea (Genesis 22:17). Yet only a remnant of them will return. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:27 to explain why so many in Israel hadn't believed in Jesus. A remnant was always the way God worked.

But Paul doesn't stop there. In Romans 11:25-27 he tells us that "all Israel will be saved" when "the One who delivers will come out of Zion." I believe that points to a future day, at Christ's return, when the nation of Israel turns to Him. God hasn't given up on Israel.

New Testament links: Romans 9:27-28 (quoted)

10:23 *For a complete destruction, and **one that is** decided, the Lord GOD of armies is about to make in the midst of all the land.*

The destruction is "decided." It isn't random and it isn't out of control. It overflows "with righteousness" (verse 22), meaning it is fully just. Paul quotes this too in Romans 9:28. God's judgments are never careless. He decides them, He limits them, and He carries them out.

New Testament links: Romans 9:27-28 (quoted)

10:24 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of armies: "Do not be afraid, My people who dwell **in** Zion, of Assyria; with the rod he will strike you, and he will lift up his staff against you in the way of Egypt.*

God speaks tenderly to His people in Zion: "Do not be afraid, My people who dwell in Zion, of Assyria." Yes, Assyria will strike them, the way Egypt did long ago. But Egypt's power ended at the Red Sea, and Assyria's will end too. Remembering what God did before helps us trust Him with what is in front of us.

10:25 *For yet a very little **while**, and the indignation will be finished, and My anger **will be** for their destruction."*

"Yet a very little while." God's anger toward His people has a limit. When it is spent, He will turn that anger on their oppressor. Psalm 30:5 says "For a moment is in His anger, life is in His favor." Our hard seasons are real, but they aren't forever.

10:26 *And the LORD of armies will stir up a whip against him, like the striking of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and His staff **will be** over the sea, and He will lift it up in the way of Egypt.*

Isaiah again reaches back to Israel's history. At the rock of Oreb, Gideon's men killed Oreb, a prince of Midian (Judges 7:25). And Moses lifted his staff over the sea, and Pharaoh's army drowned (Exodus 14:26-28). God had done both before. He would do it again to Assyria.

10:27 *And it will be in that day **that** his burden will turn aside from on your shoulder, and his yoke from on your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of fatness.*

The yoke is lifted from Judah's neck, and the burden from its shoulders, just as 9:4 promised. The last phrase, "because of fatness," is hard to translate. Some versions read "because of the anointing." I take it to mean that Judah, blessed and made strong by God, will outgrow the yoke and burst it. Either way, the yoke breaks because of what God does, not Assyria.

10:28-29 *He has come against Aiath; he has passed through Migron; at Michmash he deposits his baggage. They have passed over the pass; Geba **is** a lodging place for us; Ramah has trembled; Gibeah of Saul has fled.*

Now Isaiah paints a vivid picture of an army marching toward Jerusalem from the north. Aiath (the old city of Ai), Migron, Michmash, Geba, Ramah and Gibeah of Saul were towns a few miles north of the city. The enemy leaves its heavy baggage at Michmash and moves quickly through the pass. Town after town panics as it comes near.

10:30-31 *Cry aloud **with** your voice, daughter of Gallim! Pay attention, Laishah! O afflicted Anathoth! Madmenah has fled; the inhabitants of Gebim have taken refuge.*

The cries spread from village to village. Gallim, Laishah and Anathoth (Jeremiah's hometown, Jeremiah 1:1) are told to cry out. Madmenah flees and Gebim hides. You can almost hear the alarm passing from one hilltop to the next. Some read this as the actual route of Sennacherib's army in 701 B.C., and others as a poetic picture of the danger. Either way, the threat was real and close.

10:32 *Yet today **he will** stand at Nob; he will shake his hand **at** the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.*

Nob was a town of priests very close to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 21:1). From there the enemy can see the city. He stops and shakes his fist at Mount Zion. That is as far as he gets. The fist is shaken, but it never strikes. God sets the line, and the proud enemy can't cross it.

10:33 *Look, the Lord, the LORD of armies, is about to lop off the boughs with a crash; and the exalted of height **will be** cut down, and the lofty will be brought low.*

At the very moment the Assyrian is shaking his fist, the Lord swings His axe. The tall boughs crash down. "The lofty will be brought low." This is a theme all through Isaiah (2:11-12). God humbles whatever lifts itself up against Him, whether it is a nation or a heart.

10:34 *And He will cut down the thickets of the forest with the iron, and the Lebanon will fall by a mighty one.*

The forest of Lebanon, famous for its great cedars, falls "by a mighty one," the Lord Himself swinging the iron axe (verse 33). Assyria, which called itself the axe in verse 15, is now the tree being cut down.

Keep this picture in mind as you turn the page. Assyria will be a forest of stumps with no new life. But chapter 11 begins with a stump that sprouts.

Chapter 10 Summary

God pronounces woe on Israel's unjust lawmakers and on Assyria, the rod of His anger. Assyria thought its conquests were its own doing and mocked the LORD as one more idol, so God would cut it down like a forest. Yet in the middle of judgment He promises that a remnant of Israel will return to the mighty God. The Assyrian army marches to the edge of Jerusalem and shakes its fist, but the Lord fells it.

Places on the March to Jerusalem (10:28-32)

Aiath: the old city of Ai (Joshua 7-8), north of Jerusalem.

Michmash and Geba: towns on either side of a deep pass, where Jonathan once attacked the Philistines (1 Samuel 14).

Ramah and Gibeah of Saul: Ramah was Samuel's home; Gibeah was King Saul's town.

Anathoth: a town of priests, the hometown of Jeremiah.

Nob: a town of priests within sight of Jerusalem (1 Samuel 21-22).

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. Have you ever seen someone take credit for something that wasn't really theirs? How did it make you feel?

2. What were the lawmakers in Israel doing wrong? (10:1-2)

3. Why does God call Assyria "the rod of My anger," and what was Assyria's own intent? (10:5-7)

4. How did the king of Assyria explain his success? (10:13-14)

5. What picture does Isaiah use to answer the king's boasting? (10:15)

6. Who is the remnant, and whom will they rely on? (10:20-21)

7. How far did the enemy get before God stopped him? (10:32-34)

8. Where are you tempted to think, "By the strength of my hand I have done it"?

9. How does knowing that God sets limits on hardship help you in a difficult season right now?

Chapter 11: The Branch

Scripture: The Reign of the Shoot from Jesse

11:1-5 And a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, ***the*** spirit of wisdom and understanding, ***the*** spirit of counsel and might, ***the*** spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And His delight ***will be*** in the fear of the LORD; and He will not judge by the sight of His eyes, and He will not decide by the hearing of His ears; and He will judge the poor with righteousness, and decide with uprightness for the humble of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will put the wicked to death. And righteousness will be the waistband of His hips, and faithfulness the waistband of His loins.

11:6-9 And the wolf will sojourn with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling ***will be*** together; and a small boy will lead them. And the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion, like the ox, will eat straw. And the nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned ***child*** will put out his hand over the nest of the viper. They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all the mountain of My holiness; for the earth will be full ***of*** the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

11:10-16 And it will be in that day ***that*** the root of Jesse, who will stand as a banner of the peoples, nations will seek Him, and His resting place will be glory. And it will be in that day ***that*** the Lord will again ***set*** His hand a second time to acquire the remnant of His people which will remain, from Assyria and from Egypt and from Pathros and from Cush and from Elam and from Shinar and from Hamath and from the coastlands of the sea. And He will lift up a banner for the nations, and He will gather the banished of Israel, and the scattered of Judah He will assemble from the four corners of the earth. And the jealousy of Ephraim will turn aside, and those who oppose Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not oppose Ephraim. And they will fly on the shoulder of ***the*** Philistines toward the west; together they will despoil the sons of the east; Edom and Moab ***will be*** the stretching out of their hand, and the sons of Ammon their subjects. And the LORD will devote to destruction the tongue of the sea of Egypt, and He will wave His hand over the River with the scorching of His wind, and He will strike it into seven wadis, and He will make ***men*** walk ***over*** in sandals. And there will be a highway for the remnant of His people which will remain from Assyria, as there was for Israel in the day he came up from the land of Egypt.

Chapter 11 Preview

Chapter 10 ended with Assyria cut down like a forest. Chapter 11 begins with a stump that does grow back. From the family line of Jesse, King David's father, a Branch will spring up, and the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him.

Isaiah then shows us the world under this King's rule: justice for the poor, peace even among wild animals, and the earth full of the knowledge of the LORD. Finally, God gathers His scattered people Israel home from every corner of the earth.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *And a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*

"A shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse." Jesse was the father of King David. Why does Isaiah name Jesse and not David? Because by the time the Branch comes, David's royal family will look like a stump, cut down to nothing. The kings will be gone. The family will be poor and forgotten, back to its humble beginnings in Bethlehem, where Jesse kept his flocks (1 Samuel 16:11).

That is exactly how Jesus came. He was born in David's line (Matthew 1:1-16), but to a carpenter's family in a small town, with no throne and no palace. Out of what looked dead, God brought new life.

"A branch from his roots will bear fruit." The word "Branch" became a title for the Messiah. Jeremiah 23:5 speaks of "a righteous Branch" raised up for David, and Zechariah 3:8 calls Him "My servant the Branch." A Messiah, by the way, means "Anointed One," the King God promised to send. The Greek form of the word is "Christ."

The contrast with chapter 10 is deliberate. Assyria was a mighty forest that fell and stayed fallen. David's house was a stump that looked finished, yet it sprouted. God's kingdom often begins small. It grows from places the world has written off.

11:2 *And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, **the** spirit of wisdom and understanding, **the** spirit of counsel and might, **the** spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

The Spirit of the LORD will "rest" on Him. That means the Spirit will stay, not come and go. In the Old Testament the Spirit came on judges and kings for a season. On this King He remains.

Isaiah describes the Spirit in three pairs. Wisdom and understanding: He sees what is true and knows what to do with it. Counsel and strength: He makes right plans and has the power to carry them out. Knowledge and the fear of the LORD: He knows God perfectly and honors Him completely.

We see this at Jesus' baptism, when the Spirit came down on Him like a dove and remained (John 1:32-33). Later, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me" (Luke 4:18). Everything He said and did flowed from this anointing.

11:3 *And His delight **will be** in the fear of the LORD; and He will not judge by the sight of His eyes, and He will not decide by the hearing of His ears;*

"His delight will be in the fear of the LORD." The "fear of the LORD" means a deep reverence and love for God that wants to please Him, not terror. For this King, honoring the Father is a joy more than a duty. Jesus said, "I always do the things pleasing to Him" (John 8:29).

He won't judge by appearances or by rumor. Human judges are limited to what they see and hear. This Judge sees the heart. That is a comfort if you have ever been misjudged, and a warning if you have been hiding something.

11:4 *and He will judge the poor with righteousness, and decide with uprightness for the humble of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will put the wicked to death.*

The poor and afflicted rarely get a fair hearing in this world. Under this King, they will. He judges "with righteousness" and decides "with uprightness."

"He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth." He doesn't need an army. His word is enough. Paul draws on this verse when he describes the Lord Jesus slaying the lawless one, the Antichrist, "with the breath of His mouth" at His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Revelation 19:15 shows Christ returning with a sharp sword coming from His mouth to strike down the nations.

So this verse looks past Jesus' first coming. When He came as a baby, He didn't slay the wicked. He came to save. But when He returns, He will judge. I believe verses 4 through 9 describe His second coming and the kingdom that follows.

New Testament links: 2 Thessalonians 2:8 (alluded to); Revelation 19:15 (alluded to)

11:5 *And righteousness will be the waistband of His hips, and faithfulness the waistband of His loins.*

A belt held a man's robe together so he could move and work. This King's belt is righteousness and faithfulness. Everything He does is held together by doing what is right and keeping His word. He never breaks a promise. Paul uses a similar picture for believers, telling us to stand firm, "having girded your loins with truth" (Ephesians 6:14). What is true of the King is meant to be true of His people.

New Testament links: Ephesians 6:14 (alluded to)

11:6 *And the wolf will sojourn with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling **will be** together; and a small boy will lead them.*

Here Isaiah describes a world where natural enemies live together in peace. The wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the young goat, the calf and the young lion. And a little boy leads them all.

Bible teachers disagree about this passage. Some say it is only a picture of peace between people. I take it as written, because nothing in the text tells us it is a figure of speech, and Romans 8:19-22

tells us that creation itself is waiting to be set free from its slavery to corruption. When the curse of Genesis 3 is lifted, nature itself will be changed.

When will this happen? It hasn't happened yet. I believe it describes the Millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth after His return (Revelation 20:4-6). I believe Isaiah 11:6-9 is one of the Old Testament promises that will be fulfilled in that kingdom. It will be a world where a child is safe among animals that once would have killed him.

11:7 *And the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion, like the ox, will eat straw.*

The cow and the bear will graze together, and the lion "like the ox, will eat straw." Predators become plant eaters. This takes us back to the beginning, when God gave green plants as food to every animal (Genesis 1:30). In the Messiah's kingdom, the violence that entered creation through sin is undone. Isaiah repeats this promise in 65:25.

11:8 *And the nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned **child** will put out his hand over the nest of the viper.*

A nursing baby plays near a cobra's hole, and a toddler puts his hand into a viper's nest. Every parent knows the terror of that picture today. In the kingdom there is nothing to fear. Some see a reminder here of the serpent in Eden. The creature that brought death into the world will be harmless around the smallest child.

11:9 *They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all the mountain of My holiness; for the earth will be full **of** the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

"They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all the mountain of My holiness." The "mountain of My holiness" is Zion, Jerusalem, the center of His rule. From there, peace spreads over the whole earth.

"As the waters cover the sea." The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, and this is the reason for the peace. Every place in the ocean is covered by water. No spot is left dry. In the same way, the knowledge of God will reach every place and every person. Habakkuk 2:14 repeats this promise.

That is the kind of world we long for. Today, much of the world doesn't know God at all. In His kingdom, no one will be ignorant of Him. Until then, we have a part to play in spreading that knowledge, one person at a time.

11:10 *And it will be in that day **that** the root of Jesse, who will stand as a banner of the peoples, nations will seek Him, and His resting place will be glory.*

"The root of Jesse." In verse 1 the Messiah was a shoot from Jesse's stump. Here He is the root. How can He be both? Because He is both David's descendant and David's Lord. Jesus calls Himself "the root and the offspring of David" in Revelation 22:16.

He will stand "as a banner of the peoples," like a banner raised on a hill that everyone can see, and the nations will come to Him. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:12 to show that God always planned to bring the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations, to faith in Christ. If you aren't Jewish and you trust in Jesus, this verse is about you.

New Testament links: Romans 15:12 (quoted); Revelation 5:5 (alluded to); Revelation 22:16 (alluded to)

11:11 *And it will be in that day **that** the Lord will again **set** His hand a second time to acquire the remnant of His people which will remain, from Assyria and from Egypt and from Pathros and from Cush and from Elam and from Shinar and from Hamath and from the coastlands of the sea.*

"A second time." God recovered His people once before, when He brought them out of Egypt (verse 16 makes this link). Now He will do it again.

Some apply this to the return from Babylon under Cyrus in 538 B.C. That return was real, but it came mostly from one place. This list covers the whole known world: Assyria, Egypt, Pathros (southern Egypt), Cush (the region south of Egypt), Elam (east of Babylon), Shinar (Babylon), Hamath (in Syria), and the islands of the sea. I believe this points to a final regathering of Israel at the end of the age, when Christ returns and gathers His people (Matthew 24:31).

11:12 *And He will lift up a banner for the nations, and He will gather the banished of Israel, and the scattered of Judah He will assemble from the four corners of the earth.*

The banner of verse 10 is raised again. This time it calls the "banished of Israel" and the "scattered of Judah" home "from the four corners of the earth." Both kingdoms, north and south, are gathered.

Many see the return of Jewish people to the land in modern times, and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, as a step toward this. I don't want to read too much into the headlines. But I am certain of this: God keeps His promises to Israel, and the full keeping of this one comes when the nation turns to its Messiah (Romans 11:25-27).

11:13 *And the jealousy of Ephraim will turn aside, and those who oppose Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not oppose Ephraim.*

For centuries the northern kingdom (Ephraim) and the southern kingdom (Judah) were jealous of each other and often at war. We saw it in 9:21. In the Messiah's kingdom, that old rivalry is over. Ezekiel 37:15-22 gives the same promise with two sticks joined into one, one nation under one king. When people come under the rule of Christ, old hatreds can finally be laid down.

11:14 *And they will fly on the shoulder of **the** Philistines toward the west; together they will despoil the sons of the east; Edom and Moab **will be** the stretching out of their hand, and the sons of Ammon their subjects.*

Israel's old enemies are named: the Philistines to the west, the "sons of the east," Edom, Moab and Ammon. These were the nations that troubled Israel for centuries. In that day they will no longer

threaten God's people. United Israel will hold the land God promised them. I take this to mean that God's people will be secure in the land, and their enemies will be under the rule of the King.

11:15 *And the LORD will devote to destruction the tongue of the sea of Egypt, and He will wave His hand over the River with the scorching of His wind, and He will strike it into seven wadis, and He will make **men** walk **over** in sandals.*

God will dry up "the tongue of the sea of Egypt" and divide "the River," which in the Old Testament usually means the Euphrates. He will split it into seven streams so that people can cross on foot without getting their sandals wet.

This echoes the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14) and the Jordan crossing (Joshua 3). God removes every barrier that would keep His people from coming home. Revelation 16:12 also speaks of the Euphrates being dried up at the end of the age, though there it makes way for the kings of the east.

11:16 *And there will be a highway for the remnant of His people which will remain from Assyria, as there was for Israel in the day he came up from the land of Egypt.*

God will build a highway for His people out of Assyria, just as He made a way out of Egypt in the Exodus. Highways show up again and again in Isaiah (19:23; 35:8; 40:3). God doesn't just call people home. He makes the road. If you feel far from God today, remember that He is the One who builds the way back.

Chapter 11 Summary

Out of the stump of Jesse, God raises up the Branch, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Spirit of the LORD rests on Him. He judges the poor with fairness and slays the wicked with the breath of His lips. Under His rule even wild animals live in peace, and the earth is full of the knowledge of the LORD. The nations come to Him, and God gathers His scattered people Israel home a second time from every corner of the earth.

Where the Remnant Comes From (11:11)

Pathros: Upper (southern) Egypt.

Cush: The land south of Egypt along the Nile, often called Ethiopia in older Bibles.

Elam: A land east of Babylon, in what is now southwestern Iran.

Shinar: The plain of Babylon (Genesis 11:2).

Hamath: A city-state in Syria on the Orontes River.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. Have you ever seen something grow back that you thought was completely dead?

2. Why do you think Isaiah calls the Messiah a shoot from the stump of Jesse instead of from David? (11:1)

3. How does Isaiah describe the Spirit that rests on the Branch? (11:2)

4. How is His judging different from human judging? (11:3-4)

5. What changes in the animal world when He reigns? (11:6-8)

6. Why will no one hurt or destroy in His holy mountain? (11:9)

7. Who will gather to the root of Jesse, and from where will Israel be gathered? (11:10-12)

8. Which part of the Messiah's kingdom are you most looking forward to, and why?

9. What is one way you can help spread the knowledge of the LORD where you live this week?

Chapter 12: The Song of the Redeemed

Scripture: Thanksgiving in That Day

12:1-3 And you will say in that day, "I will give thanks to You, O LORD, for You were angry with me; let Your anger turn back, and may You comfort me. Look, God ***is*** my salvation; I will trust and I will not dread; for my strength and song ***is the*** LORD, the LORD, and He has become salvation for me." And you will draw water with joy from the springs of the salvation.

12:4-6 And you will say in that day, "Give thanks to the LORD; call on His name; make known His deeds among the peoples; bring to remembrance that His name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for He has done majestic ***things***; this is made known in all the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst ***is*** the Holy One of Israel."

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapter 12 is a short song of praise. It closes the first major section of Isaiah, which began in chapter 1 with a sinful nation and now ends with a forgiven people singing.

"In that day" points back to chapter 11, the day when the Branch reigns and God gathers His people home. Those who have been brought through judgment will thank God, ask Him to turn His anger back and comfort them, and they will tell the whole earth what He has done.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *And you will say in that day, "I will give thanks to You, O LORD, for You were angry with me; let Your anger turn back, and may You comfort me.*

"And you will say in that day." "That day" is the day of chapter 11, when the Messiah reigns and Israel is gathered home. The "you" here is singular in Hebrew. Each person sings this song for himself.

The song begins with honesty. "You were angry with me." The singer doesn't pretend he never sinned or that God's anger was unfair. Then he prays, "let Your anger turn back, and may You comfort me." Through chapters 9 and 10 we heard over and over that "His anger has not turned back." Here, at last, the singer asks God to turn it, and he trusts that God will.

How can a holy God turn His anger away from sinners? The New Testament answers plainly. Jesus took that anger on Himself at the cross (Romans 5:9). Every believer can sing this verse.

12:2 *Look, God **is** my salvation; I will trust and I will not dread; for my strength and song **is the** LORD, the LORD, and He has become salvation for me."*

"Look, God is my salvation." Not only does God save. He is my salvation. My rescue is a Person.

"I will trust and I will not dread." Fear and trust can't both rule the same heart. When we look at God, trust grows and fear shrinks. The second half of the verse echoes the song Moses and Israel

sang after crossing the Red Sea: "My strength and song is the LORD" (Exodus 15:2). Psalm 118:14 says it too. A new Exodus deserves the old Exodus song. The God who saved them from Pharaoh is the same God who saves us from sin.

12:3 *And you will draw water with joy from the springs of the salvation.*

"You will draw water with joy from the springs of the salvation." In a dry land, a spring meant life. Drawing water was hard daily work, but here it is done with joy, because the well never runs dry.

Later Jewish worship at the Feast of Booths included a ceremony of drawing water and pouring it out at the temple. On the last day of that feast, Jesus stood up and cried out that anyone who is thirsty should come to Him and drink (John 7:37-38). He is the spring of salvation Isaiah sang about. Are you drinking from Him, or from wells that leave you thirsty?

12:4 *And you will say in that day, "Give thanks to the LORD; call on His name; make known His deeds among the peoples; bring to remembrance that His name is exalted.*

Now the song turns outward. "Give thanks," "call on His name," and "make known His deeds among the peoples." Salvation is never meant to stay private. Those who have been saved tell others. God's plan was always that Israel would be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6), and in the Messiah's kingdom this will be fully true. For believers today, Jesus gave the same charge in Matthew 28:19-20.

12:5 *Sing praises to the LORD, for He has done majestic **things**; this is made known in all the earth.*

"He has done majestic things." The singer praises God for what He has actually done, not for vague feelings. Biblical praise is rooted in real events: the Exodus, the return from exile, the cross, the empty tomb, the coming kingdom. "This is made known in all the earth." God's works are too great to keep quiet about.

12:6 *Cry aloud and shout for joy, inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst **is** the Holy One of Israel."*

The song ends with a shout. The "inhabitant of Zion" is called to cry out for joy. Why? Because "great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

"The Holy One of Israel" is Isaiah's favorite name for God. He uses it about twenty-five times, and rarely does anyone else in Scripture. Isaiah met this Holy One in chapter 6 and was undone. Now the Holy One lives among His people, and they aren't undone. They are glad. That is what forgiveness does. The God who once was a terror to sinners becomes the joy of His people's lives. Revelation 21:3 promises the same thing at the very end: God Himself will dwell among them.

Chapter 12 Summary

In the day when the Messiah reigns, God's people will sing this song. They will thank Him and ask Him to turn His anger back and comfort them. God Himself is their salvation, their strength and

their song. They will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation, tell the nations what He has done, and shout for joy because the Holy One of Israel lives among them.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What song do you find yourself singing when you are truly thankful?

2. What does the singer ask God to do with His anger? (12:1)

3. What does it mean to say God is "my salvation" and not only "my Savior"? (12:2)

4. Where else in Scripture do we find the words "my strength and song is the LORD"? (12:2; Exodus 15:2)

5. What picture does Isaiah use for receiving salvation? (12:3)

6. What are God's people told to do among the nations? (12:4-5)

7. Why are the people of Zion told to shout for joy? (12:6)

8. Which of God's "majestic things" in your own life could you tell someone about this week?

9. Where are you trying to draw water from wells other than Jesus?

Chapter 13: The Fall of Babylon

Scripture: The Oracle Concerning Babylon

13:1-5 The oracle of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. On a bare mountain lift up a banner; raise a voice to them; wave a hand, so that they may enter the doors of ***the*** nobles. I have commanded My consecrated ones; I have also summoned My mighty ones for My anger, the exultant ones of My pride. The sound of a tumult on the mountains, the likeness of a great people! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms of nations gathered together! The LORD of armies is mustering an army of battle. They are coming from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy all the land.

13:6-16 Wail, for the day of the LORD ***is*** near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will go limp, and every heart of man will melt. And they will be terrified; pangs and pains will seize ***them***; they will writhe like a woman giving birth; each will look in astonishment at his neighbor; their faces ***will be*** faces of flames. Look, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, and ***with*** wrath and burning of anger, to make the land a waste; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark at its going forth, and the moon will not make its light shine. And I will punish the world ***for*** evil, and the wicked ***for*** their iniquity; and I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and the haughtiness of the ruthless I will bring low. I will make man more rare than pure gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD of armies and in the day of the burning of His anger. And it will be ***that*** like a hunted gazelle, and like sheep with no one gathering ***them***, each will turn to his people, and each will flee to his land. Everyone who is found will be pierced through, and everyone who is caught will fall by the sword. And their children will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered, and their wives lain with.

13:17-22 Look, I am about to stir up Media against them, who do not value silver, and gold, they do not delight in it. And ***their*** bows will dash youths in pieces, and on the fruit of the womb they will have no compassion; on sons their eye will not look with pity. And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the splendor of the pride of ***the*** Chaldeans, will be like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. It will not be inhabited ever, and it will not be dwelt in from generation to generation; and an Arab will not pitch a tent there, and shepherds will not make ***their flocks*** lie down there. And desert creatures will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; and the daughters of the ostrich will dwell there, and wild goats will leap about there. And hyenas will cry out in its citadels, and jackals in the palaces of delight; and its time ***is*** near to come, and its days will not be prolonged.

Chapter 13 Preview

With chapter 13, Isaiah begins a new section. Chapters 13 through 23 are a series of oracles, or messages, against the nations around Israel. The first and longest is against Babylon.

In Isaiah's day Babylon wasn't yet the great power it would become. Yet Isaiah sees its fall, names the Medes who will help bring it down, and describes its ruin. He also sees beyond Babylon to the Day of the LORD, when God will punish the whole world for its evil.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *The oracle of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.*

"The oracle of Babylon." The word translated "oracle" can also mean "burden." It is a heavy message, a word of judgment that weighs on the prophet who carries it.

Isaiah names himself here as the one who "saw" it. He saw it more than a century before Babylon fell. Predicting the future is exactly what the God of the Bible does (Isaiah 46:9-10).

13:2 *On a bare mountain lift up a banner; raise a voice to them; wave a hand, so that they may enter the doors of* ***the*** *nobles.*

Someone raises a banner on a bare hill where everyone can see it, and shouts and waves for the troops to come. The target is "the doors of the nobles," the gates of Babylon's proud rulers. God is calling an army together to attack.

13:3 *I have commanded My consecrated ones; I have also summoned My mighty ones for My anger, the exultant ones of My pride.*

"My consecrated ones." "Consecrated" means set apart for a task. These soldiers aren't godly men. They are pagan armies. But God has set them apart to carry out His anger, the same way He used Assyria as His rod in chapter 10. They are proud and exulting, and they have no idea whose plan they are fulfilling.

13:4 *The sound of a tumult on the mountains, the likeness of a great people! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms of nations gathered together! The LORD of armies is mustering an army of battle.*

Isaiah hears the noise before he sees the army: a roar on the mountains, kingdoms and nations gathering. And at the center of it all, "the LORD of armies is mustering an army." Human armies think they are making history. Isaiah lets us see who is really taking the roll call.

13:5 *They are coming from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of His indignation, to destroy all the land.*

They come from "the end of the heavens." The Medes and Persians came from the mountains and plateau northeast of Babylon, a long way from Israel. Isaiah calls them "the weapons of His indignation." The phrase "all the land" can also mean the whole earth, and that hint prepares us for what comes next. This judgment is about Babylon, but it reaches further.

13:6 *Wail, for the day of the LORD **is** near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.*

"Wail, for the day of the LORD is near." This is a key phrase in Isaiah and in all the prophets. The Day of the LORD is any time God steps into history to judge sin and set things right. There were "days of the LORD" in Isaiah's time, like Babylon's fall. And there is a final Day of the LORD at the end of this age, when Christ returns (2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

"Destruction from the Almighty" is a play on words in Hebrew, since the word for destruction sounds like the name "Shaddai," the Almighty. Destruction comes from the Almighty Himself, and no one can stand against it.

13:7-8 *Therefore all hands will go limp, and every heart of man will melt. And they will be terrified; pangs and pains will seize **them**; they will writhe like a woman giving birth; each will look in astonishment at his neighbor; their faces **will be** faces of flames.*

When that day comes, strong men go weak. Hands drop. Hearts melt. Isaiah compares their terror to a woman in labor, a picture Jesus also used for the troubles before His return (Matthew 24:8). They stare at one another with faces burning, from fear or shame, with no idea what to do. Every proud empire eventually comes to a moment when it discovers it isn't in control.

13:9 *Look, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, and **with** wrath and burning of anger, to make the land a waste; and He will destroy its sinners from it.*

The Day of the LORD is "cruel, and with wrath and burning of anger." Those are hard words. But we should remember that God's anger isn't like ours. It's His settled, holy opposition to evil, nothing like a temper. The goal is "to make the land a waste," and God "will destroy its sinners from it." Sin won't be allowed to stay. Thankfully, God has given a way for sinners to be saved before that day comes.

13:10 *For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark at its going forth, and the moon will not make its light shine.*

Here the scene widens to the whole cosmos. The stars stop shining, the sun is dark when it rises, and the moon gives no light. Jesus used this same language to describe what happens right after the Tribulation and right before He returns. "The sun will be darkened," He said, and the moon will give no light (Matthew 24:29). Joel 2:31 and Revelation 6:12-13 describe the same thing.

So I read this as a double fulfillment. Babylon's fall was a near Day of the LORD. But the language here is too big for one city. It looks ahead to the final Day of the LORD at the end of the Tribulation.

New Testament links: Matthew 24:29 (alluded to); Mark 13:24 (alluded to); Luke 21:25 (alluded to); Revelation 6:12 (alluded to)

13:11 *And I will punish the world **for** evil, and the wicked **for** their iniquity; and I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and the haughtiness of the ruthless I will bring low.*

"I will punish the world for evil." Not Babylon only, but the world. Isaiah's prophecy now plainly reaches past Babylon. And notice what God singles out: arrogance, pride, haughtiness. Pride is the

sin that started the rebellion against God, and it is the sin God brings low at the end. "God opposes the proud" (James 4:6).

13:12 *I will make man more rare than pure gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.*

So many will die that people will be rarer than pure gold, rarer than the gold of Ophir, which was the finest gold Israel knew (1 Kings 9:28). Revelation describes huge numbers of people dying in the judgments of the Tribulation (Revelation 6:8; 9:15). This verse should sober us. The final judgment is real, and it's coming.

13:13 *Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD of armies and in the day of the burning of His anger.*

God will make "the heavens tremble" and shake the earth "from its place." Hebrews 12:26-27 quotes a similar promise from Haggai, that God will once more shake not only the earth but also heaven, so that only what can't be shaken will remain. Everything people build without God will be shaken loose. Only His kingdom stands.

13:14 *And it will be **that** like a hunted gazelle, and like sheep with no one gathering **them**, each will turn to his people, and each will flee to his land.*

People run like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep scattered with no shepherd. Babylon was a city full of foreigners, traders and captives from many nations. When the end came, each one fled to his own people. A city held together by money and power falls apart the moment the power fails.

13:15-16 *Everyone who is found will be pierced through, and everyone who is caught will fall by the sword. And their children will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered, and their wives lain with.*

These are some of the hardest verses in Isaiah. No one who is caught escapes. Children are killed in front of their parents, and wives are assaulted.

Why would the Bible record this? Isaiah isn't approving of these horrors. He is describing what war is like and what Babylon's enemies would do to it. Babylon had done the same to others, including Jerusalem (Psalm 137:8-9). What Babylon sowed, it would reap (Galatians 6:7). The Bible never hides how terrible sin and its fruit can be.

13:17 *Look, I am about to stir up Media against them, who do not value silver, and gold, they do not delight in it.*

"I am about to stir up Media against them." Isaiah names the nation. The Medes lived in the mountains northeast of Babylon. In Isaiah's day they were scattered tribes, not a world power. Yet that is who God named.

In 539 B.C. the Persian king Cyrus, ruling over the joined kingdom of the Medes and Persians, took Babylon. Daniel 5 describes the very night it happened, when Belshazzar's feast ended and

"Darius the Mede" received the kingdom (Daniel 5:30-31). This is real predictive prophecy, written long before it happened.

"Who do not value silver." The Medes couldn't be bought off. Babylon's wealth wouldn't save it.

13:18 *And **their** bows will dash youths in pieces, and on the fruit of the womb they will have no compassion; on sons their eye will not look with pity.*

Their bows will cut down the young men, and they will have no pity even on children. Isaiah again shows the cruelty of war without softening it. When a nation comes under God's judgment, it often loses every protection it once had, including its future generation.

13:19 *And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the splendor of the pride of **the** Chaldeans, will be like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah.*

"Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms." Babylon was famous in the ancient world for its walls, its gates and its gardens. The Chaldeans were the people who ruled it in its last great age. Its pride was its glory.

Yet it will end "like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah" (Genesis 19). Babylon wasn't burned by fire from heaven in 539 B.C. Cyrus took it with little fighting and left it standing. But over the following centuries it declined, until it was a ruin. Revelation 18 takes up the name "Babylon" for the final world system, and there it falls in a single hour (Revelation 18:10). I believe the full weight of this verse lands there.

13:20 *It will not be inhabited ever, and it will not be dwelt in from generation to generation; and an Arab will not pitch a tent there, and shepherds will not make **their flocks** lie down there.*

"It will not be inhabited ever." Even nomads won't camp there, and shepherds won't rest their flocks there. Babylon did become an empty ruin. By the early centuries after Christ, the great city had been largely abandoned, and it has never again become the city it was. God's word about it held true.

13:21 *And desert creatures will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; and the daughters of the ostrich will dwell there, and wild goats will leap about there.*

Desert creatures, owls, ostriches and wild goats move into the ruins. The Hebrew words for these animals aren't all certain, and some translations name them differently. Either way, the picture is clear: the palace of the world's proudest city becomes a home for wild animals. Revelation 18:2 uses the same kind of picture, calling fallen Babylon "a prison of every unclean spirit and a prison of every unclean and hated bird."

New Testament links: Revelation 18:2 (alluded to)

13:22 *And hyenas will cry out in its citadels, and jackals in the palaces of delight; and its time* ***is*** *near to come, and its days will not be prolonged.*

Hyenas howl in the towers and jackals live in the palaces. Then the last line: "its time is near to come." For Isaiah's first readers, this was more than a century away. But from God's point of view it was near. God's clock doesn't run the same as ours (2 Peter 3:8). The judgment of the proud may seem slow, but it always comes on time.

Chapter 13 Summary

Isaiah begins his messages against the nations with Babylon. God musters an army from far away, names the Medes, and promises that the proud city will fall and become a haunt of wild animals. History confirms it: Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. and later became a ruin. But the oracle reaches beyond one city to the final Day of the LORD, when the sun and moon go dark and God punishes the whole world for its evil and pride.

The Oracles Against the Nations (Isaiah 13-23)

Babylon (13:1-14:23); Assyria (14:24-27); Philistia (14:28-32); Moab (15-16); Damascus and Ephraim (17); Cush (18); Egypt (19-20).

The Wilderness of the Sea, Babylon again (21:1-10); Edom, called Dumah (21:11-12); Arabia (21:13-17); Jerusalem, the Valley of Vision (22); Tyre (23).

The Medes (13:17): A people from the mountains northeast of Babylon. Joined with the Persians under Cyrus, they took Babylon in 539 B.C.

Chaldeans (13:19): The people who ruled Babylon in its last great age, under kings like Nebuchadnezzar.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What city or place have you visited that seemed impressive and permanent?
2. Who does God say He is calling to carry out His anger on Babylon? (13:3-5)
3. What is the Day of the LORD, and how does Isaiah describe it? (13:6-9)
4. How does Jesus use the language of verse 10 in Matthew 24:29? (13:10)
5. What sin does God single out for punishment in verse 11? (13:11)
6. Which nation does God name, and how was this prophecy fulfilled? (13:17; Daniel 5:30-31)
7. What does Isaiah say Babylon will become? (13:19-22)
8. Where do you see pride at work in our world, and where do you see it in yourself?
9. How should knowing that the Day of the LORD is coming shape the way you live this week?

Chapter 14: The Fallen Star

Scripture: The Taunt Against the King of Babylon

14:1-2 For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and will give them rest on their land; and the sojourner will join himself to them, and they will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them as an inheritance on the land of the LORD as male servants and female servants; and they will be captors of their captors, and they will have dominion over their oppressors.

14:3-11 And it will be in the day the LORD gives you rest from your pain and from your turmoil and from the hard labor with which you were made to labor, that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, "How the oppressor has ceased! The raging has ceased! The LORD has broken the staff of ***the*** wicked, the scepter of rulers, which struck peoples in wrath, a blow without ceasing, which had dominion over nations in anger, a persecution without restraint. All the earth is at rest, it is quiet; they break forth ***into*** a shout of joy. The cypresses also rejoice over you, the cedars of Lebanon: 'Since you lay down, the cutter does not come up against us.' Sheol beneath is stirred up over you to meet your coming; it rouses the shades for you, all the leaders of the earth; it has raised from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All of them will answer and say to you, 'You also have been made weak as we; you have become like us.' Your pride has been brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; under you maggots are spread as a bed, and worms ***are*** your covering.

14:12-21 How you have fallen from heaven, O shining one, son of dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! And you said in your heart, 'I will ascend ***to*** the heavens; above the stars of God I will raise my throne; and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the remotest parts of ***the*** north. I will ascend above the high places of the cloud; I will make myself like the Most High.' Yet you are brought down to Sheol, to the remotest parts of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you; they will consider you ***closely***: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who made kingdoms shake, who made the world like the wilderness, and tore down its cities, ***who*** did not open ***the way*** home for his prisoners?' All the kings of the nations, all of them, lie in glory, each in his house. And you have been cast out from your tomb like an abhorred branch, ***like*** the clothing of the slain, pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a trampled corpse. You will not be joined with them in burial, for you have ruined your land, you have slain your people. The offspring of evildoers will never be named. Prepare a place of slaughter for his sons because of the iniquity of their fathers; let them not rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world ***with*** cities."

14:22-23 "And I will rise up against them," declares the LORD of armies, "and I will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and descendant and posterity," declares the LORD. "And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD of armies.

14:24-27 The LORD of armies has sworn, saying, "Surely as I have intended, so it has happened; and as I have planned, it will stand: to break Assyria in My land, and on My mountains I will trample him; and his yoke will turn aside from on them, and his burden will turn aside from on his shoulder." This ***is*** the plan that is planned concerning all the earth, and this ***is*** the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the LORD of armies has planned, and who will frustrate ***it***? And His hand ***is*** the one stretched out, and who will turn it back?

14:28-32 In the year of the death of King Ahaz this oracle came: Do not rejoice, Philistia, all of you, that the rod of the one who struck you is broken; for from the root of the snake a viper will come forth, and its fruit ***will be*** a flying serpent. And the firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy will lie down in security; and I will put your root to death by famine, and it will slay your remnant. Wail, O gate! Cry out, O city! Melt away, Philistia, all of you! For from the north smoke is coming, and ***there is*** no straggler in his ranks. And what will one answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, and in it the afflicted of His people will take refuge.

Chapter 14 Preview

Chapter 14 opens with mercy. God will have compassion on Israel and bring them home. Then Israel sings a mocking song over the fallen king of Babylon, who wanted to climb above the stars of God and ended up among the worms.

Many Bible readers see something deeper in this song, the pride and fall of Satan himself. The chapter ends with two short oracles: God's sworn plan to break Assyria, and a warning to Philistia not to celebrate too soon.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1 *For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and will give them rest on their land; and the sojourner will join himself to them, and they will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.*

Before the taunt comes the reason for it. Babylon falls because God has compassion on Jacob. He will "again choose Israel." God's choice of Israel wasn't canceled by their sin. He disciplined them, but He didn't throw them away.

"The sojourner will join himself to them." Foreigners will attach themselves to Israel and to Israel's God. Ruth the Moabitess did this long before (Ruth 1:16). After the exile, some Gentiles joined the returning Jews. In the end, people from every nation will be joined to God's people through the Messiah (Ephesians 2:12-13).

14:2 *And peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them as an inheritance on the land of the LORD as male servants and female servants; and they will be captors of their captors, and they will have dominion over their oppressors.*

The tables turn completely. The nations that once carried Israel off will now carry them home. Those who ruled over Israel will serve them. The return from Babylon under Cyrus was a first

taste of this, when the Persian king himself paid to send the Jews home and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). But I believe the full picture waits for the Messiah's kingdom, when Israel is restored and the nations come to Jerusalem (Isaiah 60:10-14).

14:3-4 *And it will be in the day the LORD gives you rest from your pain and from your turmoil and from the hard labor with which you were made to labor, that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, "How the oppressor has ceased! The raging has ceased!*

God will give His people rest from pain, turmoil and hard labor. When that day comes, they will "take up this proverb against the king of Babylon," a mocking song over the fallen tyrant.

"How the oppressor has ceased." The song opens with relief. The man who terrorized the world is finished. This isn't personal revenge. It's God's people rejoicing that He has ended evil. Revelation 18:20 calls heaven to rejoice in the same way over fallen Babylon at the end.

Notice that verse 4 tells us plainly who this song is about: "the king of Babylon." Whatever else we see in it, we start there.

14:5-6 *The LORD has broken the staff of **the** wicked, the scepter of rulers, which struck peoples in wrath, a blow without ceasing, which had dominion over nations in anger, a persecution without restraint.*

The LORD has broken the staff and scepter of the wicked ruler. This king struck peoples "in wrath, a blow without ceasing," and persecuted them without restraint. Babylon in its glory carried off whole peoples, Judah among them. Its kings thought their rod would never break. But God broke it, and He did it easily, like snapping a stick.

14:7-8 *All the earth is at rest, it is quiet; they break forth **into** a shout of joy. The cypresses also rejoice over you, the cedars of Lebanon: 'Since you lay down, the cutter does not come up against us.'*

When the tyrant falls, the whole earth breathes again. People burst into song. Even the trees join in. The cypress and the cedars of Lebanon say, "the cutter does not come up against us." Conquering kings cut the forests of Lebanon for their buildings and their wars. Sennacherib even boasted of it (Isaiah 37:24). Now the forests rest too. When evil is removed, all creation benefits (Romans 8:21).

14:9 *Sheol beneath is stirred up over you to meet your coming; it rouses the shades for you, all the leaders of the earth; it has raised from their thrones all the kings of the nations.*

Now the scene moves underground, to Sheol. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave and the world beyond it. The spirits of dead kings stir and rise from their thrones to meet the newcomer. This is poetry, but it is poetry built on truth. The dead are conscious (Luke 16:22-24), and earthly rank means nothing there.

14:10-11 *All of them will answer and say to you, 'You also have been made weak as we; you have become like us.' Your pride has been brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; under you maggots are spread as a bed, and worms **are** your covering.*

The dead kings greet him with a mocking question: you have become weak like us? All his pomp and music have gone down into the grave with him. His bed is maggots, and his blanket is worms.

It is a grim picture, and it is meant to be. The man who slept in a palace now lies in decay. Every human ruler, no matter how great, ends here unless God raises him. Our only hope beyond the grave is the One who rose from it.

14:12 *How you have fallen from heaven, O shining one, son of dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!*

"How you have fallen from heaven, O shining one." The Hebrew words here are helel ben shachar, "shining one, son of dawn." That is the bright morning star we see low in the east just before sunrise. It shines brighter than anything else in the early sky, and then the sun comes up and it disappears.

Who is this verse about? First and plainly, it is about the king of Babylon. Verse 4 says so: "you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon." Verses 16-20 describe a man with a body and a grave. He shone brightly for a while, then fell and was cut down to the earth.

So how did a verse about a Babylonian king come to be read as a verse about Satan? It happened over several centuries. Early church writers made the link first. Tertullian, writing in the early 200s, applied the boasts of verses 13 and 14 to the devil (Against Marcion, Book 5, chapter 17). Some years later Origen quoted this very verse, applied it to the devil, and tied it to Jesus' words in Luke 10:18: "I was watching Satan fall like lightning out of heaven" (On First Principles, Book 1, chapter 5).

Around A.D. 400, Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. That translation is called the Vulgate. For "shining one" he used the Latin word lucifer, which means "light bringer." In Jerome's day that was simply the everyday Latin name for the morning star, not anyone's name. The same Latin Bible uses that word in 2 Peter 1:19, where the morning star rising in our hearts points to Christ. But because so many readers already took Isaiah 14 to be about the devil, the common word slowly turned into a proper name, Lucifer. The King James Version of 1611 kept it: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" That is why most English speakers know the devil by that name today. The SLB goes back to the plain meaning, "shining one."

The early writers had reasons for seeing a second layer. The language goes beyond any human king. Who else fell from heaven because of pride? Revelation 12:9 says the great dragon, "the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan," was thrown down to the earth. Ezekiel 28:12-17 does something similar with the king of Tyre, speaking of one who was "in Eden, the garden of God."

I read it both ways, in order. The king of Babylon is the first meaning. Behind him stands the spirit who drives every proud empire, Satan himself. The pride of the king is a copy of the pride of the devil, and his fall is a preview of the devil's final fall (Revelation 20:10).

New Testament links: Luke 10:18 (alluded to)

14:13 *And you said in your heart, 'I will ascend **to** the heavens; above the stars of God I will raise my throne; and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the remotest parts of **the** north.*

"You said in your heart." The sin began in the heart, where no one could see it. Count the "I will" statements in verses 13 and 14. There are five. I will ascend. I will raise my throne. I will sit on the mount of assembly. I will ascend above the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High.

"The mount of assembly" was where the ancient peoples imagined the gods met, far in the north. Psalm 48:2 calls Mount Zion, God's own dwelling, "the far sides of the north." This king wanted to take God's seat.

That is the root of all sin. Satan wanted God's place. He tempted Eve with the same offer: "you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). Every time we insist on running our own lives without God, we are echoing those words.

New Testament links: Matthew 11:23 (alluded to); Luke 10:15 (alluded to); 2 Thessalonians 2:4 (alluded to)

14:14 *I will ascend above the high places of the cloud; I will make myself like the Most High.'*

"I will make myself like the Most High." This is the peak of pride. It isn't wanting to be like God in character, holy and loving. It is wanting God's throne without God's heart.

Compare Jesus. He was equal with God, yet He "emptied Himself, having taken the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:6-7). The devil grasped at a throne he didn't have. Jesus laid down glory He truly had. The devil was cast down. Jesus was raised up and given "a name, the one above every name" (Philippians 2:9). The way up in God's kingdom is down.

New Testament links: Matthew 11:23 (alluded to); Luke 10:15 (alluded to); 2 Thessalonians 2:4 (alluded to)

14:15 *Yet you are brought down to Sheol, to the remotest parts of the pit.*

"Yet." One word ends five boasts. You wanted heaven, but you will be thrust down to Sheol, "to the remotest parts of the pit." He wanted the heights of the north and gets the depths of the grave. God doesn't argue with pride. He simply brings it down. For Satan, the final place is the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

New Testament links: Matthew 11:23 (alluded to); Luke 10:15 (alluded to)

14:16-17 *Those who see you will stare at you; they will consider you **closely**: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who made kingdoms shake, who made the world like the wilderness, and tore down its cities, **who** did not open **the way** home for his prisoners?'*

Those who see him stare and wonder. Is this the man who shook kingdoms? Who turned the world into a wilderness and never let his prisoners go home?

The phrase "Is this the man" reminds us that, at the first level, this is a human king. Babylon's kings didn't let captives go. It took God's judgment on Babylon to send Judah home. The great terror of the world turns out to be a man, small and weak like everyone else.

14:18-19 *All the kings of the nations, all of them, lie in glory, each in his house. And you have been cast out from your tomb like an abhorred branch, **like** the clothing of the slain, pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a trampled corpse.*

Other kings at least lie in honor, each in his own tomb. This king is denied even that. He is thrown out like a rejected branch, left among the slain, trampled like a corpse on the battlefield. In the ancient world, being refused a proper burial was the final disgrace. The man who wanted a throne above the stars doesn't even get a grave.

14:20 *You will not be joined with them in burial, for you have ruined your land, you have slain your people. The offspring of evildoers will never be named.*

Why is he refused burial with the other kings? Because "you have ruined your land, you have slain your people." His cruelty reached even his own nation. Tyrants always end up destroying their own people too. "The offspring of evildoers will never be named." His name and family line will be forgotten.

14:21 *Prepare a place of slaughter for his sons because of the iniquity of their fathers; let them not rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world **with** cities."*

His sons are to be cut down so they can't rise and take over the earth. This sounds harsh to us. But the point is that Babylon's empire won't rise again under his descendants. God is ending a dynasty that filled the earth with violence. Babylon's royal line did come to an end when the city fell in 539 B.C.

14:22 *"And I will rise up against them," declares the LORD of armies, "and I will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and descendant and posterity," declares the LORD.*

Now God speaks directly, and He repeats His name for emphasis: "declares the LORD of armies." He will cut off from Babylon its name, its survivors and its descendants. When God rises against a city, nothing is left to carry on its pride.

14:23 *"And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD of armies.*

Babylon will become a swamp, home to the hedgehog (or porcupine). God will "sweep it with the broom of destruction," and the greatest city on earth is swept away like dust from a floor. Babylon was built on the Euphrates and surrounded by canals. In later centuries the city was abandoned, and its site became a waste.

14:24 *The LORD of armies has sworn, saying, "Surely as I have intended, so it has happened; and as I have planned, it will stand:*

Now Isaiah turns from Babylon, far in the future, to Assyria, the threat right in front of him. God has "sworn." When God takes an oath, there is no stronger promise (Hebrews 6:17-18). What He intends happens. What He plans will stand. Babylon's fall was certain, and so is Assyria's. The near fulfillment would prove that the far one would come true too.

14:25 *to break Assyria in My land, and on My mountains I will trample him; and his yoke will turn aside from on them, and his burden will turn aside from on his shoulder."*

"To break Assyria in My land." God would crush Assyria not far away, but right in Judah, on His mountains. That is exactly what happened in 701 B.C. Sennacherib's army surrounded Jerusalem, and in one night the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (Isaiah 37:36). The yoke came off Judah's shoulders, just as 10:27 promised.

14:26 *This **is** the plan that is planned concerning all the earth, and this **is** the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.*

God's plan isn't only for Assyria. It is a plan "planned concerning all the earth," and His hand is "stretched out over all the nations." The same phrase that warned Israel in chapters 9 and 10 now covers the world. What God did to Assyria is a sample of what He will do to every nation that sets itself against Him.

14:27 *For the LORD of armies has planned, and who will frustrate **it**? And His hand **is** the one stretched out, and who will turn it back?*

"Who will frustrate it?" Isaiah asks two questions, and the answer to both is no one. No one can cancel God's plan, and no one can push back His hand. For believers that's a real comfort, because if God has planned your salvation and your future (Romans 8:28-30), no enemy can undo it.

14:28 *In the year of the death of King Ahaz this oracle came:*

A new oracle begins, and Isaiah dates it: "the year of the death of King Ahaz." Ahaz was the faithless king of chapter 7, who trusted Assyria instead of God. Most scholars date his death somewhere between about 727 and 715 B.C. His son Hezekiah, a godly king, came to the throne.

14:29 *Do not rejoice, Philistia, all of you, that the rod of the one who struck you is broken; for from the root of the snake a viper will come forth, and its fruit* ***will be*** *a flying serpent.*

"Do not rejoice." The Philistines lived along the coast west of Judah and had been enemies of Israel since the days of Samson and David. Some rod that had struck them was broken, and they were celebrating. We aren't told for sure who the rod was, perhaps a king of Judah or a king of Assyria who had died.

Isaiah warns them not to celebrate. From the serpent's root will come a viper, and from it a "flying serpent," a fiery, darting snake. A worse attacker is coming. Philistia was trading a bad master for a worse one.

14:30 *And the firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy will lie down in security; and I will put your root to death by famine, and it will slay your remnant.*

"And the firstborn of the poor will graze." God's poor and needy people will be fed and lie down safely. But Philistia's root will die of famine, and its survivors will be killed. This is the pattern all through Scripture: the humble are lifted up, and the proud are brought down (Luke 1:52-53).

14:31 *Wail, O gate! Cry out, O city! Melt away, Philistia, all of you! For from the north smoke is coming, and* ***there is*** *no straggler in his ranks.*

"Wail, O gate! Cry out, O city!" Smoke rises from the north, the dust and fires of an advancing army. And "there is no straggler in his ranks." This army is disciplined and complete, with no one lagging behind. That fits Assyria, which marched against the Philistine cities more than once. Isaiah 20:1 records one such attack, when Assyria took the Philistine city of Ashdod.

14:32 *And what will one answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, and in it the afflicted of His people will take refuge.*

"What will one answer the messengers of the nation?" Messengers had come to Jerusalem, probably from Philistia, hoping Judah would join them against Assyria. What should Judah say?

Here is the answer: "the LORD has founded Zion," and His afflicted people will find refuge there. Judah's safety was in God, not in alliances. That is still the answer for us. When people offer us security in every place but the Lord, our reply is the same. God is our refuge.

Chapter 14 Summary

God will have compassion on Israel and bring His people home. Then they will taunt the fallen king of Babylon, who wanted to rise above the stars of God and was thrown down to the pit with no grave. Behind that proud king, many see the fall of Satan, the original rebel. God swears that Assyria will be broken in His land, a plan no one can frustrate. Philistia is warned not to rejoice, because the LORD alone is Zion's refuge.

Sheol and the Pit (14:9-15)

Sheol: The Hebrew word for the place of the dead. It can mean simply the grave, or the realm where the spirits of the dead await judgment. The New Testament uses the Greek word Hades in the same way (Revelation 20:13).

The Pit: Another name for the grave and the depths of Sheol (14:15, 19).

Shining one (14:12): Hebrew "Helel," the bright morning star. The Latin Bible and the King James Version translated it "Lucifer."

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Have you ever watched someone who seemed unstoppable suddenly fall? What did you learn from it?

2. What does God promise to do for Israel before the taunt begins? (14:1-2)

3. Whom is the taunt plainly directed against? (14:4)

4. How do the dead kings in Sheol greet the king of Babylon? (14:9-11)

5. What five "I will" statements are in verses 13-14, and what do they reveal? (14:13-14)

6. Why do many see Satan behind this passage? (14:12-15; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:9)

7. What does God swear to do to Assyria, and who can stop Him? (14:24-27)

8. Where do you hear the voice of "I will" pride in your own heart?

9. What is one messenger offering you false security, and how can you answer it with verse 32?

Chapter 15: Moab Weeps

Scripture: The Oracle Concerning Moab

15:1-4 The oracle of Moab: For in a night Ar of Moab was devastated, it was cut off; for in a night Kir of Moab was devastated, it was cut off. He has gone up ***to*** the house and ***to*** Dibon, ***to*** the high places, for weeping; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab wails; on all its heads ***is*** baldness, every beard ***is*** clipped. In its streets they have girded on sackcloth; on its roofs and in its open squares all of it wails, going down in weeping. And Heshbon cries out, and Elealeh; their voice is heard as far as Jahaz. Therefore the armed ***men*** of Moab shout; its soul trembles within it.

15:5-9 My heart cries out for Moab; its fugitives ***flee*** as far as Zoar, ***to*** Eglath-shelishiyah. For the ascent of Luhith, with weeping he goes up on it; for ***on*** the road of Horonaim they rouse a cry of shattering. For the waters of Nimrim are desolations; for the grass has dried up, the vegetation has wasted away, ***there*** is no greenery. Therefore the abundance ***that*** it has made and their stored goods they carry off over the wadi of the willows. For the cry has gone around the territory of Moab; its wailing ***is*** as far as Eglaim, and its wailing ***is at*** Beer-elim. For the waters of Dimon are full of blood; for I will put added ***things*** on Dimon: for the escaped of Moab a lion, and for the remnant of the land.

Chapter 15 Preview

Chapters 15 and 16 are a message about Moab, Israel's neighbor across the Dead Sea. Chapter 15 is a lament. City after city is struck in a single night, and the whole land fills with weeping.

What stands out is the prophet's own heart. Isaiah doesn't gloat over Moab's ruin. He says, "My heart cries out for Moab." God's judgment is real, but He takes no pleasure in it, and neither should we.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *The oracle of Moab: For in a night Ar of Moab was devastated, it was cut off; for in a night Kir of Moab was devastated, it was cut off.*

"For in a night Ar of Moab was devastated." The disaster comes suddenly. Ar and Kir were two of Moab's chief cities. Kir was a fortress city, probably the same as Kir-hareseth in 16:7. Both are ruined overnight.

Who were the Moabites? They descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:36-37), and lived on the high plateau east of the Dead Sea. They were relatives of Israel, but often enemies. Yet Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David, was a Moabitess. God's dealings with Moab were never simple hatred.

15:2 *He has gone up **to** the house and **to** Dibon, **to** the high places, for weeping; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab wails; on all its heads **is** baldness, every beard **is** clipped.*

The people go up "to the house," the temple of their god, and to Dibon, to the high places, to weep. Their god was Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7), and in their distress they ran to his shrines. But Chemosh couldn't help them.

Dibon was a leading town of Moab. A famous stone inscription from about the 800s B.C., set up by Mesha king of Moab and known as the Moabite Stone, was found there in the 1800s. Nebo and Medeba were towns on the plateau. Shaved heads and cut beards were signs of deep mourning in that world. The whole nation is grieving.

15:3 *In its streets they have girded on sackcloth; on its roofs and in its open squares all of it wails, going down in weeping.*

Sackcloth was rough, dark cloth made of goat hair, worn in times of grief or repentance. The Moabites wear it in the streets. They wail on their rooftops and in their town squares, "going down in weeping." Isaiah paints a picture of a people who have lost everything at once. No place is untouched, from private rooftops to public squares.

15:4 *And Heshbon cries out, and Elealeh; their voice is heard as far as Jahaz. Therefore the armed **men** of Moab shout; its soul trembles within it.*

Heshbon and Elealeh were cities in the north of Moab's territory. Their cry carries all the way to Jahaz. Even the soldiers, the "armed men of Moab," cry out. When the warriors are weeping, there is no one left to defend the land. "Its soul trembles within it." Moab's courage is gone.

15:5 *My heart cries out for Moab; its fugitives **flee** as far as Zoar, **to** Eglath-shelishiyah. For the ascent of Luhith, with weeping he goes up on it; for **on** the road of Horonaim they rouse a cry of shattering.*

"My heart cries out for Moab." This is the voice of the prophet, and through him we hear the heart of God. Isaiah is announcing judgment on a foreign, idol-worshiping nation, yet he grieves for them.

Jeremiah would later say almost the same thing about Moab (Jeremiah 48:31-36). And Jesus wept over Jerusalem even as He announced its coming destruction (Luke 19:41-44). God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). When we talk about judgment, our hearts should be broken, not hard.

The refugees flee south toward Zoar, the same town where Lot once fled from Sodom (Genesis 19:22). They climb the road of Luhith weeping and cry out on the road to Horonaim.

15:6 *For the waters of Nimrim are desolations; for the grass has dried up, the vegetation has wasted away,* ***there*** *is no greenery.*

The waters of Nimrim, probably a stream in southern Moab, have dried up. The grass is withered, and nothing green is left. Some think the invaders stopped up the springs, as armies sometimes did (2 Kings 3:25). Either way, the land itself mourns. When people turn from God, even the ground can suffer with them.

15:7 *Therefore the abundance* ***that*** *it has made and their stored goods they carry off over the wadi of the willows.*

The refugees carry what wealth they can across "the wadi of the willows," probably a stream on Moab's southern border, the way out toward Edom. Everything they worked to gather and store up is now a bundle on their backs. Jesus warned about storing up treasure on earth, where it can be lost (Matthew 6:19-20). Moab learned that lesson the hard way.

15:8 *For the cry has gone around the territory of Moab; its wailing* ***is*** *as far as Eglaim, and its wailing* ***is at*** *Beer-elim.*

The cry of distress goes around the whole border of Moab, from Eglaim to Beer-elim. The locations aren't certain, but the point is plain. The weeping reaches from one end of the country to the other. No corner of Moab escapes.

15:9 *For the waters of Dimon are full of blood; for I will put added* ***things*** *on Dimon: for the escaped of Moab a lion, and for the remnant of the land.*

The waters of Dimon are "full of blood." Dimon is Dibon, spelled here in a way that sounds like "dam," the Hebrew word for blood. It is a grim wordplay. The river runs red.

Even this isn't the end. God says, "I will put added things on Dimon:" a lion on the survivors. Whether the lion is a real beast or a picture of another conquering army, the warning is the same. Those who escape one judgment while refusing to turn to God will meet another. Moab's only safe place was the one it wouldn't go to, the God of Israel. Chapter 16 will show that refuge.

Chapter 15 Summary

Isaiah's message about Moab begins with a lament. In a single night Moab's cities are ruined. The people run to their idol's shrines, shave their heads, put on sackcloth and weep in the streets. Refugees flee south carrying what they can, the waters dry up, and the river runs with blood. Yet the most striking voice in the chapter is the prophet's, who cries out in grief for Moab even as he announces its judgment.

Places in Moab (Isaiah 15-16)

Ar and Kir (15:1): Two of Moab's chief cities. Kir is probably Kir-hareseth (16:7), called Kir-haresh in 16:11, Moab's fortress capital.

Dibon (15:2): A leading town north of the Arnon River, where the Moabite Stone was found.

Nebo (15:2): A town named for the mountain where Moses viewed the promised land before he died (Deuteronomy 34:1).

Heshbon (15:4): Once the capital of Sihon king of the Amorites (Numbers 21:26), later held by Moab.

Zoar (15:5): The small town where Lot fled from Sodom (Genesis 19:22), at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

Arnon (16:2): The river gorge that runs west into the Dead Sea through the middle of Moab.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. When was the last time you cried over bad news that happened to someone else?

2. How quickly does disaster come on Moab? (15:1)

3. Where do the people of Moab go first in their grief? (15:2)

4. Who is weeping in verse 4, and why does that matter? (15:4)

5. How does Isaiah himself feel about Moab's judgment? (15:5)

6. What happens to the land and to the wealth of Moab? (15:6-7)

7. What does God mean by "I will put added things on Dimon" in verse 9? (15:9)

8. How can we speak honestly about God's judgment while keeping a broken heart for people?

9. Who is someone far from God that you could pray for this week with the heart Isaiah shows here?

Chapter 16: The Pride of Moab

Scripture: Refuge in Zion and the Throne of David

16:1-5 Send a lamb ***to*** the ruler of the land, from Sela toward the wilderness, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion. And it will be ***that*** like a fluttering bird, a nest sent away, ***so*** the daughters of Moab will be ***at*** the fords of the Arnon. Bring counsel, make a decision; make your shade like the night in the middle of noon; hide the outcasts; do not expose the fugitive. Let my outcasts sojourn among you, Moab; be a shelter to them from before the destroyer. For the oppressor has come to an end, devastation has ceased, the trampler is consumed from the land. And a throne will be established in steadfast love, and he will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David, judging and seeking justice and swift ***in*** righteousness.

16:6-12 We have heard the pride of Moab, ***it is*** very proud, its haughtiness and its pride and its arrogance; its empty boasts ***are*** not right. Therefore Moab will wail for Moab; all of it will wail. For the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth you will moan, utterly stricken. For the fields of Heshbon have withered, the vine of Sibmah; the lords of the nations have struck down its choice vines; they reached as far as Jazer, they wandered ***into*** the wilderness; its shoots were spread out, they passed over ***the*** sea. Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer ***for*** the vine of Sibmah; I drench you ***with*** my tears, Heshbon and Elealeh; for over your summer fruit and over your harvest the shouting has fallen. And gladness and rejoicing will be removed from the fruitful field, and in the vineyards it will not be sung, it will not be shouted; the treader will not tread wine in the winepresses; I have made the shouting cease. Therefore my inward parts sound like the lyre for Moab, and my inner being for Kir-haresh. And it will be, when it is seen that Moab has wearied itself on the high place, and it comes to its sanctuary to pray, that it will not prevail.

16:13-14 This ***is*** the word which the LORD spoke concerning Moab long ago. And now the LORD has spoken, saying, "In three years, like the years of a hired laborer, the glory of Moab will be held in contempt with all the great multitude, and a remnant ***will be*** small, very little, not mighty."

Chapter 16 Preview

The message about Moab continues. Moab's refugees are told where to find help: send tribute to Jerusalem and seek shelter with the house of David. In the middle of this, Isaiah sees a throne established in steadfast love, with a righteous Judge from David's line.

But Moab's pride stands in the way. Its vineyards are trampled, its songs fall silent, and its prayers to its idol go unanswered. Then God sets a deadline: within three years, Moab's glory will be brought low.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1 *Send a lamb **to** the ruler of the land, from Sela toward the wilderness, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion.*

"Send a lamb to the ruler of the land." Moab was known for its flocks. Years earlier, Mesha king of Moab paid Israel's king a yearly tribute of a hundred thousand lambs (2 Kings 3:4). Isaiah tells Moab to send lambs again, this time to Jerusalem, "the mountain of the daughter of Zion."

Sela means "rock." It was a rock fortress in Edom, south of Moab, where Moab's refugees may have fled. From there they are to send their gifts to Judah. The message is that Moab should humble itself and seek the protection of David's house. Safety for Moab lies in Zion.

16:2 *And it will be **that** like a fluttering bird, a nest sent away, **so** the daughters of Moab will be **at** the fords of the Arnon.*

Moab's women are like birds pushed out of the nest, fluttering at the fords of the Arnon, the great river gorge in the middle of Moab. They are trying to cross to escape. It is a picture of helplessness. When the nest is gone, little birds have nowhere to go. That is how Moab looks without God.

16:3 *Bring counsel, make a decision; make your shade like the night in the middle of noon; hide the outcasts; do not expose the fugitive.*

These are the words of Moab's refugees to Judah, or perhaps Isaiah's counsel to Judah on their behalf. "Bring counsel, make a decision." Cast your shadow over us like night at high noon, hiding us from the burning sun. "Hide the outcasts; do not expose the fugitive."

It is a plea for mercy. God's law told Israel to care for the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:19). Even an old enemy in distress should be sheltered.

16:4 *Let my outcasts sojourn among you, Moab; be a shelter to them from before the destroyer. For the oppressor has come to an end, devastation has ceased, the trampler is consumed from the land.*

"Let my outcasts sojourn among you." Moab asks Judah to be a hiding place. Then the verse looks ahead to a time when the oppressor is gone, destruction has ceased, and the extortioners have disappeared from the land.

This verse prepares us for verse 5. The final answer to oppression was never going to be a stronger human army; it's a righteous King.

16:5 *And a throne will be established in steadfast love, and he will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David, judging and seeking justice and swift **in** righteousness.*

This is the heart of the chapter. In the middle of a message about Moab, Isaiah sees a throne.

"A throne will be established in steadfast love." "Steadfast love" translates the Hebrew word "hesed," God's loyal, covenant love that never lets go. This throne is built on that love. The one who sits on it is faithful. He sits "in the tent of David," the royal house of David.

He seeks justice and is "swift in righteousness," quick to do what is right. No king of Isaiah's day fit this description completely. I believe it points to the Messiah, the same King we met in 9:7 and 11:1-5. Amos 9:11 promises that God will raise up "the booth of David that is falling," and James quotes that promise in Acts 15:16 about Gentiles coming to Christ.

Here is the beauty of it. Moab's refuge isn't only Jerusalem. It is the King who will sit on David's throne. Jesus is that refuge for anyone, from any nation, who will come to Him.

16:6 *We have heard the pride of Moab,* ***it is*** *very proud, its haughtiness and its pride and its arrogance; its empty boasts* ***are*** *not right.*

"We have heard the pride of Moab." Here is why Moab doesn't take the offer. Isaiah piles up the words: pride, haughtiness, arrogance. Moab's pride was famous. Jeremiah 48:29 repeats nearly the same charge. Its "empty boasts are not right," talk with nothing behind it.

Pride kept Moab from bowing to the house of David. It still keeps people from coming to the Son of David. It is hard to ask for shelter when you won't admit you need it.

16:7 *Therefore Moab will wail for Moab; all of it will wail. For the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth you will moan, utterly stricken.*

So Moab will wail. Everyone in Moab will wail. They will moan for the "raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth," a delicacy made from pressed grapes, and perhaps used in worship of their gods. The small luxuries people take for granted are the first things missed when judgment comes. Kir-hareseth was Moab's fortress capital.

16:8 *For the fields of Heshbon have withered, the vine of Sibmah; the lords of the nations have struck down its choice vines; they reached as far as Jazer, they wandered* ***into*** *the wilderness; its shoots were spread out, they passed over* ***the*** *sea.*

Moab's vineyards were famous. Heshbon's fields and Sibmah's vines once spread so far that their branches reached Jazer, stretched into the desert, and crossed toward the sea. Now foreign rulers, "the lords of the nations," have trampled down the best clusters. The pride of Moab's economy is crushed under enemy feet.

16:9 *Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer* ***for*** *the vine of Sibmah; I drench you* ***with*** *my tears, Heshbon and Elealeh; for over your summer fruit and over your harvest the shouting has fallen.*

"Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer." Again the speaker weeps for Moab. Is it Isaiah, or is it God speaking through him? The next verse says "I have made the shouting cease," which sounds like God Himself. I believe the grief here is God's own, carried in His prophet's voice. He drenches Heshbon and Elealeh with tears. The harvest shouts have stopped.

16:10 *And gladness and rejoicing will be removed from the fruitful field, and in the vineyards it will not be sung, it will not be shouted; the treader will not tread wine in the winepresses; I have made the shouting cease.*

In Moab, the grape harvest was a time of singing and celebrating. Workers trod the grapes with their feet in stone presses, shouting and singing as they worked. Now there is no joy, no singing, no treading. "I have made the shouting cease." God has stopped the party.

Jeremiah 48:33 says the same thing. Joy that isn't rooted in God can be taken away in a single season.

16:11 *Therefore my inward parts sound like the lyre for Moab, and my inner being for Kir-haresh.*

"Therefore my inward parts sound like the lyre for Moab, and my inner being for Kir-haresh." A lyre's strings vibrate with a low, mournful sound. That is how the speaker's heart trembles for Moab and Kir-haresh. Once again we see that God's judgments aren't cold. He is just, and He grieves. If God grieves over a proud pagan nation, how much more does He care for the person reading this page?

16:12 *And it will be, when it is seen that Moab has wearied itself on the high place, and it comes to its sanctuary to pray, that it will not prevail.*

Moab goes to its high place, its hilltop shrine, and wears itself out praying to Chemosh. But "it will not prevail." The prayers go nowhere, because there is no one there to hear.

Compare Elijah on Mount Carmel, when the prophets of Baal cried out all day and "there was no one answering" (1 Kings 18:26). Idols can't answer prayer. Moab had a living God offering shelter in Zion, and it chose an idol that couldn't even hear.

16:13 *This **is** the word which the LORD spoke concerning Moab long ago.*

This verse tells us that the message so far was given earlier, perhaps years before. God had already spoken about Moab. Some think Isaiah was taking up an older prophecy. Either way, God's word about Moab stood, and now it was about to come due.

16:14 *And now the LORD has spoken, saying, "In three years, like the years of a hired laborer, the glory of Moab will be held in contempt with all the great multitude, and a remnant **will be** small, very little, not mighty."*

"In three years, like the years of a hired laborer." A hired worker counts his years exactly. He doesn't work one day more than his contract says. So God sets a precise deadline. In three years, Moab's glory will be humbled, its large population will shrink, and the few left will be "small, very little, not mighty."

We aren't told the exact year this was spoken, so we can't pin down the date of its fulfillment. But Moab did fall under Assyrian power, and in time Moab disappeared as a people. God's timetable is

exact, even when we don't know every date. God set Moab's three years, and He has set the day of Christ's return (Acts 17:31).

Chapter 16 Summary

Moab's refugees are urged to send tribute to Jerusalem and seek shelter with the house of David. Isaiah sees a throne established in steadfast love, where a faithful Judge from David's line will sit, a picture of the Messiah. But Moab's pride keeps it from seeking refuge. Its vineyards are trampled, its harvest songs fall silent, and its prayers to its idol fail. God weeps over Moab, and He sets a deadline of three years for its humbling.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Have you ever needed to ask someone you didn't get along with for help? What was that like?

2. Where is Moab told to send its tribute, and why there? (16:1)

3. What does Moab ask Judah to do for its outcasts? (16:3-4)

4. Describe the throne and the Judge in verse 5. Who do you believe this points to? (16:5)

5. What sin keeps Moab from finding refuge? (16:6)

6. What happens to Moab's vineyards and harvest celebrations? (16:8-10)

7. Why does Moab's prayer at its high place fail? (16:12)

8. Is there any area of pride that keeps you from asking God, or others, for help?

9. How does knowing that Jesus is a refuge for people from every nation change the way you see those who are far from Him?

Chapter 17: Damascus and Ephraim

Scripture: The Oracle Concerning Damascus

17:1-3 The oracle of Damascus: Look, Damascus is about to be removed from ***being*** a city, and it will be a heap of ruin. The cities of Aroer ***will be*** abandoned; they will be for flocks, and they will lie down, and ***there will be*** none who terrifies ***them***. And the fortress will cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they will be like the glory of the sons of Israel, declares the LORD of armies.

17:4-6 And it will be in that day ***that*** the glory of Jacob will become low, and the fatness of his flesh will be made lean. And it will be like the gathering of the harvest of standing grain, and his arm reaps the ears of grain; and it will be like one who gathers ears of grain in the valley of Rephaim. And gleanings will be left in it like the beating of an olive tree, two ***or*** three olives at the top of the highest branch, four ***or*** five on the branches of the fruit-bearing ***tree***, declares the LORD, the God of Israel.

17:7-11 In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel. And he will not look to the altars, the work of his hands; and what his fingers have made he will not regard, either the Asherah poles or the incense altars. In that day his strong cities will be like the forsaken ***place*** of the forest and the treetop which they abandoned because of the sons of Israel; and it will be a desolation. For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and the rock of your stronghold you have not remembered; therefore you plant pleasant plantings, and you sow it ***with*** the vine branch of a stranger. In the day of your planting you make ***it*** grow, and in the morning you make your seed sprout; a heap ***is*** the harvest in a day of sickness and incurable pain.

17:12-14 Woe ***to*** the tumult of many peoples; they roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rumbling of nations; they rumble like the rumbling of mighty waters. Nations rumble like the rumbling of many waters, and He will rebuke it, and it will flee far away, and it will be chased like the chaff of the mountains before a wind and like whirling dust before a storm wind. At evening time, and look, sudden terror! Before morning it is no more. This ***is*** the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who despoil us.

Chapter 17 Preview

This oracle is addressed to Damascus, the capital of Syria (Aram), but it quickly turns to Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel. The two had joined forces against Judah in chapter 7, and now they fall together.

Yet even here God leaves a few olives on the tree, a small remnant who will turn from their idols and look to the Holy One of Israel. At the very end many nations roar against God's people, and the Lord scatters them like chaff overnight.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1 *The oracle of Damascus: Look, Damascus is about to be removed from **being** a city, and it will be a heap of ruin.*

"Look, Damascus is about to be removed from being a city." Damascus was the capital of Syria, just northeast of Israel. Its king, Rezin, had joined with Israel to attack Judah (Isaiah 7:1). God promised then that this alliance would fail.

It did. In 732 B.C. the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III captured Damascus, killed Rezin, and carried its people away (2 Kings 16:9). Syria's kingdom ended.

Damascus was rebuilt later, and it is a major city today. Because of that, some Bible teachers believe this verse still waits for a final fulfillment, when Damascus will become a complete ruin. Here is how I read it. The prophecy came true plainly in 732 B.C., when Damascus fell and ceased to be a royal capital. Like many oracles in Isaiah, it may also have a future layer. I hold that part loosely, and I would warn against tying it to any headline.

17:2 *The cities of Aroer **will be** abandoned; they will be for flocks, and they will lie down, and **there will be** none who terrifies **them**.*

Aroer was the name of more than one town east of the Jordan. Its mention shows the ruin spreading beyond Damascus into the lands around it. Its cities become pasture land where flocks lie down without anyone to scare them away. When people are gone, animals move in. Isaiah used the same kind of picture for Babylon (13:20-21).

17:3 *And the fortress will cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they will be like the glory of the sons of Israel, declares the LORD of armies.*

Now Ephraim is named with Damascus. The fortified city of Ephraim is Samaria. Damascus and Ephraim stood together against Judah, and they will fall together. "They will be like the glory of the sons of Israel." In other words, Syria's glory will fade the same way Israel's will. The alliance that seemed so strong becomes a shared ruin. Samaria fell to Assyria in about 722 B.C., ten years after Damascus.

17:4 *And it will be in that day **that** the glory of Jacob will become low, and the fatness of his flesh will be made lean.*

"The glory of Jacob will become low." Isaiah now speaks directly about Israel, the northern kingdom. Its glory will grow thin, like a strong man who wastes away until his body is skin and bone. The northern kingdom had been rich and proud under kings like Jeroboam II. That prosperity had made them forget God (Amos 6:1-6). Now it would melt away.

17:5 *And it will be like the gathering of the harvest of standing grain, and his arm reaps the ears of grain; and it will be like one who gathers ears of grain in the valley of Rephaim.*

Isaiah pictures a harvest. The reaper gathers the standing grain in his arm and cuts it down. Then gleaners walk the field picking up whatever was left. The valley of Rephaim, just southwest of Jerusalem, was known for its fields. Isaiah's hearers could picture it. Israel will be harvested by the enemy, its people carried away like sheaves.

17:6 *And gleanings will be left in it like the beating of an olive tree, two **or** three olives at the top of the highest branch, four **or** five on the branches of the fruit-bearing **tree**, declares the LORD, the God of Israel.*

"And gleanings will be left in it." Here is grace in the middle of judgment. When olives were harvested, workers beat or shook the tree. A few olives always stayed on the highest branches, out of reach. Two or three here, four or five there.

That is the remnant again. God never wipes out His people completely. Even when the northern kingdom fell, some remained, and some of them later came south to worship at Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day (2 Chronicles 30:11). God always keeps a few. Paul says that in his own day too there was "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5).

17:7 *In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel.*

"In that day man will look to his Maker." This is the goal of judgment. The survivors will finally look to the One who made them. They will lift their eyes to "the Holy One of Israel."

Sometimes God has to take everything else away before we look up. That can feel harsh, but it's mercy. A shepherd will sometimes do whatever it takes to bring a straying sheep back to the fold.

17:8 *And he will not look to the altars, the work of his hands; and what his fingers have made he will not regard, either the Asherah poles or the incense altars.*

Turning to God means turning from idols. The remnant will stop looking to the altars they made with their own hands. The "Asherah poles" were wooden poles or images set up to honor Asherah, a Canaanite goddess. Incense stands were used in false worship too.

The point is simple. You can't look to your Maker and to the things you made at the same time. Paul praised the Thessalonians because they "turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

17:9 *In that day his strong cities will be like the forsaken **place** of the forest and the treetop which they abandoned because of the sons of Israel; and it will be a desolation.*

Israel's strong cities will be like abandoned places in the forest. Isaiah may be reminding them of how the Canaanites once abandoned their cities when Israel came into the land under Joshua. Now Israel is the one fleeing, and its own towns are left empty. "It will be a desolation." What God gave, He can take away when it is used to dishonor Him.

17:10 *For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and the rock of your stronghold you have not remembered; therefore you plant pleasant plantings, and you sow it **with** the vine branch of a stranger.*

"For you have forgotten the God of your salvation." Here is the reason for everything. Israel forgot. God was their salvation and "the rock of your stronghold," and they didn't remember Him.

So they planted "pleasant plantings" and set out "the vine branch of a stranger." Many think this describes gardens planted in honor of foreign gods, perhaps fertility gods. They looked to these gods for a good harvest instead of the LORD. Forgetting God always leads to replacing Him with something else.

17:11 *In the day of your planting you make **it** grow, and in the morning you make your seed sprout; a heap **is** the harvest in a day of sickness and incurable pain.*

They worked hard at their pagan gardens. They fenced them carefully and got them to bloom quickly. But "a heap is the harvest in a day of sickness and incurable pain."

Galatians 6:7-8 says that whatever a man sows, he will reap. Israel sowed to false gods and reaped grief. The things we plant in place of God may bloom quickly, but they never bring the harvest they promise.

17:12 *Woe **to** the tumult of many peoples; they roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rumbling of nations; they rumble like the rumbling of mighty waters.*

"Woe to the tumult of many peoples." Now the tone shifts. Isaiah hears a great noise, nations roaring like the sea, rushing like mighty waters. In the Bible the sea often stands for the restless nations of the world (Revelation 17:15).

In Isaiah's day this was the Assyrian army, made up of soldiers from many conquered nations, flooding toward Judah. Isaiah used the same picture in 8:7-8, where Assyria is a river overflowing its banks.

17:13 *Nations rumble like the rumbling of many waters, and He will rebuke it, and it will flee far away, and it will be chased like the chaff of the mountains before a wind and like whirling dust before a storm wind.*

The nations rumble on, but God simply rebukes them, and they run. They are chased away like chaff blown off the hills by the wind, or like dust whirled up by a storm.

Chaff is the light husk of grain. When farmers tossed grain into the air, the wind carried the chaff away. All the power of the nations is like that before God. Psalm 1:4 says the wicked "are like the chaff which the wind drives away." The armies that seem unstoppable are weightless in His hand.

17:14 *At evening time, and look, sudden terror! Before morning it is no more. This* ***is*** *the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who despoil us.*

"Before morning it is no more." At evening there is terror, but by morning the enemy is gone. This came true exactly in 701 B.C. At night the Assyrian army camped around Jerusalem, a terror to everyone inside. In the morning, 185,000 of them lay dead (Isaiah 37:36).

I also believe this points ahead. At the end of the age, the nations will gather against Jerusalem once more (Zechariah 14:2-3; Revelation 19:19). And once more, the Lord will destroy them, this time when Christ returns.

"This is the portion of those who plunder us." God's people may be plundered for a night. But the night doesn't last. As Psalm 30:5 says, "at the morning, a shout of joy."

Chapter 17 Summary

God announces that Damascus will become a ruin, and Ephraim, its ally, will fall with it. This came true when Assyria took Damascus in 732 B.C. and Samaria about ten years later. Israel's glory fades like a harvested field, yet a few olives are left on the tree. That remnant will turn from their idols to their Maker. Israel fell because it forgot the God of its salvation. The last verses show roaring nations rushing against God's people, gone before morning.

Names in Isaiah 17

Damascus: The capital of Syria, northeast of Israel. Captured by Assyria in 732 B.C.

Syria (Aram): The kingdom of the Arameans, with its capital at Damascus. Its king Rezin allied with Israel against Judah (7:1).

Ephraim: The largest tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel, often used as a name for the whole kingdom. Its capital Samaria fell to Assyria in about 722 B.C.

Asherah poles (17:8): Wooden poles or images honoring Asherah, a Canaanite goddess.

Valley of Rephaim (17:5): A fertile valley just southwest of Jerusalem.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. What is something you once forgot that turned out to matter a great deal?
2. What happened to Damascus, and when did it come true? (17:1-3)
3. How does Isaiah picture Israel's fading glory? (17:4-5)
4. What do the olives left on the tree represent? (17:6)
5. What will the survivors stop looking to, and whom will they look to instead? (17:7-8)
6. What is the root reason Isaiah gives for Israel's ruin? (17:10)

7. How does God deal with the roaring nations, and how did this come true? (17:12-14; 37:36)

8. What "pleasant plantings" are you tempted to tend in place of God?

9. What night of trouble are you in right now, and how does verse 14 give you hope for the morning?

Chapter 18: Cush

Scripture: A Message to the Land Beyond the Rivers

18:1-3 Woe, land of the whirring of wings, which ***is*** beyond the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by the sea, and in vessels of papyrus on the face of the waters: "Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared from it and onward, a nation of strength, strength, and trampling, whose land the rivers divide." All inhabitants of the world and dwellers of ***the*** earth, when a banner is lifted up ***on the*** mountains, you will see ***it***, and when a trumpet is blown, you will hear ***it***.

18:4-7 For thus the LORD said to me, "I will be quiet, and I will look on from My dwelling place, like dazzling heat upon light, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." For before harvest, when the bud is finished, and the blossom becomes a ripening grape, then He will cut off the shoots with the pruning knives, and the tendrils He will remove, He will cut away. They will be left together for the birds of prey of the mountains and for the beasts of the earth; and the birds of prey will spend the summer on it, and every beast of the earth will spend the winter on it. At that time a gift will be brought to the LORD of armies ***from*** a people tall and smooth-skinned, and from a people feared from it and onward, a nation of strength, strength, and trampling, whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of the LORD of armies, Mount Zion.

Chapter 18 Preview

Envoys from Cush, a strong nation far to the south of Egypt, are traveling up and down the Nile looking for allies against Assyria. Isaiah sends them home with a message of his own.

God isn't anxious about Assyria. He sits quietly and watches, and at the right moment He will cut the enemy down like a vinedresser pruning a vine. One day this distant people will bring gifts to the LORD on Mount Zion.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1 *Woe, land of the whirring of wings, which **is** beyond the rivers of Cush,*

"Woe, land of the whirring of wings." Isaiah turns to Cush, the land south of Egypt along the upper Nile, roughly where Sudan is today. Older Bibles call it Ethiopia. The "whirring of wings" may be the swarms of insects that country was known for, or the fast boats that skimmed its rivers. Either way, Isaiah is speaking to a real nation, far from Jerusalem, that God still sees.

18:2 *which sends envoys by the sea, and in vessels of papyrus on the face of the waters: "Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared from it and onward, a nation of strength, strength, and trampling, whose land the rivers divide."*

In Isaiah's day kings from Cush ruled Egypt as well, and they sent envoys by river and sea in light boats made of papyrus reeds. Most scholars believe these messengers had come to Jerusalem

looking for partners against Assyria, the great empire to the north and east (in what is now Iraq) that was swallowing nation after nation.

"Go, swift messengers." Isaiah sends them back. The people of Cush were tall, smooth-skinned, and feared in battle, and Isaiah describes them with respect. But Judah's safety wouldn't come from a treaty with Cush. It would come from the LORD.

18:3 *All inhabitants of the world and dwellers of **the** earth, when a banner is lifted up **on the** mountains, you will see **it**, and when a trumpet is blown, you will hear **it**.*

Now Isaiah speaks to the whole world. A banner was a flag raised on a pole to rally soldiers, and the trumpet called them to battle. When God acts, no one will miss it. I believe this was seen first in Assyria's sudden defeat, and it looks ahead to the day when the great trumpet sounds and every eye sees Christ return (Matthew 24:30-31).

18:4 *For thus the LORD said to me, "I will be quiet, and I will look on from My dwelling place, like dazzling heat upon light, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."*

"I will be quiet, and I will look on from My dwelling place." While the nations rush around making alliances, God sits still and watches. He is like the steady heat of the sun or the dew in harvest time, quiet but always there. Why doesn't God move right away? The Bible doesn't give a full answer here. What it does show is that God sees, He's in control, and He acts at the right time. If you're waiting on Him today, His quiet isn't His absence.

18:5 *For before harvest, when the bud is finished, and the blossom becomes a ripening grape, then He will cut off the shoots with the pruning knives, and the tendrils He will remove, He will cut away.*

Isaiah draws a picture from the vineyard. Just when the grapes are about to ripen, the vinedresser cuts off the shoots and spreading branches. Assyria's plans looked ready for harvest, and then God cut them off. That happened in 701 B.C., when the angel of the LORD struck the Assyrian army camped against Jerusalem (37:36).

18:6 *They will be left together for the birds of prey of the mountains and for the beasts of the earth; and the birds of prey will spend the summer on it, and every beast of the earth will spend the winter on it.*

The cut branches are left on the ground for the birds and wild animals through summer and harvest. It is a picture of a fallen army whose dead lie unburied in the field. This is sober language, and it should be. Those who set themselves against God's purpose won't stand, however strong they look today.

18:7 *At that time a gift will be brought to the LORD of armies **from** a people tall and smooth-skinned, and from a people feared from it and onward, a nation of strength, strength, and trampling, whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of the LORD of armies, Mount Zion.*

"A gift will be brought to the LORD of armies." Isaiah closes this oracle on hope. "LORD of armies" means He is the commander of heaven. The same tall, feared people will one day bring gifts to Mount Zion. I believe this points to the Millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, when the nations come to Jerusalem to worship the King (Zephaniah 3:10; Zechariah 14:16). We see a first taste of it in Acts 8:26-39, when an official from Ethiopia reads Isaiah and believes in Jesus.

Chapter 18 Summary

Isaiah answers the envoys of Cush, who had come seeking allies against Assyria. He tells the whole world to watch for God's signal. The LORD waits quietly, and just before Assyria's plans ripen He cuts them down like branches in a vineyard, leaving the fallen for the birds and beasts. In the end, this distant and powerful nation will bring gifts of honor to the LORD of armies on Mount Zion.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. When you face a threat, who are the first people you call for help?
2. Where was Cush, and what were its messengers doing? (18:1-2)
3. What does God tell the whole world to watch and listen for? (18:3)
4. How does God describe the way He waits and watches? (18:4)
5. What does the picture of pruning the vine tell us about God's timing? (18:5-6)
6. What will the people of Cush one day bring to Mount Zion? (18:7)
7. How does Acts 8:26-39 give us an early picture of this promise? (18:7)
8. Is there an area of your life where God seems quiet right now? How does this chapter help you wait?
9. What "alliance" are you tempted to trust more than God this week?

Chapter 19: Egypt

Scripture: The Oracle Concerning Egypt

19:1-4 The oracle of Egypt: Look, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud, and He is coming ***to*** Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble before Him, and the heart of Egypt will melt within it. And I will stir up Egypt against Egypt, and they will fight, each against his brother and each against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom. And the spirit of Egypt will be emptied out within it, and its counsel I will swallow up; and they will seek the idols and the mutterers and the mediums and the spiritists. And I will hand over Egypt into the hand of a cruel master, and a strong king will rule over them, declares the Lord, the LORD of armies.

19:5-10 And the waters will be dried up from the sea, and the river will become parched and will be dry. And the rivers will stink; the streams of Egypt will become low and will dry up; reed and rush will wither. The bare places by the Nile, by the mouth of the Nile, and all the sown land of the Nile will be dry; it is driven away, and it is no more. And the fishermen will lament, and all who cast a hook into the Nile will mourn, and those who spread a net on the face of the waters will languish. And the workers of combed flax will be ashamed, and those who weave white cloth. And its foundations will be crushed; all who work for wages ***will be*** grieved of soul.

19:11-15 The officials of Zoan ***are*** only fools; the wise ones of the counselors of Pharaoh ***give*** senseless counsel. How will you say to Pharaoh, "I ***am*** a son of the wise, a son of kings of old"? Where ***are*** they, then, your wise ones? And let them tell you, please, and let them know what the LORD of armies has planned against Egypt. The officials of Zoan have become fools; the officials of Memphis have been deceived; they have led Egypt astray, the cornerstone of its tribes. The LORD has mixed within it a spirit of distortion, and they have led Egypt astray in all its work, as a drunkard staggers in his vomit. And ***there*** will not be for Egypt a work which head and tail, palm branch and bulrush, can do.

19:16-22 In that day Egypt will be like women, and it will tremble and be in dread because of the waving of the hand of the LORD of armies, which He is waving over it. And the land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone to whom one mentions it will be in dread because of the plan of the LORD of armies which He is planning against it. In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan and swearing to the LORD of armies; one will be called City of Destruction. In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the middle of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD beside its border. And it will become a sign and a witness to the LORD of armies in the land of Egypt; for they will cry out to the LORD because of oppressors, and He will send them a savior and a defender, and he will rescue them. And the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt, and Egypt will know the LORD in that day; and they will serve ***with*** sacrifice and grain offering, and they will vow a vow to the LORD and will pay ***it***. And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; and they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them, and He will heal them.

19:23-25 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt toward Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria; and Egypt will serve with Assyria. In that day Israel will be a

third to Egypt and to Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of armies will bless, saying, "Blessed ***be*** My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and My inheritance Israel."

Chapter 19 Preview

Egypt was the old superpower to Judah's south, and many in Jerusalem wanted to lean on it for protection. In this chapter God shows how little Egypt can really offer. Its idols, its leaders, its river, and its wise men all fail.

Then the chapter takes a turn that few readers expect. Egypt itself will one day know the LORD, build Him an altar, and stand beside Assyria and Israel as His people.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1 *The oracle of Egypt: Look, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud, and He is coming **to** Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble before Him, and the heart of Egypt will melt within it.*

"The oracle of Egypt." An oracle is a solemn message from God, often a message of judgment. Isaiah pictures the LORD riding a swift cloud into Egypt. Egypt worshiped many gods, and here every one of them trembles before the real God. The idols can't protect the people who made them. Their hearts melt like wax.

19:2 *And I will stir up Egypt against Egypt, and they will fight, each against his brother and each against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.*

God's first judgment on Egypt is civil war. Brother fights brother and city fights city. History records long stretches when Egypt was divided among rival rulers in this period. When people turn from God, they often turn on one another, and a nation that looks strong from outside can crumble from within.

New Testament links: Matthew 24:7 (alluded to); Mark 13:8 (alluded to); Luke 21:10 (alluded to)

19:3 *And the spirit of Egypt will be emptied out within it, and its counsel I will swallow up; and they will seek the idols and the mutterers and the mediums and the spiritists.*

When their courage fails, the Egyptians run to idols, the spirits of the dead, mediums, and spiritists. God says He will confuse their plans. This is a sad pattern we still see. When people won't seek the living God, they look for answers in dark places, and those answers only add to their confusion (compare 8:19).

19:4 *And I will hand over Egypt into the hand of a cruel master, and a strong king will rule over them, declares the Lord, the LORD of armies.*

"A cruel master." Egypt will be handed over to a harsh king. Bible teachers suggest different rulers here. Assyria's king Esarhaddon conquered Egypt and took Memphis about 671 B.C., and other

foreign kings ruled it after him. I take this as plainly fulfilled in that run of foreign conquest. Egypt, the land Judah trusted, couldn't even keep itself free.

19:5 *And the waters will be dried up from the sea, and the river will become parched and will be dry.*

Egypt's whole life depended on the Nile. Its yearly flood watered the fields, and without it the land is desert. Here God says the river itself will dry up. "The sea" in this verse most likely means the Nile, which was so wide that it was sometimes called a sea. The God who made the river can stop it.

19:6 *And the rivers will stink; the streams of Egypt will become low and will dry up; reed and rush will wither.*

The canals that carried water out to the fields start to stink, and the reeds and rushes along the banks rot. Egypt's farming was built on an elaborate network of channels. When the water drops, the whole system turns foul. What people build their security on can become the very thing that fails them.

19:7 *The bare places by the Nile, by the mouth of the Nile, and all the sown land of the Nile will be dry; it is driven away, and it is no more.*

The fields planted along the riverbanks dry up and blow away. These fields fed the nation, and Egypt even sold grain to other lands. When the Nile fails, the breadbasket is empty. Egypt's pride in its rich land would turn to loss.

19:8 *And the fishermen will lament, and all who cast a hook into the Nile will mourn, and those who spread a net on the face of the waters will languish.*

Next Isaiah turns to the fishermen. Fishing on the Nile was a large trade that fed many families. With low water there are no fish, and those who cast lines and nets sit down and mourn. God's judgment reaches into ordinary jobs and ordinary homes.

19:9 *And the workers of combed flax will be ashamed, and those who weave white cloth.*

Egypt was famous for its fine white linen, woven from flax that grew along the river. Without water, no flax grows, and the linen workers have nothing to work with. One failure leads to the next. When God withholds His blessing, the effects ripple out through a whole economy.

19:10 *And its foundations will be crushed; all who work for wages* ***will be*** *grieved of soul.*

"Its foundations will be crushed." The "foundations" are probably the leaders and the wealthy who held society up. Even they are crushed, and the hired workers at the bottom grieve too. No class of people is spared. Judgment touches the top and the bottom alike.

19:11 *The officials of Zoan **are** only fools; the wise ones of the counselors of Pharaoh **give** senseless counsel. How will you say to Pharaoh, "I **am** a son of the wise, a son of kings of old"?*

Zoan was a city in the Nile delta where Pharaoh's officials gathered. Egypt was proud of its wisdom, and its advisers boasted of their long family lines of wise men and ancient kings. Isaiah calls their counsel stupid. Human wisdom that leaves God out ends in foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:20).

19:12 *Where **are** they, then, your wise ones? And let them tell you, please, and let them know what the LORD of armies has planned against Egypt.*

Isaiah asks a pointed question: "Where are they, then, your wise ones?" If they are so wise, let them explain what the LORD of armies has planned for Egypt. They can't. Only God knows the future, and only those to whom He reveals it can speak of it. That is still true of anyone who claims to read the future apart from God.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 1:20 (alluded to)

19:13 *The officials of Zoan have become fools; the officials of Memphis have been deceived; they have led Egypt astray, the cornerstone of its tribes.*

Memphis was Egypt's ancient capital. The leaders of both great cities have been fooled. Those who should have been the cornerstone, holding the nation together, have led it astray instead. When leaders lose their way, the people follow them into trouble.

19:14 *The LORD has mixed within it a spirit of distortion, and they have led Egypt astray in all its work, as a drunkard staggers in his vomit.*

"A spirit of distortion." God Himself has given Egypt over to confusion. The picture is ugly on purpose: a drunk staggering in his own vomit. This is what happens when God lets people have their way. He gives them over to the confusion they chose (Romans 1:28).

19:15 *And **there** will not be for Egypt a work which head and tail, palm branch and bulrush, can do.*

Head or tail, palm branch or bulrush, high or low, no one in Egypt can get anything done. The same picture is used of Israel in 9:14-15. Every effort fails. Without God's blessing, all our labor comes to nothing (Psalm 127:1).

19:16 *In that day Egypt will be like women, and it will tremble and be in dread because of the waving of the hand of the LORD of armies, which He is waving over it.*

"In that day." Here the chapter shifts from poetry to prose, and "in that day" appears six times in verses 16-25. Egypt will tremble when the LORD waves His hand over it, the way He once stretched out His hand over Egypt in the days of Moses (Exodus 14:16, 26). Fear is the first step. It won't be the last.

19:17 *And the land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone to whom one mentions it will be in dread because of the plan of the LORD of armies which He is planning against it.*

In Isaiah's day tiny Judah was no threat to Egypt. But one day even the name of Judah will make Egypt afraid, because of what the LORD is planning. The fear here is about Judah's God, not Judah's army. When Egypt hears of Judah, it will remember the God who acts on Judah's behalf.

19:18 *In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan and swearing to the LORD of armies; one will be called City of Destruction.*

Five cities in Egypt will speak "the language of Canaan," which is Hebrew, and swear loyalty to the LORD. One will be called the City of Destruction. Some ancient copies of Isaiah read "City of the Sun," which would be Heliopolis, a center of sun worship. If that reading is right, a city known for false worship becomes a city of true worship. Readers differ on the details here, but whichever reading is right, the point is plain: Egypt will turn to the LORD.

19:19 *In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the middle of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD beside its border.*

An altar in the middle of Egypt and a pillar at its border are signs that the land belongs to the LORD. Abraham and Jacob set up altars and pillars to mark where God had met them (Genesis 12:7; 28:18). Egypt, the old house of slavery, will become a place of worship.

19:20 *And it will become a sign and a witness to the LORD of armies in the land of Egypt; for they will cry out to the LORD because of oppressors, and He will send them a savior and a defender, and he will rescue them.*

"A savior and a defender." When Egypt cries out under oppressors, God answers just as He answered Israel in the days of the judges. I believe the final Savior here is Jesus Christ. There is no other Savior who can bring a whole nation to know God (Acts 4:12). The Egyptians who cried out to idols in 19:3 now cry out to the LORD, and He hears them.

19:21 *And the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt, and Egypt will know the LORD in that day; and they will serve **with** sacrifice and grain offering, and they will vow a vow to the LORD and will pay **it**.*

God makes Himself known, and Egypt truly knows Him. They worship with sacrifice and offering and keep the vows they make. This is more than a nation being defeated. This is a nation being converted. I take this as describing the Millennium, when the nations worship the King in His kingdom (Zechariah 14:16-19).

19:22 *And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; and they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them, and He will heal them.*

"Striking and healing." God's discipline has a purpose. He strikes Egypt so that Egypt will return to Him, and when they return, He heals them. That is how God deals with us too. His correction is never meant to destroy His children but to bring us home (Hebrews 12:6, 11).

19:23 *In that day there will be a highway from Egypt toward Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria; and Egypt will serve with Assyria.*

A highway runs from Egypt to Assyria, the two great powers that fought over the land between them for centuries. In Isaiah's day armies marched on that road. In that day worshipers will travel on it together. Only God can turn old enemies into fellow worshipers. I believe this will be seen in Christ's thousand-year reign on earth.

19:24-25 *In that day Israel will be a third to Egypt and to Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of armies will bless, saying, "Blessed **be** My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and My inheritance Israel."*

Israel stands as the third partner with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the middle of the earth. This fulfills God's promise to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

"Blessed be My people Egypt." Listen to the words God uses. "My people" and "the work of My hands" were names for Israel, and here He gives them to Egypt and Assyria. Yet Israel is still "My inheritance." God brings the Gentiles in without throwing Israel out (Romans 11:1, 25-26). The gospel opens the door wide, and God keeps every promise He made to His people.

Chapter 19 Summary

The LORD comes to Egypt, and its idols tremble. Egypt is torn by civil war, handed to a cruel master, and struck by the drying of the Nile, which ruins its farms, fishing, and linen trade. Its proud wise men prove to be fools. But the chapter ends in hope. Egypt will fear the LORD, build Him an altar, cry out to Him, and be healed. A highway will join Egypt and Assyria in worship, with Israel as a blessing in the middle of the earth.

Places in Egypt

The Nile (19:5-8): The great river that flows north through Egypt to the Mediterranean. Its yearly flood watered the fields and made Egyptian life possible.

Zoan (19:11, 13): A city in the eastern Nile delta, also called Tanis. Pharaoh's officials and advisers gathered there.

Memphis (19:13): Egypt's ancient capital, just south of where Cairo is today.

Heliopolis (19:18): "City of the Sun," a center of sun worship near Memphis. Some ancient copies of Isaiah read this name in 19:18.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What do people in our culture tend to rely on when times get hard?
2. What happens to Egypt's idols when the LORD comes? (19:1-3)
3. How does the drying of the Nile affect every part of Egyptian life? (19:5-10)

4. What does Isaiah say about the wisdom of Pharaoh's advisers? (19:11-15)

5. What does Egypt do when it cries out to the LORD, and how does He answer? (19:19-22)

6. What do the words "striking and healing" teach about God's discipline? (19:22)

7. What is surprising about the names God gives to Egypt, Assyria, and Israel? (19:23-25)

8. Has God ever used a hard season in your life to bring you back to Him?

9. Is there someone you have written off as too far from God? How does this chapter change the way you pray for them?

Chapter 20: Naked and Barefoot

Scripture: A Sign Against Egypt and Cush

20:1-6 In the year of the coming of ***the*** supreme commander to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and captured it, at that time the LORD spoke by the hand of Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loosen the sackcloth from your waist, and take off your sandals from your feet." And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, "Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years ***as*** a sign and a portent against Egypt and against Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young men and old ***men***, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt. And they will be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and because of Egypt their boast. And the inhabitant of this coastland will say in that day, 'Look, thus ***is*** our hope, where we fled for help to be delivered from before the king of Assyria; and how will we ourselves escape?'"

Chapter 20 Preview

This short chapter is a living sermon. God tells Isaiah to take off his outer garment and sandals and walk that way for three years.

The strange sight has a plain meaning. Egypt and Cush, the nations Judah and its neighbors hoped would save them from Assyria, will themselves be led away as captives. Anyone who trusts in them will be put to shame.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1 *In the year of the coming of **the** supreme commander to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and captured it,*

Ashdod was one of the Philistine cities on the coast west of Judah. It rebelled against Assyria, counting on help from Egypt. Sargon II, king of Assyria, sent his commander, and Ashdod was captured. Most scholars date this to about 711 B.C. The name Sargon was once known only from this verse, and later digs uncovered his palace and records, which is a good reminder that the Bible's history can be trusted.

20:2 *at that time the LORD spoke by the hand of Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loosen the sackcloth from your waist, and take off your sandals from your feet." And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.*

"Loosen the sackcloth." Sackcloth was a rough garment worn by mourners and prophets. God tells Isaiah to take it off along with his sandals. "Naked" here most likely means stripped down to an undergarment, the way prisoners of war were marched away. Isaiah obeyed. He let his own life become the message, even when it cost him his dignity.

20:3 *And the LORD said, "Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years **as** a sign and a portent against Egypt and against Cush,*

Isaiah did this for three years. That is a long time to be a walking sign. Every day people in Jerusalem saw the prophet and remembered God's warning. God calls Isaiah "My servant," a title of honor. Faithfulness sometimes looks foolish to the watching world, but God sees and honors it.

20:4 *so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young men and old **men**, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt.*

Here is the meaning. The king of Assyria will lead away captives from Egypt and Cush, young and old, stripped and barefoot, in deep shame. In 671 B.C. Assyria's king Esarhaddon did conquer Egypt and took Memphis, and his son Ashurbanipal later pushed farther south. What Isaiah acted out came true.

20:5 *And they will be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and because of Egypt their boast.*

"Because of Cush their hope and because of Egypt their boast." People had placed their hope in Cush and made Egypt their boast. When those nations fall, everyone who trusted them is dismayed. This is the danger of putting our hope in anything other than God. When it fails, our hope fails with it.

20:6 *And the inhabitant of this coastland will say in that day, 'Look, thus **is** our hope, where we fled for help to be delivered from before the king of Assyria; and how will we ourselves escape?'"*

"This coastland" means the people living along the Mediterranean coast, including Philistia and, by extension, Judah. Their cry is the honest question of anyone whose false hope has collapsed: "How will we ourselves escape?" The answer Isaiah gives over and over is simple. Turn to the LORD. Only He can deliver (Psalm 20:7).

Chapter 20 Summary

When Assyria captured the Philistine city of Ashdod, God told Isaiah to walk stripped and barefoot for three years. His strange appearance was a sign that Assyria would lead the people of Egypt and Cush away as shamed captives. Those who had trusted Egypt and Cush for rescue would be dismayed and left asking how they could escape. The lesson is that only the LORD can be trusted to save.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. Have you ever been embarrassed for doing what you believed was right?
2. What was happening at Ashdod when God gave this message? (20:1)
3. What did God ask Isaiah to do, and for how long? (20:2-3)
4. What did Isaiah's appearance mean for Egypt and Cush? (20:4)

5. How did the people feel when the nations they trusted were defeated? (20:5)

6. What question do the people of the coastland finally ask? (20:6)

7. Why do you think God used a living sign instead of words alone? (20:2-4)

8. What "Egypt" are you tempted to lean on instead of God?

9. How could your own life be a visible message of trust in God this week?

Chapter 21: Babylon Has Fallen

Scripture: Oracles Concerning Babylon, Edom, and Arabia

21:1-5 The oracle of the wilderness of the sea: Like storm winds in the Negeb sweeping through, it comes from the wilderness, from a land to be feared. A harsh vision has been told to me: the traitor is acting treacherously, and the destroyer is destroying. Go up, Elam! Lay siege, Media! All its groaning I have made to cease. Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me like the pangs of ***a woman*** giving birth; I am bent over from hearing; I am terrified from seeing. My heart has wandered; shuddering has overwhelmed me; the twilight of my desire He has made into trembling for me. Arranging the table, spreading out the rug, eating, drinking! Arise, officials; anoint a shield!

21:6-10 For thus the Lord has said to me, "Go, station the watchman; what he sees, let him tell." And he will see a rider, a pair of horsemen, a rider of a donkey, a rider of a camel; and he will listen ***with*** attentiveness, great attentiveness. And he called out ***like*** a lion, "On a watchtower, Lord, I am standing continually by day, and at my post I am stationed all the nights. And look, this ***is*** coming: a rider, a man, a pair of horsemen." And he answered and said, "Babylon has fallen, has fallen, and all the carved images of her gods He has shattered to the ground." My threshed one, and the son of my threshing floor, what I have heard from the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, I have told to you.

21:11-12 The oracle of Dumah: ***One*** is calling to me from Seir, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman says, "Morning comes, and also night. If you will inquire, inquire; return, come."

21:13-17 The oracle against Arabia: In the thicket in Arabia you will lodge, caravans of Dedanites. To meet the thirsty bring water, inhabitants of the land of Tema; with his bread they have met the fugitive. For they have fled from before swords, from before a drawn sword, and from before a bent bow, and from before the weight of battle. For thus the Lord has said to me, "Within yet a year, like the years of a hired laborer, all the glory of Kedar will be finished. And the remnant of the number of the archers, the warriors of the sons of Kedar, will be few; for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken."

Chapter 21 Preview

Isaiah sees a vision so harsh that it makes him sick with dread. Armies from Elam and Media rise against a proud city that is busy feasting, and a lookout on the watchtower finally hears the cry, "Babylon has fallen, has fallen."

Two short messages follow. Someone from Edom calls out in the dark, asking how long the night will last, and the desert tribes of Arabia are warned that their glory will end within a year.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *The oracle of the wilderness of the sea: Like storm winds in the Negeb sweeping through, it comes from the wilderness, from a land to be feared.*

"The wilderness of the sea." This unusual title turns out to be Babylon, as verse 9 makes plain. Babylon sat on the Euphrates in the flat land of southern Mesopotamia, where the rivers and marshes spread out like a sea. The coming attack is like a desert windstorm sweeping in from the Negev, the dry land south of Judah. It is sudden and it is terrifying.

21:2 *A harsh vision has been told to me: the traitor is acting treacherously, and the destroyer is destroying. Go up, Elam! Lay siege, Media! All its groaning I have made to cease.*

God shows Isaiah a hard vision. The treacherous one keeps on betraying and the destroyer keeps on destroying, so God calls in the armies of Elam and Media. Elam lay east of Babylon, and the Medes lived to the northeast. In 539 B.C. Cyrus, king of Persia, with the Medes as his partners, took Babylon. I take this as a plain prophecy of that event, given well over a century ahead. God will end the groaning Babylon has caused.

21:3 *Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me like the pangs of* ***a woman*** *giving birth; I am bent over from hearing; I am terrified from seeing.*

Isaiah feels what he sees. His body is gripped with pain like a woman in labor, and he is so shaken he can hardly hear or see. A true prophet doesn't deliver God's judgment with a cold heart. Even when the judgment is deserved, it grieves him. That is a good word for us when we speak about God's judgment today.

21:4 *My heart has wandered; shuddering has overwhelmed me; the twilight of my desire He has made into trembling for me.*

"The twilight of my desire." Evening was meant to be a time of rest. Now the twilight brings only trembling. Isaiah's mind reels at what is coming. Some see in this the evening when Babylon fell, when the city went to bed feasting and woke up conquered.

21:5 *Arranging the table, spreading out the rug, eating, drinking! Arise, officials; anoint a shield!*

While danger is at the door, the leaders of Babylon set the table and eat and drink. Then comes the sudden order: "Arise, officials; anoint a shield!" Leather shields were oiled before battle so they wouldn't crack. Daniel 5 describes Babylon's last night, when King Belshazzar held a great feast and the city fell that same night (Daniel 5:30). The careless party ends in alarm.

21:6 *For thus the Lord has said to me, "Go, station the watchman; what he sees, let him tell."*

God tells Isaiah to post a lookout. A watchman stood on the city wall and reported whatever came down the road. Isaiah himself is in a sense that watchman, standing by to report what God shows him (Habakkuk 2:1). Every believer is called to stay alert in the same way (Mark 13:37).

21:7 *And he will see a rider, a pair of horsemen, a rider of a donkey, a rider of a camel; and he will listen **with** attentiveness, great attentiveness.*

The lookout is told what to watch for: riders, horsemen in pairs, and long lines of donkeys and camels. That is what an army on the march looked like, with its supplies carried behind. He must pay close attention. God's watchmen aren't allowed to doze at their post.

21:8 *And he called out **like** a lion, "On a watchtower, Lord, I am standing continually by day, and at my post I am stationed all the nights.*

"On a watchtower, Lord, I am standing continually by day." The lookout reports that he has kept his post day and night. Watching is hard, slow work. Most of the time nothing happens. But faithful waiting is part of the job. The church waiting for Christ's return knows something of this (Luke 12:37).

21:9 *And look, this **is** coming: a rider, a man, a pair of horsemen." And he answered and said, "Babylon has fallen, has fallen, and all the carved images of her gods He has shattered to the ground."*

At last the riders arrive with the news: "Babylon has fallen, has fallen." Her idols lie shattered on the ground. Babylon's gods couldn't save her.

"Babylon has fallen, has fallen." Nearly the same words ring out in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2 over the end-times Babylon. The real city fell in Isaiah's prophecy, and Revelation picks up the name for the final world system set against God. Both falls are certain because the same God has spoken.

New Testament links: Revelation 14:8 (alluded to); Revelation 18:2 (alluded to)

21:10 *My threshed one, and the son of my threshing floor, what I have heard from the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, I have told to you.*

"My threshed one, and the son of my threshing floor." Isaiah turns to his own people, who have been beaten like grain on a threshing floor. He tells them plainly what he has heard from the LORD of armies. The message about Babylon's fall is meant to comfort those who would one day suffer under Babylon. God tells His people the end of the story so they can endure the middle.

21:11 *The oracle of Dumah: **One** is calling to me from Seir, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?"*

"The oracle of Dumah." The Hebrew word here is Dumah, which sounds like the word for silence, and Seir is the mountain country of Edom, south and east of the Dead Sea. Someone calls out twice to the watchman, "What of the night?" It is the cry of a people living under the dark shadow of Assyria, wanting to know when the night will end.

21:12 *The watchman says, "Morning comes, and also night. If you will inquire, inquire; return, come."*

The watchman's answer is honest. Morning is coming, but so is night. Relief may come, but darkness will return. Then he adds an invitation: if you want to ask, ask, and come back again. I take this as a door left open. Edom is welcome to keep seeking. The only lasting morning comes to those who turn to the LORD.

21:13 *The oracle against Arabia: In the thicket in Arabia you will lodge, caravans of Dedanites.*

Now Isaiah speaks about Arabia, the desert lands east and south of Judah. The Dedanites were traders whose caravans crossed the desert. Instead of moving freely along their trade routes, they must hide for the night in the thickets. War has made even the open desert unsafe.

21:14 *To meet the thirsty bring water, inhabitants of the land of Tema; with his bread they have met the fugitive.*

The people of Tema, an oasis town in northern Arabia, are urged to bring water and bread to the fugitives. Hospitality to the stranger in need was a sacred duty in the desert. Even in a message of judgment there is a call to mercy. God still cares how we treat those who are running for their lives.

21:15 *For they have fled from before swords, from before a drawn sword, and from before a bent bow, and from before the weight of battle.*

The fugitives have fled from the sword, the bow, and the heat of battle. Isaiah doesn't name the army chasing them, but in his day Assyria pushed into Arabia more than once. War spares no one, not even the tribes who lived far from the great cities.

21:16-17 *For thus the Lord has said to me, "Within yet a year, like the years of a hired laborer, all the glory of Kedar will be finished. And the remnant of the number of the archers, the warriors of the sons of Kedar, will be few; for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken."*

Kedar was a powerful tribe of the Arabian desert, descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). Within a year, counted as exactly as a hired man counts the days of his contract, its glory will end and only a few of its archers will be left.

"The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken." The chapter closes with this seal. Babylon, Edom, and Arabia were far from Jerusalem and seemed out of Judah's reach, but none of them were out of God's reach. What He says, He does.

Chapter 21 Summary

Isaiah sees armies from Elam and Media rise against Babylon while its leaders feast. The vision fills him with pain. A lookout watches day and night until riders bring the news that Babylon has fallen and her idols are shattered, a message meant to comfort God's threshed people. A voice

from Edom asks how long the night will last and is told that morning and night both are coming. The tribes of Arabia are warned that Kedar's glory will end within a year.

The Nations in Chapter 21

Babylon (21:1-10): The great city on the Euphrates River. It fell to Cyrus of Persia and the Medes in 539 B.C. Revelation 17-18 later uses the name for the end-times world system.

Elam and Media (21:2): Elam lay east of Babylon in what is now southwest Iran. The Medes lived to the northeast. Both joined the Persians under Cyrus.

Edom and Seir (21:11-12): The land of Esau's descendants, south and east of the Dead Sea. Seir is its mountain range.

Dedan, Tema, and Kedar (21:13-17): Desert peoples of Arabia. Dedan was a trading people, Tema an oasis town, and Kedar a strong tribe descended from Ishmael.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. When you hear about a tragedy in the news, how does it affect you?

2. Why does Isaiah's vision make him feel like a woman in labor? (21:2-4)

3. What were Babylon's leaders doing when the attack came? (21:5)

4. What was the lookout told to watch for, and how faithfully did he watch? (21:6-8)

5. Where else in the Bible do we hear the words "Babylon has fallen, has fallen"? (21:9)

6. What does the watchman tell the one calling from Seir? (21:11-12)

7. What are the people of Tema asked to do for the fugitives? (21:13-15)

8. Jesus tells us to stay alert for His return. What does it look like for you to stand watch, like the lookout "on a watchtower"?

9. Is there someone running from trouble in your life who needs you to meet them with bread this week?

Chapter 22: The Valley of Vision

Scripture: Jerusalem's Careless Joy, and Two Stewards

22:1-4 The oracle of the valley of vision: What ***is the matter*** with you, then, that you have gone up, all of you, to the roofs? Full of noises, turbulent city, jubilant town, your slain ***are*** not slain by the sword, and not dead in battle. All your rulers have fled together; without the bow they have been captured; all who were found of you were captured together; they had fled far away. Therefore I said, "Look away from me; let me weep bitterly; do not insist on comforting me over the devastation of the daughter of my people."

22:5-11 For ***it is*** a day of tumult and trampling and confusion for the Lord GOD of armies in the valley of vision, a breaking down of a wall and a crying out to the mountain. And Elam took up a quiver, with chariots of men ***and*** horsemen; and Kir uncovered a shield. And it was ***that*** the choicest of your valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen surely took ***their*** stand toward the gate. And he uncovered the covering of Judah; and you looked in that day to the weapons of the House of the Forest. And you saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered the waters of the lower pool. And you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you pulled down the houses to fortify the wall. And you made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool; and you did not look to the One who made it, and the One who formed it long ago you did not see.

22:12-14 And the Lord GOD of armies called in that day for weeping and for mourning and for baldness and for girding on sackcloth. And look, joy and gladness, killing cattle and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." And the LORD of armies has revealed Himself in my ears: "Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die," says the Lord GOD of armies.

22:15-19 Thus says the Lord GOD of armies: "Go, come to this steward, to Shebna, who ***is*** over the house: What ***is*** yours here, and whom ***do*** you ***have*** here, that you have dug out a tomb for yourself here, digging out his tomb on high, cutting a dwelling for himself in the rock? Look, the LORD is about to hurl you away ***with*** a hurling, O man, and to grasp you firmly. He will surely wind you up ***in*** a winding, like a ball, into a land broad on both sides; there you will die, and there the chariots of your glory ***will be***, the disgrace of the house of your master. And I will push you from your office, and from your post He will tear you down.

22:20-25 And it will be in that day ***that*** I will summon My servant, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him ***with*** your tunic, and ***with*** your sash I will make him firm, and your authority I will put into his hand; and he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will put the key of the house of David on his shoulder; and he will open, and ***there will be*** none who shuts; and he will shut, and ***there will be*** none who opens. And I will drive him ***as*** a tent peg in a firm place, and he will become a throne of glory for the house of his father. And they will hang on him all the glory of the house of his father, the offspring and the offshoots, all the vessels of the small ***kind***, from the vessels of bowls even to all the vessels of jars. In that day, declares the LORD of armies, the tent peg that was driven in a firm place will be

removed; and it will be cut down and will fall, and the burden that ***was*** on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken."

Chapter 22 Preview

After messages to the nations around Judah, Isaiah turns the same warning on Jerusalem itself. The city is partying on its rooftops while an enemy army fills its valleys. The people work hard on their walls and water supply, but they never look to the God who made it all.

Then Isaiah turns to two officials of the royal palace. Proud Shebna will be thrown out of office, and faithful Eliakim will be given the key of the house of David.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1 *The oracle of the valley of vision: What **is the matter** with you, then, that you have gone up, all of you, to the roofs?*

"The valley of vision." Unlike the oracles around it, this one is about Jerusalem, the city where God gave Isaiah his visions, surrounded by valleys. The people have gone up on their flat rooftops. They may have been celebrating, or watching the enemy outside. Isaiah asks what is wrong with them.

22:2 *Full of noises, turbulent city, jubilant town, your slain **are** not slain by the sword, and not dead in battle.*

Jerusalem is noisy and full of excitement, yet Isaiah sees death. Those who died didn't fall bravely in battle. Many scholars think they died of hunger and disease during a siege, or while running away. A city can be loud with celebration and still be on the edge of ruin.

22:3 *All your rulers have fled together; without the bow they have been captured; all who were found of you were captured together; they had fled far away.*

The leaders run away together and are captured without a fight. When Babylon besieged Jerusalem, King Zedekiah and his soldiers fled by night and were caught near Jericho (2 Kings 25:4-6). I believe Isaiah may be looking past the crisis of his own day to that later fall in 586 B.C. Bible teachers differ on which event is in view here. Either way, leaders who should stand firm abandon their people.

22:4 *Therefore I said, "Look away from me; let me weep bitterly; do not insist on comforting me over the devastation of the daughter of my people."*

"Let me weep bitterly." While the city laughs, the prophet weeps. He asks to be left alone in his grief for "the daughter of my people." Jesus also wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). A heart close to God breaks over sin and its cost, even when everyone else is laughing.

22:5 *For **it is** a day of tumult and trampling and confusion for the Lord GOD of armies in the valley of vision, a breaking down of a wall and a crying out to the mountain.*

God has a day of panic, of being trampled, and of confusion in store for the valley of vision. The walls are broken down and cries for help echo off the mountains. The "Day of the LORD" in Isaiah means a time when God steps into history to judge. Here it comes to Jerusalem itself. God's own people aren't exempt from His discipline.

22:6 *And Elam took up a quiver, with chariots of men **and** horsemen; and Kir uncovered a shield.*

Elam and Kir were distant lands whose soldiers fought in the great armies of the day. Kir is where Assyria had sent the people of Damascus into exile (2 Kings 16:9). Archers, chariots, and shields are lined up against the city. Far-off nations are now at Jerusalem's door.

22:7 *And it was **that** the choicest of your valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen surely took **their** stand toward the gate.*

Jerusalem's best valleys are full of enemy chariots, and the horsemen take up their positions at the city gate. The land God gave to His people is now covered by foreign armies. The danger is no longer distant. It is at the gate.

22:8 *And he uncovered the covering of Judah; and you looked in that day to the weapons of the House of the Forest.*

"He uncovered the covering of Judah." God took away Judah's covering, and the people's first thought was weapons. They went to the armory in "the House of the Forest," the palace hall Solomon built with cedar from Lebanon, where shields were stored (1 Kings 7:2; 10:17). There is nothing wrong with being prepared. The problem was where their trust was placed.

22:9 *And you saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered the waters of the lower pool.*

They inspect the walls of the city of David and find many breaches. They gather water from the lower pool. These were sensible steps. A city under siege needs strong walls and water. Isaiah isn't mocking their work. He is getting ready to show us what they left out.

22:10 *And you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you pulled down the houses to fortify the wall.*

They count the houses of Jerusalem and tear some down to use the stones for the wall. Archaeologists have found a thick section of wall from this period in Jerusalem, built right over the remains of houses. It was a costly effort, and people gave up their homes for it.

22:11 *And you made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool; and you did not look to the One who made it, and the One who formed it long ago you did not see.*

They build a reservoir between two walls to store water. King Hezekiah also cut a tunnel through solid rock to bring water from the Gihon spring into the city (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). That tunnel can still be walked today.

"You did not look to the One who made it." Here is the heart of the chapter. They checked the walls, the water, and the weapons, but they never looked to God, who made the city and planned all of this long ago. We can do the same thing. We plan and prepare and forget to pray.

22:12 *And the Lord GOD of armies called in that day for weeping and for mourning and for baldness and for girding on sackcloth.*

In that day God called His people to weep, to mourn, to shave their heads, and to wear sackcloth. These were signs of grief and repentance. The right response to God's warning was to humble themselves. God was giving them a way back.

22:13 *And look, joy and gladness, killing cattle and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*

"Let us eat and drink." Instead of repenting, the people throw a party. They kill cattle and sheep, eat meat, and drink wine. Their motto is "tomorrow we die," so they live for today. Paul quotes this attitude in 1 Corinthians 15:32 and shows that it is how people live when they don't believe in the resurrection. Despair can look a lot like celebration.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 15:32 (quoted)

22:14 *And the LORD of armies has revealed Himself in my ears: "Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die," says the Lord GOD of armies.*

The LORD reveals to Isaiah that this sin won't be forgiven until they die. This is a hard word. I take it to mean that those who stubbornly refused God's call to repent, laughing at His warning, would carry their guilt to the grave. It is a serious reminder that there can come a point when the door of repentance is shut (Hebrews 3:15).

22:15 *Thus says the Lord GOD of armies: "Go, come to this steward, to Shebna, who **is** over the house:*

The message now narrows to one man. Shebna was the steward in charge of the royal household, one of the highest offices in the kingdom. God sends Isaiah to confront him. A whole city's sin has a face, and here it is a proud official.

22:16 *What **is** yours here, and whom **do** you **have** here, that you have dug out a tomb for yourself here, digging out his tomb on high, cutting a dwelling for himself in the rock?*

"What is yours here?" Shebna was carving an expensive tomb for himself high in the rock, a monument to his own name. While the nation was in danger, he was thinking about his legacy. Isaiah asks him who he thinks he is. Tombs from this time have been found cut into the hillside near Jerusalem.

22:17 *Look, the LORD is about to hurl you away **with** a hurling, O man, and to grasp you firmly.*

The LORD is about to grab Shebna and hurl him away. He wanted a permanent resting place, and God would give him no resting place at all. The man who planned to stay forever would be thrown out.

22:18 *He will surely wind you up **in** a winding, like a ball, into a land broad on both sides; there you will die, and there the chariots of your glory **will be**, the disgrace of the house of your master.*

God will roll him up like a ball and toss him into a wide country, and there he will die. His fine chariots will go with him into disgrace. He was supposed to bring honor to his master's house, and instead he brought shame. Pride always rides toward a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

22:19 *And I will push you from your office, and from your post He will tear you down.*

God removes Shebna from his office and pulls him down from his post. Later in Isaiah, at the time of the Assyrian crisis, Shebna appears as a scribe while Eliakim is over the household (36:3). It seems he was demoted. Positions of power are given by God, and He can take them away.

22:20 *And it will be in that day **that** I will summon My servant, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah,*

"My servant, Eliakim." God calls Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, to replace Shebna. The title "My servant" is a mark of honor. Shebna served himself. Eliakim would serve God and the people.

22:21 *and I will clothe him **with** your tunic, and **with** your sash I will make him firm, and your authority I will put into his hand; and he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.*

God will clothe Eliakim with Shebna's robe and sash, the uniform of his office, and give him Shebna's authority. Notice the phrase "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." That is what godly leadership looks like. It cares for people the way a good father cares for his children.

22:22 *And I will put the key of the house of David on his shoulder; and he will open, and **there will be** none who shuts; and he will shut, and **there will be** none who opens.*

"The key of the house of David." The steward carried the key to the palace, and with it the right to decide who came in. What he opened, no one could shut. Jesus takes these words for Himself in Revelation 3:7, calling Himself the One "who has the key of David." Eliakim pictures a greater Steward. Christ alone opens the door to the King's house, and no one can shut it.

New Testament links: Revelation 3:7 (alluded to)

22:23 *And I will drive him **as** a tent peg in a firm place, and he will become a throne of glory for the house of his father.*

God will drive Eliakim like a peg into a firm place, and he will become a seat of honor for his father's family. A peg in the wall held up heavy household things. Eliakim would be secure and dependable, and his family would be honored through him.

22:24 *And they will hang on him all the glory of the house of his father, the offspring and the offshoots, all the vessels of the small* ***kind****, from the vessels of bowls even to all the vessels of jars.*

His whole family will hang on him, from the smallest cups to the largest jars. That is a lot of weight on one peg. Family members would lean on Eliakim for positions and favor. Even good leaders can be burdened by those who use their position for themselves.

22:25 *In that day, declares the LORD of armies, the tent peg that was driven in a firm place will be removed; and it will be cut down and will fall, and the burden that* ***was*** *on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken."*

In that day the peg will give way, break off, and fall, and everything hanging on it will come down. Bible teachers differ on whether this means Eliakim himself later failed or whether it returns to Shebna. I take it as a warning that even the best human leader can fail under the weight people put on him. Only Christ, the true holder of David's key, can carry all our weight and never give way.

Chapter 22 Summary

Isaiah turns to Jerusalem, the valley of vision. The people celebrate on their rooftops while their leaders flee and enemy chariots fill the valleys. They strengthen the walls and store water, but they never look to the God who made it all. Instead of repenting, they say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." God then removes proud Shebna from his office and gives his authority to faithful Eliakim, placing the key of the house of David on his shoulder.

Shebna and Eliakim

Shebna (22:15-19): The steward over King Hezekiah's household, removed from office for his pride. In 36:3 he appears as a scribe, a lower post.

Eliakim (22:20-25): The son of Hilkiah, who replaced Shebna as the one over the royal household. He was one of Hezekiah's officials who met the Assyrian commander outside Jerusalem (36:3; 2 Kings 18:18).

The Key of David (22:22): The steward's key gave him authority over who entered the palace. Jesus applies this to Himself in Revelation 3:7.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. When you face a crisis, what is the first thing you usually do?
2. Why was Isaiah weeping while the rest of Jerusalem celebrated? (22:1-4)
3. What practical steps did the people take to prepare for the siege? (22:8-11)
4. What did they fail to do, according to Isaiah? (22:11)
5. How did the people respond when God called them to weep and mourn? (22:12-13)
6. Why was God angry with Shebna? (22:15-19)

7. How does Jesus use the words about the key of David in Revelation 3:7? (22:22)

8. In what areas of your life do you plan and prepare but forget to pray?

9. Eliakim was to be "a father" to the people. Who has God placed you in a position to care for?

Chapter 23: Tyre

Scripture: The Oracle Concerning Tyre

23:1-7 The oracle of Tyre: Wail, ships of Tarshish, for it has been devastated, without house, without entrance; from the land of Cyprus it has been revealed to them. Be silent, inhabitants of the coastland, the merchant of Sidon; those who pass over the sea have filled you. And on many waters ***was*** the seed of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, her revenue; and she became the trade of nations. Be ashamed, Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, "I have not been in labor, and I have not given birth, and I have not brought up young men, ***nor*** raised virgins." When the report ***comes*** to Egypt, they will be in anguish according to the report of Tyre. Pass over to Tarshish; wail, inhabitants of the coastland. ***Is*** this your jubilant ***city***, whose origin ***is*** from the days of antiquity, whose feet carried her far away to sojourn?

23:8-14 Who has planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose traders ***were*** princes, whose merchants ***were*** the honored of the earth? The LORD of armies has planned it, to profane the pride of all splendor, to treat with contempt all the honored of the earth. Pass over your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish; ***there is*** no restraint any longer. He has stretched out His hand over the sea; He has made kingdoms tremble; the LORD has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its strongholds. And He said, "You will not again exult any more, oppressed one, virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, pass over to Cyprus; even there ***there*** will be no rest for you." Look, the land of the Chaldeans: this ***is*** the people ***that*** was not; Assyria assigned it to desert creatures; they raised up its siege towers; they stripped bare its palaces; he made it a ruin. Wail, ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold has been devastated.

23:15-18 And it will be in that day ***that*** Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will be for Tyre like the song of the prostitute: "Take a lyre, go around the city, forgotten prostitute; play well, sing many songs, so that you may be remembered." And it will be at the end of seventy years ***that*** the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her hire, and she will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the earth on the face of the ground. And her profit and her hire will be holiness to the LORD; it will not be stored up, and it will not be hoarded; for her profit will be for those who dwell before the LORD, for eating to satisfaction and for choice covering.

Chapter 23 Preview

The last of the oracles against the nations is aimed at Tyre, the great sea trading city on the coast north of Israel. Its ships sailed the whole Mediterranean, and its merchants lived like princes.

Isaiah announces that Tyre will be brought down, and that the LORD of armies is the One who planned it. After seventy years Tyre will return to trading, but in the end even its profits will be set apart for the LORD.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1 *The oracle of Tyre: Wail, ships of Tarshish, for it has been devastated, without house, without entrance; from the land of Cyprus it has been revealed to them.*

"Wail, ships of Tarshish." Tarshish was a far-off port in the west, most likely in Spain, and "ships of Tarshish" were the large ocean-going ships of the day. As they sail home they hear the news from Cyprus, their last stop, that Tyre is destroyed. There is no home and no harbor to come back to.

23:2 *Be silent, inhabitants of the coastland, the merchant of Sidon; those who pass over the sea have filled you.*

The people of the coast and the merchants of Sidon are told to be silent. Sidon was Tyre's older sister city a little to the north, and the two were closely tied. Their sailors and messengers had crossed the sea and made them rich. Now there is nothing to say.

23:3 *And on many waters **was** the seed of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, her revenue; and she became the trade of nations.*

Tyre's wealth came from carrying other people's goods. Grain from the Nile, the river of Egypt, passed through her hands, and she became "the trade of nations." Tyre didn't grow much. She bought and sold. Her whole life was trade, and that trade was about to end.

23:4 *Be ashamed, Sidon, for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, "I have not been in labor, and I have not given birth, and I have not brought up young men, **nor** raised virgins."*

"Be ashamed, Sidon." The sea itself speaks like a mother who has lost her children. She says it is as if she had never given birth or raised sons and daughters. The cities that depended on the sea for their people and their wealth are left empty. All Sidon's pride in her sea trade turns to shame.

23:5 *When the report **comes** to Egypt, they will be in anguish according to the report of Tyre.*

When the news reaches Egypt, the Egyptians will be in anguish. Egypt sold its grain through Tyre, so Tyre's fall would hit Egypt's economy hard. In a world tied together by trade, one city's collapse is felt in many places. We see the same thing today when a great financial center fails.

23:6 *Pass over to Tarshish; wail, inhabitants of the coastland.*

The people of the coast are told to flee across the sea to Tarshish and to wail. Tyre had sent out settlers to many places along the Mediterranean, and now her people would escape to those far-off colonies. Running away won't undo what God has done.

23:7 ***Is** this your jubilant **city**, whose origin **is** from the days of antiquity, whose feet carried her far away to sojourn?*

Is this the joyful city whose history goes back to ancient times? Tyre was very old, and her ships had carried settlers to plant colonies far away. Carthage in North Africa was founded by people

from Tyre. The city that sent people out to settle distant places will now see her own people scattered.

23:8 *Who has planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose traders **were** princes, whose merchants **were** the honored of the earth?*

"Who has planned this against Tyre?" Isaiah asks the obvious question. Tyre crowned kings in her colonies, and her merchants were treated like royalty. Who could bring down such a city? The question is meant to lead us to the answer in the next verse.

New Testament links: Revelation 18:23 (alluded to)

23:9 *The LORD of armies has planned it, to profane the pride of all splendor, to treat with contempt all the honored of the earth.*

The LORD of armies planned it. His purpose is to bring down the pride of all that is beautiful and to humble the honored people of the earth. God has nothing against beauty or honest trade, but He's against pride. When people trust in their wealth and glory instead of in Him, He humbles them (James 4:6).

23:10 *Pass over your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish; **there is** no restraint any longer.*

The "daughter of Tarshish" is told to spread out over her land like the Nile spreads in flood season, because there is nothing to hold her back anymore. I take this to mean that with Tyre's grip broken, her distant colonies are now on their own. Bible teachers read this verse in a few different ways. The clear point is that Tyre's control is gone.

23:11 *He has stretched out His hand over the sea; He has made kingdoms tremble; the LORD has given command concerning Canaan to destroy its strongholds.*

God has stretched out His hand over the sea and shaken kingdoms. He has given the order to tear down the strongholds of Canaan, the old name for the coastal land where Tyre and Sidon stood. The God of Israel rules the sea and the nations on it. No harbor is out of His reach.

23:12 *And He said, "You will not again exult any more, oppressed one, virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, pass over to Cyprus; even there **there** will be no rest for you."*

Sidon's celebrating is over. She is called "oppressed one, virgin daughter of Sidon," a city that was once untouched and is now broken. Even if her people flee to Cyprus, they will find no rest there. When God's judgment comes, moving somewhere else doesn't make it go away.

23:13 *Look, the land of the Chaldeans: this **is** the people **that** was not; Assyria assigned it to desert creatures; they raised up its siege towers; they stripped bare its palaces; he made it a ruin.*

Isaiah points to the land of the Chaldeans, the people of Babylon, as an example. Assyria had built siege towers against it and left it in ruins, a place for desert animals. Assyria's king Sennacherib destroyed Babylon in 689 B.C. The lesson for Tyre is plain. If Babylon could be brought down, so could Tyre.

23:14 *Wail, ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold has been devastated.*

The chapter's first section ends where it began: "Wail, ships of Tarshish." The ships have lost their stronghold. The repeated line works like a frame around the whole lament. The proud fleet that ruled the sea has no safe place left to go.

23:15 *And it will be in that day **that** Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will be for Tyre like the song of the prostitute:*

Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, "like the days of one king," which means about the length of one long reign or one lifetime. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Tyre for thirteen years in the 500s B.C., and the city's power was greatly reduced during the time Babylon ruled the region. Seventy years is also the length of time Jeremiah gave for Babylon's rule (Jeremiah 25:11).

23:16 *"Take a lyre, go around the city, forgotten prostitute; play well, sing many songs, so that you may be remembered."*

"Forgotten prostitute." Tyre is pictured as an aging prostitute who walks the streets with a lyre, singing to be noticed again. It is a harsh picture, but it fits. Tyre's trade was driven by greed and was willing to sell itself to anyone. A city that lives only for profit is described in the same terms the Bible uses for unfaithfulness.

23:17 *And it will be at the end of seventy years **that** the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her hire, and she will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the earth on the face of the ground.*

After seventy years the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will go back to her old ways, trading with every kingdom on earth. Tyre did recover and became a great trading city again. Revelation 18 uses this same picture for end-times Babylon, whose merchants grow rich and whose fall they mourn (Revelation 18:3, 11-19).

New Testament links: Revelation 17:2 (alluded to)

23:18 *And her profit and her hire will be holiness to the LORD; it will not be stored up, and it will not be hoarded; for her profit will be for those who dwell before the LORD, for eating to satisfaction and for choice covering.*

"Holiness to the LORD." Here is a surprise. Tyre's profits will one day be holy to the LORD. Her wealth won't be hoarded, but will feed and clothe those who live in His presence. In the New Testament there were believers in Tyre, and Paul stayed a week with them (Acts 21:3-4). I also believe this looks ahead to the Millennium, when the wealth of the nations is brought to the King (Isaiah 60:5). God can take even what was used for greed and use it for His glory.

Chapter 23 Summary

Isaiah announces the fall of Tyre, the proud trading city of the sea. Sailors returning home learn their harbor is gone, and Sidon and Egypt mourn because their wealth depended on Tyre. The LORD of armies planned this to humble the pride of the honored of the earth. Tyre will be

forgotten for seventy years and then return to her trade like a forgotten prostitute singing for attention. In the end, her profits will be set apart for the LORD and His people.

Tyre and Its Neighbors

Tyre (23:1-18): A Phoenician port on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel, in what is now Lebanon. It was the leading sea trading city of its day. Alexander the Great finally took it in 332 B.C.

Sidon (23:2, 4, 12): An older Phoenician city just north of Tyre, closely tied to it in trade.

Tarshish (23:1, 6, 10, 14): A distant western port, most likely in Spain. "Ships of Tarshish" were large trading ships built for long voyages.

Cyprus (23:1, 12): The large island west of Tyre, a regular stop for ships headed home.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. What do you think makes a city or a nation feel secure?
2. What was the source of Tyre's great wealth? (23:1-3)
3. Why would Egypt be upset when it heard about Tyre? (23:5)
4. Who planned Tyre's fall, and why? (23:8-9)
5. What example does Isaiah point to as a warning for Tyre? (23:13)
6. How long will Tyre be forgotten, and what will she do afterward? (23:15-17)
7. How does Revelation 18 echo the picture of Tyre's merchants and trade? (23:17)
8. What will finally happen to Tyre's wealth? (23:18)
9. Is there any area where your work or money has become a source of pride? How could you set it apart for the LORD this week?

Chapter 24: The Earth Laid Waste

Scripture: The LORD's Judgment on the Whole Earth

24:1-6 Look, the LORD is about to empty the earth and lay it waste, and He will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it will be, like the people, like the priest; like the servant, like his master; like the maidservant, like her mistress; like the buyer, like the seller; like the lender, like the borrower; like the creditor, like the one who owes him. The earth will surely be emptied, and it will surely be plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth has mourned, it has withered; the world has languished, it has withered; the exalted of the people of the earth have languished. And the earth has been polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, they have overstepped the statute, they have broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse has consumed the earth, and those who dwell in it are held guilty; therefore the inhabitants of the earth have dwindled, and few of mankind are left.

24:7-13 The new wine has mourned, the vine has languished; all the glad of heart have groaned. The gaiety of tambourines has ceased; the uproar of the jubilant has stopped; the gaiety of the lyre has ceased. With song they will not drink wine; strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it. The town of formlessness has been broken; every house has been shut up from entering. ***There is*** an outcry over the wine in the streets; all gladness has turned to evening; the gaiety of the earth has departed. Desolation has remained in the city, and the gate will be crushed ***to*** ruin. For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples, like the beating of an olive tree, like gleanings when the grape harvest has ended.

24:14-16 They will lift up their voice; they will shout for joy; in the majesty of the LORD they cry aloud from ***the*** west. Therefore glorify the LORD in the east, the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the coastlands of the sea. From the edge of the earth we have heard songs, "Splendor to the righteous one." And I said, "Leanness to me, leanness to me; woe to me! The treacherous act treacherously, and ***with*** treachery the treacherous act treacherously."

24:17-23 Dread and pit and snare ***are*** on you, inhabitant of the earth. And it will be ***that*** the one who flees from the sound of the dread will fall into the pit, and the one who goes up from the midst of the pit will be caught in the snare; for the windows from on high have been opened, and the foundations of the earth have shaken. The earth has been utterly broken; the earth has been utterly split apart; the earth has been utterly shaken. The earth will surely stagger like the drunkard, and it will sway like the hut; and its transgression will be heavy on it, and it will fall and will not rise again. And it will be in that day ***that*** the LORD will visit ***punishment*** on the host of the height in the height, and on the kings of the earth on the earth. And they will be gathered, a gathering of prisoners, into a pit, and they will be shut up in a prison; and after many days they will be visited. And the moon will be abashed, and the sun will be ashamed, for the LORD of armies will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His elders ***will be*** glory.

Chapter 24 Preview

Up to now Isaiah has spoken to one nation at a time. In chapter 24 the camera pulls back, and the whole earth comes under God's judgment. No one escapes, from priest to slave, and the joy of the world falls silent.

Yet even in the ruins a remnant sings praise to the Righteous One. The chapter ends with the powers of heaven and earth locked away, and the LORD of armies reigning in glory on Mount Zion.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1 *Look, the LORD is about to empty the earth and lay it waste, and He will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.*

"Look, the LORD is about to empty the earth." Chapters 24 through 27 belong together. They move beyond Egypt, Tyre, and Babylon to the whole world at the end of the age.

I believe these chapters describe the coming worldwide judgment of the Tribulation, the seven years of trouble before Christ returns, followed by His kingdom. God turns the earth upside down and scatters its people. God made the world, so He has the right to judge it.

24:2 *And it will be, like the people, like the priest; like the servant, like his master; like the maidservant, like her mistress; like the buyer, like the seller; like the lender, like the borrower; like the creditor, like the one who owes him.*

Everyone is treated alike: people and priest, servant and master, buyer and seller, lender and borrower. In normal times money and position can buy a way out of trouble. Not in this judgment. Rank and wealth will mean nothing in that day, just as in Revelation 6:15-17, where kings and slaves alike hide in the caves from the wrath of the Lamb.

24:3 *The earth will surely be emptied, and it will surely be plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word.*

The earth will be completely laid waste and completely stripped. Isaiah repeats the words to make the point as strong as he can. And the reason this will surely happen is simple: the LORD has spoken. When God says it, it is settled.

24:4 *The earth has mourned, it has withered; the world has languished, it has withered; the exalted of the people of the earth have languished.*

The earth mourns and withers. The world fades. Even the proud and powerful wilt. Isaiah pictures the whole creation drooping like a plant without water. Sin doesn't only hurt people. It damages the world God gave us to care for (Romans 8:20-22).

24:5 *And the earth has been polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, they have overstepped the statute, they have broken the everlasting covenant.*

"Broken the everlasting covenant." Why is all this happening? The earth has been polluted by the people who live on it. They broke God's laws, twisted His statutes, and broke the everlasting covenant. I take this to mean God's basic covenant with all mankind, given to Noah after the flood, which called for respect for human life (Genesis 9:5-6, 16). It isn't only Israel that is accountable to God. Every person is.

24:6 *Therefore a curse has consumed the earth, and those who dwell in it are held guilty; therefore the inhabitants of the earth have dwindled, and few of mankind are left.*

A curse devours the earth, and its people are held guilty. They are burned, and few are left. Isaiah's words fit what Revelation describes in the Tribulation, when a third of the earth is burned and great numbers of people die (Revelation 8:7; 9:18). The word "few" is sobering, but it also holds a seed of hope. There will be survivors. God always keeps a remnant, a faithful few who belong to Him.

24:7 *The new wine has mourned, the vine has languished; all the glad of heart have groaned.*

The new wine dries up, the vine wilts, and those who were happy now sigh. In the Bible, wine often stands for joy and celebration. Isaiah is describing a world where the good times have suddenly ended. The party that seemed like it would never stop is over.

24:8 *The gaiety of tambourines has ceased; the uproar of the jubilant has stopped; the gaiety of the lyre has ceased.*

The tambourines and harps fall silent, and the shouts of the partygoers stop. Revelation 18:22 says something very close about end-times Babylon: the sound of harpists and musicians won't be heard in her anymore. A world that ignored God and lived for pleasure loses the very pleasures it lived for.

24:9 *With song they will not drink wine; strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it.*

People still drink, but there is no singing, and the strong drink tastes bitter. When God's judgment falls, even the things that once brought comfort lose their sweetness. Nothing satisfies a soul that has turned from its Maker.

24:10 *The town of formlessness has been broken; every house has been shut up from entering.*

"The town of formlessness has been broken." Isaiah doesn't name the city. It seems to stand for the whole proud world system that has organized itself without God, much like Babylon in Revelation 17-18. It is broken down, and every house is locked up tight. People hide behind closed doors, but there is no safety there.

24:11 ***There is*** *an outcry over the wine in the streets; all gladness has turned to evening; the gaiety of the earth has departed.*

People cry in the streets over the wine that is gone. All joy turns to gloom, and gladness is banished from the earth. Why would God take away the joy of the world? Because the world chose joy without God, and joy cut off from God can't last. True joy is found only in Him (Psalm 16:11).

24:12 *Desolation has remained in the city, and the gate will be crushed* ***to*** *ruin.*

Ruin is all that is left in the city, and its gate is smashed. The city gate was where business was done and judges sat. A broken gate means the city's strength, its government, and its daily life have all collapsed.

24:13 *For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples, like the beating of an olive tree, like gleanings when the grape harvest has ended.*

"Like the beating of an olive tree." When olives were harvested, the trees were beaten and shaken, and a few olives were always left behind. After the grapes were picked, a few were left for gleaners. That is what the earth will look like after this judgment. Most are gone, but a small remnant remains, just as Isaiah described Israel in 17:6. God never lets His people be wiped out completely.

24:14 *They will lift up their voice; they will shout for joy; in the majesty of the LORD they cry aloud from* ***the*** *west.*

Suddenly there are voices raised in joy. The remnant shouts from the west about the majesty of the LORD. This is the turning point of the chapter. Out of the ruins comes worship. Those who have trusted God through the darkness lift their voices to praise Him, much like the great multitude in Revelation 7:9-14 who came out of the great tribulation.

24:15 *Therefore glorify the LORD in the east, the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the coastlands of the sea.*

The call to worship spreads east and to the coastlands of the sea. From east to west, the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, is honored. Even in the worst days of world history, God has a people who glorify Him. Their praise doesn't depend on comfortable circumstances.

24:16 *From the edge of the earth we have heard songs, "Splendor to the righteous one." And I said, "Leanness to me, leanness to me; woe to me! The treacherous act treacherously, and* ***with*** *treachery the treacherous act treacherously."*

"Splendor to the righteous one." Songs come from the ends of the earth, and I believe the righteous one here is the LORD Himself, whom we know in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:14). But Isaiah can't join the celebration yet. He cries out, "Woe to me," because he sees that the treacherous are still at work.

He knows the praise is real, but he also knows the worst isn't over. That is an honest place for a believer to stand. We can rejoice in God's final victory and still grieve over the evil that continues around us.

24:17 *Dread and pit and snare **are** on you, inhabitant of the earth.*

"Dread and pit and snare." In Hebrew these three words sound alike, and the sound itself rings like a warning bell. They are hunters' words. Terror drives the animal, the pit catches it, and the snare holds it. Every person on earth who stands against God will face them. Jeremiah repeats these words against Moab (Jeremiah 48:43-44).

24:18 *And it will be **that** the one who flees from the sound of the dread will fall into the pit, and the one who goes up from the midst of the pit will be caught in the snare; for the windows from on high have been opened, and the foundations of the earth have shaken.*

Whoever flees the terror falls into the pit, and whoever climbs out of the pit is caught in the snare. There is no escape. The windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth shake. These words call to mind the flood in Noah's day, when "the floodgates of the heavens were opened" (Genesis 7:11). God has judged the whole world before, and He will do it again. Jesus Himself compared His coming to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39).

24:19 *The earth has been utterly broken; the earth has been utterly split apart; the earth has been utterly shaken.*

The earth is broken apart, split open, and shaken violently. Revelation describes a great earthquake unlike any since man has been on the earth, which shakes the whole world (Revelation 16:18-20). There is no reason to soften these words. The creation itself will be shaken when God judges the world.

24:20 *The earth will surely stagger like the drunkard, and it will sway like the hut; and its transgression will be heavy on it, and it will fall and will not rise again.*

"The earth will surely stagger like the drunkard." The ground staggers like a drunk man and sways like a flimsy hut in a storm. Why? Because the guilt of its rebellion lies heavy on it. Sin isn't light. It has real weight, and at the end of the age it brings the whole proud world system down, never to rise again. Only the cross can lift that weight from us (Isaiah 53:6).

24:21 *And it will be in that day **that** the LORD will visit **punishment** on the host of the height in the height, and on the kings of the earth on the earth.*

"The host of the height in the height." In that day the LORD will punish two groups: the host of the height and the kings of the earth. The "host of the height" here isn't God's holy angels. It points to Satan and the fallen angels who stand behind the rulers of this world (Ephesians 6:12; Daniel 10:13, 20). God judges both the unseen powers and the earthly kings who served them. Evil in heaven and evil on earth face the same Judge.

24:22 *And they will be gathered, a gathering of prisoners, into a pit, and they will be shut up in a prison; and after many days they will be visited.*

They are gathered like prisoners into a pit and shut up in prison, and "after many days" they will be punished. This verse fits Revelation 20 closely. At Christ's return Satan is bound and thrown into the abyss for a thousand years, and after that he is released briefly and then thrown into the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10). I take "after many days" as the thousand-year reign of Christ.

Here the Old Testament quietly points toward a period between Christ's return and the final judgment. Bible teachers who hold other views read it differently, but to me the plain sense fits the premillennial view I hold, that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years before the final judgment.

24:23 *And the moon will be abashed, and the sun will be ashamed, for the LORD of armies will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His elders* ***will be*** *glory.*

"The LORD of armies will reign on Mount Zion." The chapter ends in glory. The moon is embarrassed and the sun is ashamed, because their light looks dim beside the glory of the King. The LORD reigns in Jerusalem, and His glory shines before His elders, which reminds us of the elders gathered around the throne in Revelation 4:4.

I believe this describes Christ's reign on earth during the Millennium, when He rules from Jerusalem as the prophets promised (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 14:9). It also looks ahead to the eternal city, which has no need of the sun or the moon, because the glory of God gives it light (Revelation 21:23). The judgment of chapter 24 is terrible, but it isn't the end of the story. The King is coming to reign.

Chapter 24 Summary

The LORD lays the whole earth waste because its people have broken His laws and the everlasting covenant. Everyone is judged alike, and the joy of the world falls silent. Only a few are left, like olives after the harvest, yet that remnant lifts its voice in praise. Terror, pit, and snare catch everyone who tries to flee, and the earth staggers like a drunkard. God shuts up the powers of heaven and the kings of earth in prison, and the LORD of armies reigns in glory on Mount Zion.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. When you hear about worldwide disasters, what thoughts go through your mind?
2. Why does God judge the whole earth in this chapter? (24:5-6)
3. What happens to the world's joy and celebrations? (24:7-12)
4. What does the picture of the olive tree tell us about the remnant? (24:13)
5. Who is singing in the middle of the judgment, and what are they singing? (24:14-16)
6. Why is there no escape for those who flee? (24:17-18)

7. How does 24:21-22 compare with what Revelation 20:1-3 says about Satan? (24:21-22)

8. How does the remnant's praise in the middle of judgment challenge the way you respond to hard times?

9. Sin is described as heavy on the earth. What weight do you need to bring to the cross this week?

Chapter 25: Death Swallowed Up

Scripture: A Song of Praise and the Feast on the Mountain

25:1-5 O LORD, You ***are*** my God; I will exalt You; I will give thanks to Your name; for You have done a wonder, plans from long ago, faithfulness ***and*** firmness. For You have made a city into a heap, a fortified town into a ruin, a fortress of strangers ***to be*** no city; it will never be rebuilt. Therefore a strong people will glorify You; the town of ruthless nations will fear You. For You have been a stronghold for the poor, a stronghold for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the rainstorm, a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless ***is*** like a rainstorm ***against*** a wall. Like heat in a dry land You will subdue the uproar of strangers; ***like*** heat by the shade of a cloud, the song of the ruthless will be humbled.

25:6-9 And the LORD of armies will make for all the peoples on this mountain a feast of fat things, a feast of aged wines, of fat things full of marrow, of aged wines refined. And He will swallow up on this mountain the face of the covering that covers over all the peoples, and the veil that is woven over all the nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will remove from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. And one will say in that day, "Look, this ***is*** our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This ***is*** the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and let us rejoice in His salvation."

25:10-12 For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trampled down in its place, as straw is trampled down in a dunghill. And it will spread out its hands in its midst, as the swimmer spreads ***them*** out to swim; and He will bring low its pride together with the tricks of its hands. And the fortress of the high refuge of your walls He will lay low, He will bring low, He will make ***it*** touch the ground, down to the dust.

Chapter 25 Preview

After the dark judgment of chapter 24, Isaiah bursts into a song of thanks. God has kept His plans, brought down the proud city, and been a shelter for the poor.

Then Isaiah looks ahead to a feast. On Mount Zion the LORD will spread a feast for all peoples, tear away the veil of death, and wipe away every tear. Those who waited for Him will finally say, "This is our God."

Chapter 25 Study

25:1 *O LORD, You **are** my God; I will exalt You; I will give thanks to Your name; for You have done a wonder, plans from long ago, faithfulness **and** firmness.*

"O LORD, You are my God." Isaiah answers the vision of judgment with personal worship. He doesn't just say God is great. He says God is his. He praises God for wonders and for plans made long ago, carried out with perfect faithfulness. Nothing in chapter 24 caught God by surprise. Every part of it was in His plan from the beginning.

When life looks out of control, this verse is a good place to stand. The world may be shaking, but God's plans are faithful and true. You can call Him "my God" in the middle of the storm.

25:2 *For You have made a city into a heap, a fortified town into a ruin, a fortress of strangers **to be** no city; it will never be rebuilt.*

God has turned a city into a heap of rubble, a fortress into a ruin, never to be rebuilt. Like "the town of formlessness" in 24:10, this city isn't named. I take it as the proud world city, the same system Revelation calls Babylon the great, which will be thrown down and found no longer (Revelation 18:21). Man's proudest city falls, and God's city stands.

25:3 *Therefore a strong people will glorify You; the town of ruthless nations will fear You.*

The result is surprising. Strong nations and ruthless cities will glorify God and fear Him. When God judges, He punishes, and He also shows the world who He is. Some who were once His enemies will come to honor Him.

25:4 *For You have been a stronghold for the poor, a stronghold for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the rainstorm, a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless **is** like a rainstorm **against** a wall.*

"A shelter from the rainstorm." God has been a strong place for the helpless and the needy in their distress. He is shelter from the storm and shade from the heat. The fury of the ruthless beats against a wall like a rainstorm, but the wall holds.

That is a picture of what God is for His people in every age, and especially in the end times. Those who trust Him may face the storm, but the storm can't reach them where He shelters them. If you are going through a hard season, He is your wall today.

25:5 *Like heat in a dry land You will subdue the uproar of strangers; **like** heat by the shade of a cloud, the song of the ruthless will be humbled.*

Just as heat in a dry land is cooled by the shade of a cloud, God quiets the uproar of foreigners and silences the song of the ruthless. The proud boasting of God's enemies will simply stop. He doesn't need to shout them down. He brings them to silence.

25:6 *And the LORD of armies will make for all the peoples on this mountain a feast of fat things, a feast of aged wines, of fat things full of marrow, of aged wines refined.*

"A feast of fat things, a feast of aged wines." On "this mountain," Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the LORD of armies will spread a feast. Rich food and the finest aged wine are set out. Notice who is invited: all peoples. This isn't only for Israel. Gentiles from every nation are welcome at God's table.

Jesus spoke of this banquet when He said many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11). Revelation calls it

"the supper of the marriage of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). I believe this feast begins when Christ returns to reign on earth in the Millennium, with Jerusalem at the center of His kingdom.

At the Last Supper Jesus said He wouldn't drink of the fruit of the vine again until He drinks it new in His Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29). He is looking forward to this feast. His people should be too.

25:7 *And He will swallow up on this mountain the face of the covering that covers over all the peoples, and the veil that is woven over all the nations.*

On the same mountain God will swallow up the covering over all peoples, the veil stretched over all nations. A veil or shroud was used to cover the face of the dead. I take this "veil" as the shadow of death itself that hangs over the whole human race, along with the spiritual blindness that keeps people from seeing God (2 Corinthians 3:15-16; 4:4).

God won't just lift that veil. He will swallow it. When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). That was the first sign of what this verse promises. On that day, nothing will stand between God and His people.

25:8 *He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will remove from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.*

"He will swallow up death forever." Death has swallowed every person who has ever lived, and now God swallows death. Paul quotes this verse when he describes the resurrection of believers: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Death doesn't get the last word. Jesus does.

"The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces." Revelation 21:4 picks up these words in the new heaven and new earth: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer." Picture the Lord Himself gently wiping the tears from your face. Every grief, every loss, every funeral you have ever stood at will be answered.

God will also remove the reproach of His people. For centuries Israel and the church have been mocked and shamed by the world. That shame will be taken away for good. Why can we be so sure? The verse ends simply: "For the LORD has spoken."

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 15:54 (quoted); Revelation 21:4 (alluded to); Revelation 7:17 (alluded to)

25:9 *And one will say in that day, "Look, this **is** our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This **is** the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and let us rejoice in His salvation."*

"Look, this is our God; we have waited for Him." In that day God's people will look at Him and say, in effect, that this is the One they waited for, and He has saved them. The waiting was long. Generations lived and died while they waited. But the waiting wasn't in vain.

I believe this will be the cry of Israel when Christ returns, when they look on Him whom they pierced and turn to Him in faith (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26). It is also the cry of every

believer who has waited for Jesus. Waiting on God is never wasted. When He comes, all we will want to do is rejoice and be glad in His salvation.

25:10 *For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be trampled down in its place, as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.*

The hand of the LORD rests on Mount Zion in blessing, but Moab is trampled down like straw pressed into a manure pile. Moab, Israel's proud neighbor east of the Dead Sea, stands here for all of God's enemies. The contrast is sharp. On the same day that God's people feast, His enemies are brought low.

25:11 *And it will spread out its hands in its midst, as the swimmer spreads **them** out to swim; and He will bring low its pride together with the tricks of its hands.*

Moab spreads out his hands like a swimmer trying to stay afloat in the filth, but the Lord pulls down his pride along with all his tricks. No amount of struggling can save a proud heart from God's judgment. Only humility before God brings rescue (James 4:10).

25:12 *And the fortress of the high refuge of your walls He will lay low, He will bring low, He will make **it** touch the ground, down to the dust.*

God brings down Moab's high, strong walls and throws them to the ground, all the way to the dust. The walls Moab trusted can't stand. The chapter that began with a city in ruins ends the same way. Every proud fortress that sets itself against God will fall. Only the city of God remains.

Chapter 25 Summary

Isaiah praises the LORD for His faithful plans and for bringing down the proud city. God has been a refuge for the poor and a shelter from the storm. On Mount Zion He will spread a rich feast for all peoples, tear away the veil that covers the nations, swallow up death forever, and wipe away every tear. His people will say, "Look, this is our God; we have waited for Him." Meanwhile proud Moab, a picture of God's enemies, will be trampled and its walls brought down to the dust.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. What is the best celebration meal you have ever been part of, and what made it special?
2. What does Isaiah praise God for at the start of this chapter? (25:1-5)
3. How is God described in verse 4, and what does that mean to you? (25:4)
4. Who is invited to the banquet on the mountain? (25:6)
5. What is the "veil" over the nations, and what will God do with it? (25:7)
6. How do 1 Corinthians 15:54 and Revelation 21:4 use the promise of verse 8? (25:8)
7. What will God's people say when they see Him? (25:9)
8. How does knowing that God will one day wipe away every tear help you face grief now?
9. What are you waiting on God for today? How can you wait with hope this week?

Chapter 26: Perfect Peace

Scripture: Judah's Song of Trust and the Promise of Resurrection

26:1-6 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: A city of strength ***is*** ours; He sets salvation ***as*** walls and rampart. Open the gates, that a righteous nation that keeps faithfulness may enter. The steadfast mind You will keep ***in*** peace, peace, for ***it is*** trusting in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in ***the*** LORD, the LORD, ***is*** an everlasting rock. For He has laid low the inhabitants of the height, the lofty town; He brings it low, He brings it low to the ground; He makes it touch the dust. The foot will trample it, the feet of the afflicted, the steps of the poor.

26:7-11 The way of the righteous ***is*** uprightness; O Upright One, You make level the track of the righteous. Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You; for Your name and for Your remembrance ***is*** the desire of ***our*** soul. ***With*** my soul I have desired You in the night; yes, ***with*** my spirit within me I will seek You earnestly; for when Your judgments ***are*** on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. ***Though*** the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; in a land of straightforwardness he acts unjustly, and he does not see the majesty of the LORD. O LORD, Your hand is lifted up, ***but*** they do not see ***it***. They will see, and they will be ashamed ***at Your*** zeal for ***the*** people; yes, the fire of Your adversaries will consume them.

26:12-15 O LORD, You will establish peace for us, for also all our works You have done for us. O LORD our God, lords besides You have ruled over us; ***but*** by You only we bring to remembrance Your name. ***The*** dead will not live; ***the*** shades will not rise; therefore You have visited and destroyed them, and You have made all remembrance of them perish. You have added to the nation, O LORD, You have added to the nation; You have been glorified; You have extended all the borders of the land.

26:16-19 O LORD, in distress they sought You; they poured out a whispered ***prayer when*** Your chastening ***was*** on them. Like a pregnant ***woman who*** draws near to give birth, she is in labor, she cries out in her pangs, so were we because of You, O LORD. We were pregnant, we were in labor, we gave birth, as it were, ***to*** wind; we do not accomplish salvation ***for*** the earth, and the inhabitants of the world do not fall. Your dead will live; my corpse, they will rise. Awake and shout for joy, dwellers of ***the*** dust! For Your dew ***is*** a dew of lights, and the earth will cast forth the shades.

26:20-21 Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your door behind you; hide for a little moment until the indignation passes by. For look, the LORD is about to come out from His place to visit the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth on them; and the earth will reveal its bloodshed, and will no longer cover its slain.

Chapter 26 Preview

In that day Judah will sing a new song about a strong city, where God keeps the one who trusts Him in perfect peace. The song moves from praise, to longing, to an honest confession that God's people couldn't save the world by their own efforts.

Then comes a promise that changes everything. "Your dead will live." God's people are told to hide for a little moment, until His anger has passed and He comes out to judge the earth.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1 *In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: A city of strength **is** ours; He sets salvation **as** walls and rampart.*

"A city of strength is ours." In that day, the day of God's victory in chapters 24 and 25, the land of Judah will sing. The proud city of the world lies in ruins (25:2), but God's people have a city that stands. God Himself "sets salvation as walls and rampart." Our security doesn't come from stones we stack. It comes from God, who is our wall.

26:2 *Open the gates, that a righteous nation that keeps faithfulness may enter.*

"Open the gates." The gates of the city are thrown open so that the righteous nation may enter, the one that keeps faith. What counts is faithfulness, not being born in the right country. Those who trust God and keep faith with Him walk in. Psalm 118:19-20 says the same: the gate of the LORD is for the righteous.

26:3 *The steadfast mind You will keep **in** peace, peace, for **it is** trusting in You.*

"You will keep in peace, peace." Many believers have leaned on this verse in hard times. The Hebrew doubles the word to show complete, perfect peace. God keeps in perfect peace the one whose mind is steady, because that person trusts in Him.

Notice where the peace comes from. It doesn't come from calm circumstances. Isaiah is singing this after describing the end of the world. It comes from a mind fixed on God. When our thoughts keep running to our problems, we lose our peace. When they rest on Him, He keeps us. Paul says something very similar in Philippians 4:6-7.

26:4 *Trust in the LORD forever, for in **the** LORD, the LORD, **is** an everlasting rock.*

"An everlasting rock." Trust the LORD forever, because the LORD God is a Rock that never moves. A rock is the same in sunshine and in storm. Everything else we lean on will wear out, but He won't. That is why trust in Him can last forever.

26:5 *For He has laid low the inhabitants of the height, the lofty town; He brings it low, He brings it low to the ground; He makes it touch the dust.*

God has brought down those who lived up high and leveled the proud, lofty city. He lays it low, all the way to the dust. This is the same city we saw in 24:10 and 25:2. The more people lift themselves up against God, the farther they fall.

26:6 *The foot will trample it, the feet of the afflicted, the steps of the poor.*

The proud city is trampled under the feet of the poor and the afflicted. What a reversal. Those who were looked down on now walk over the ruins of those who oppressed them. Jesus taught the same thing: the humble will be lifted up and the proud brought low (Luke 1:52; 14:11).

26:7 *The way of the righteous **is** uprightness; O Upright One, You make level the track of the righteous.*

The path of the righteous is level, because the Upright One, God Himself, makes it smooth. The righteous still face hills and rocks, but God goes ahead of them and makes a way. When you walk with God, He takes responsibility for the road (Proverbs 3:5-6).

26:8 *Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You; for Your name and for Your remembrance **is** the desire of **our** soul.*

While walking in the way of God's judgments, His people have waited eagerly for Him. His name, and even the memory of Him, is what their souls desire. Waiting on God means walking in His ways while we look for His coming. The deepest longing of a believer's heart is God Himself.

26:9 ***With** my soul I have desired You in the night; yes, **with** my spirit within me I will seek You earnestly; for when Your judgments **are** on the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*

"With my soul I have desired You in the night." Isaiah speaks for every believer who has lain awake at night longing for God. He seeks God with all his heart. Then he gives a reason for God's judgments: when the earth experiences them, the people of the world learn righteousness. God's judgments are meant to wake people up. Even in the Tribulation, some will turn to Him (Revelation 7:14; 11:13).

26:10 ***Though** the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; in a land of straightforwardness he acts unjustly, and he does not see the majesty of the LORD.*

But not everyone learns. When the wicked are shown kindness, they still don't learn righteousness. Even in a land where people live uprightly, they keep doing wrong, and they never see the majesty of the LORD. God's goodness should lead people to repent (Romans 2:4), but a hard heart can turn even kindness into an excuse to keep sinning.

26:11 *O LORD, Your hand is lifted up, **but** they do not see **it**. They will see, and they will be ashamed **at Your** zeal for **the** people; yes, the fire of Your adversaries will consume them.*

God's hand is raised to act, and still the wicked don't see it. One day they will see His zeal for His people and be put to shame, and fire will consume His enemies. There is a sad kind of blindness that refuses to see God even when He is working in plain sight. Revelation describes people in the Tribulation who see God's judgments and still refuse to repent (Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9).

26:12 *O LORD, You will establish peace for us, for also all our works You have done for us.*

"You will establish peace for us." God will give His people peace, because everything good they have done, He did in them. This is an important truth. Our good works are His work in us (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 2:10). The believer doesn't take credit. We simply thank Him.

26:13 *O LORD our God, lords besides You have ruled over us; **but** by You only we bring to remembrance Your name.*

Other masters ruled over Judah, foreign kings and false gods, but God's people will honor only His name. Israel was ruled by Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, and too often they bowed to idols. In the end, they confess the LORD alone. Many of us know what it is like to have other things rule our lives. God can set us free and make His name the only one we serve.

26:14 ***The** dead will not live; **the** shades will not rise; therefore You have visited and destroyed them, and You have made all remembrance of them perish.*

Those old masters are dead and won't live again. Their departed spirits won't rise, because God has punished them and wiped out every memory of them. The tyrants who once seemed so powerful are gone for good. Their names fade from history. Compare that with verse 19, where God's own dead will live. The contrast is on purpose.

26:15 *You have added to the nation, O LORD, You have added to the nation; You have been glorified; You have extended all the borders of the land.*

God has made the nation larger and pushed out its borders, and He is glorified in it. When God restores Israel, the land will grow and the people will multiply. I believe this will be seen in full in the Millennium, when Israel is gathered back and the promises of the land are kept (Isaiah 54:2-3). God's blessing on Israel brings glory to His name.

26:16 *O LORD, in distress they sought You; they poured out a whispered **prayer when** Your chastening **was** on them.*

In their distress God's people sought Him, and they could only whisper a prayer while His discipline was on them. Sometimes the pain is so heavy that all we can manage is a whisper. That is enough. God hears whispered prayers. Romans 8:26 tells us the Spirit Himself helps us when we don't even know how to pray.

26:17 *Like a pregnant **woman who** draws near to give birth, she is in labor, she cries out in her pangs, so were we because of You, O LORD.*

"Like a pregnant woman who draws near to give birth." God's people compare themselves to a woman in labor, crying out in pain. They suffered and struggled before the LORD. The picture of labor pains appears often in the prophets and in Jesus' teaching about the end times (Matthew 24:8; Revelation 12:2). Pain was real, and it was meant to lead to new life.

26:18 *We were pregnant, we were in labor, we gave birth, as it were, **to** wind; we do not accomplish salvation **for** the earth, and the inhabitants of the world do not fall.*

But here is the honest confession. They went through all the pain and gave birth only to wind. They couldn't bring salvation to the earth. No one was born. Israel was meant to be a light to the world, but by their own effort they couldn't save anyone, not even themselves.

That is true of every one of us. We can't save ourselves or the world. Salvation must come from God. And that is exactly what the next verse promises.

26:19 *Your dead will live; my corpse, they will rise. Awake and shout for joy, dwellers of **the** dust! For Your dew **is** a dew of lights, and the earth will cast forth the shades.*

"Your dead will live; my corpse, they will rise." Right after confessing that they couldn't bring life to the world, God's people hear His answer. God will do what they couldn't do. He will raise the dead. Along with Daniel 12:2, it's about as clear a promise of bodily resurrection as the Old Testament gives. I read it plainly: these are real bodies coming out of real graves.

The ones lying in the dust are told to wake up and shout for joy. God's dew, like the fresh dew of morning, will fall on them, and the earth will give up its dead. Death isn't the end for those who belong to God.

Jesus is "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18). His resurrection is the guarantee of ours. Paul says that at the last trumpet the dead in Christ will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). I believe this happens when Christ comes for His church before the Tribulation. Those who die for Him during the Tribulation are raised when He returns at the end of it. Together this is what Revelation 20:5-6 calls the first resurrection. If you have buried someone who loved the Lord, this verse is for you. They will rise.

New Testament links: Ephesians 5:14 (alluded to)

26:20 *Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your door behind you; hide for a little moment until the indignation passes by.*

"Hide for a little moment." God tells His people to go into their rooms and shut the doors until His anger has passed. This reminds us of the first Passover, when Israel stayed inside behind blood-marked doors while judgment passed over (Exodus 12:22-23), and of Noah, whom God shut in the ark (Genesis 7:16).

Some teachers see in this verse a picture of the church being taken out of the world before the Tribulation. I believe the church will already be with Christ by then, because God did not appoint us for wrath (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:9). In its setting, though, God is speaking to Israel. I believe this verse fits the faithful remnant of Israel during the Tribulation, whom God shelters the way He kept Israel safe in Goshen while the plagues fell on Egypt (Exodus 8:22). Revelation 12:6 and 12:14 show Him doing this, with Israel hidden and kept safe in the wilderness during that time. The promise is that His wrath won't destroy those who are His. It lasts only "a little moment."

New Testament links: Matthew 6:6 (alluded to)

26:21 *For look, the LORD is about to come out from His place to visit the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth on them; and the earth will reveal its bloodshed, and will no longer cover its slain.*

The LORD is coming out from His place to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will uncover the blood spilled on it and will no longer hide its slain. Every murder ever covered up, every innocent life taken, will be brought to light. Abel's blood cried out from the ground (Genesis 4:10), and God hasn't forgotten. The souls of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9-10 ask how long until God avenges their blood. This verse is His answer. He is coming, and justice will be done.

Chapter 26 Summary

In that day Judah will sing of a strong city whose walls God Himself has set up. God keeps in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on Him, because He is an everlasting Rock. The proud city is laid low and trampled by the poor. God's people long for Him by night and confess that they couldn't save the world through their own labor. But God promises that His dead will live and their bodies will rise. His people are told to hide for a little moment until His anger passes and He comes to judge the earth.

Peace, to me, is calm in the storm. It is comfort in trouble, and comfort and healing in pain. Isaiah 26:3 says God keeps in perfect peace the mind that is stayed on Him. That is the only peace that holds.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. What does "peace" mean to you, and when have you felt it most?

2. What kind of city does Judah sing about, and who is allowed to enter? (26:1-2)

3. According to verse 3, who receives perfect peace, and why? (26:3-4)

4. Why do some people fail to learn righteousness even when God shows them kindness? (26:9-11)

5. What did God's people confess they couldn't do on their own? (26:17-18)

6. What does God promise about His dead in verse 19, and how does the New Testament echo it? (26:19)

7. What are God's people told to do while His anger passes, and for how long? (26:20-21)

8. Where is your mind usually fixed when you feel anxious? What would it look like to fix it on God this week?

9. How does the promise of resurrection change the way you think about death and loss?

Chapter 27: Leviathan and the Vineyard

Scripture: The Serpent Slain and Israel Restored

27:1-6 In that day the LORD will visit ***punishment*** with His fierce and great and mighty sword on Leviathan the fleeing serpent, and on Leviathan the twisting serpent; and He will slay the sea monster that ***is*** in the sea. In that day, a vineyard of delight, sing of it! I, the LORD, ***am*** its keeper; every moment I water it; lest ***anyone*** visit ***harm*** on it, night and day I keep it. Wrath I do not have. Who will give Me thorns ***and*** briers in battle? Let Me march against it; I will burn it altogether. Or let him take hold of My stronghold; let him make peace with Me; peace let him make with Me. ***In days*** to come Jacob will take root; Israel will blossom and bud, and they will fill the face of the world ***with*** fruit.

27:7-11 Like the striking of the one who struck him, has He struck him? Or like the slaughter of his slain, has he been slain? By startling, by sending her away, You contend with her; He drove ***her*** out with His fierce wind in the day of the east wind. Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be atoned for, and this ***is*** all the fruit of the removing of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altar like crushed chalk stones, Asherah poles and incense altars will not stand. For the fortified city ***is*** solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken like the wilderness; there the calf will graze, and there it will lie down, and it will consume its branches. When its branches dry up, they are broken off; women come ***and*** set it on fire. For it ***is*** not a people of understanding; therefore the One who made it will not have compassion on it, and the One who formed it will not show it favor.

27:12-13 And it will be in that day ***that*** the LORD will beat out ***grain*** from the flowing stream of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, sons of Israel. And it will be in that day ***that*** a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and the outcasts in the land of Egypt will come, and they will bow down to the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Chapter 27 Preview

The section that began in chapter 24 comes to its close. First the LORD kills Leviathan, the twisting serpent, with His great sword. Then He sings over Israel as His vineyard, a vineyard He now guards day and night.

God's discipline of Israel had a purpose: to remove her idols and forgive her sin. In that day a great trumpet will sound, and His scattered people will come home to worship Him on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1 *In that day the LORD will visit **punishment** with His fierce and great and mighty sword on Leviathan the fleeing serpent, and on Leviathan the twisting serpent; and He will slay the sea monster that **is** in the sea.*

"Leviathan the fleeing serpent." In that day the LORD will take up His fierce, great, and mighty sword and punish Leviathan, the twisted serpent, the dragon in the sea. Leviathan was a fearsome sea creature (Job 41; Psalm 104:26), and the name became a picture of chaos and evil set against God.

Bible teachers read this verse in different ways. Some see Leviathan as the great empires that oppressed Israel, such as Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt, which was often pictured as a monster in the water (Ezekiel 29:3). That may be part of it. But I believe the deeper target is Satan himself. Revelation 12:9 calls him "the great dragon ... the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan," and Revelation 20:2 uses almost the same words when he is bound.

Ever since the garden, the serpent has been at war with God and His people (Genesis 3:15). This verse promises that the war will end. God doesn't negotiate with the serpent. He kills him. At Christ's return Satan is bound, and after the thousand years he is thrown into the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:10).

New Testament links: Revelation 20:2 (alluded to)

27:2 *In that day, a vineyard of delight, sing of it!*

"A vineyard of delight, sing of it!" In that day there will be a new song about God's vineyard. Back in chapter 5, Isaiah sang a sad song about Israel as a vineyard that produced only worthless grapes, and God let it be trampled (5:1-7). Now the song is joyful. The same vineyard is fruitful and loved. That is the story of God's grace.

27:3 *I, the LORD, **am** its keeper; every moment I water it; lest **anyone** visit **harm** on it, night and day I keep it.*

"I, the LORD, am its keeper." God Himself waters the vineyard every moment and guards it night and day so no one can harm it. In chapter 5 God removed the hedge. Here He is the hedge. I believe this describes Israel restored in the Millennium, kept and protected by the Lord. Every believer can find comfort here too. The One who keeps us never sleeps (Psalm 121:4).

27:4 *Wrath I do not have. Who will give Me thorns **and** briers in battle? Let Me march against it; I will burn it altogether.*

"Wrath I do not have," God says. His anger against His vineyard is over. If briars and thorns rise up against it, God will march against them and burn them up. The briars and thorns are the enemies of His people, and perhaps also the sin that once choked the vineyard. God is no longer at war with His people. He is at war for them.

27:5 *Or let him take hold of My stronghold; let him make peace with Me; peace let him make with Me.*

"Let him make peace with Me." Even the enemy has another option. Instead of being burned, he can take hold of God's protection and make peace with Him. God says it twice to show how much He means it. This is the gospel in the Old Testament. The door is open to anyone who will come and take hold of God. Through Jesus we have peace with God (Romans 5:1).

27:6 ***In days*** *to come Jacob will take root; Israel will blossom and bud, and they will fill the face of the world* ***with*** *fruit.*

"Jacob will take root." In days to come Israel will put down roots, blossom, and sprout, and fill the whole world with fruit. This is the opposite of chapter 5. God hasn't given up on Israel. I believe this will be seen in the Millennium, when Israel is restored to her land and to her Messiah and becomes a blessing to all nations, just as God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Romans 11:12). The fruit of Israel has already filled the world in one sense, since the Savior and the Scriptures came to us through her.

27:7 *Like the striking of the one who struck him, has He struck him? Or like the slaughter of his slain, has he been slain?*

Has God struck Israel the way He struck those who struck her? Has she been killed like her enemies were killed? The answer is no. God punished Israel, but He didn't destroy her. Assyria and Babylon are gone. Israel is still here. God's discipline of His people is measured, but His judgment on His enemies is final.

27:8 *By startling, by sending her away, You contend with her; He drove* ***her*** *out with His fierce wind in the day of the east wind.*

God dealt with Israel by sending her away into exile, driving her out with His fierce east wind. The east wind in that land was the hot, dry wind off the desert. Assyria and Babylon came from the east and carried the people away. It was real discipline, but it was measured. God didn't drive them out forever.

27:9 *Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be atoned for, and this* ***is*** *all the fruit of the removing of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altar like crushed chalk stones, Asherah poles and incense altars will not stand.*

"By this the iniquity of Jacob will be atoned for." Here is the purpose of the exile. Through this discipline, Israel's sin will be atoned for and forgiven, and the proof will be that she breaks her idols to pieces. Her altar stones will be crushed like chalk, and the Asherim, wooden poles used in the worship of a false goddess, will be torn down.

Paul draws on this verse in Romans 11:26-27 when he writes that all Israel will be saved and that God will take away their sins. Forgiveness for Israel, and for us, finally rests on the cross, where Jesus paid for sin. But true forgiveness always shows up in a changed life. When God forgives, we let go of our idols.

New Testament links: Romans 11:27 (quoted)

27:10 *For the fortified city **is** solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken like the wilderness; there the calf will graze, and there it will lie down, and it will consume its branches.*

The fortified city is lonely now, a forsaken homestead like the desert. Calves graze there and strip its branches. As in 25:2 and 26:5, the city isn't named. Some take it as the proud world city, others as Jerusalem or Samaria under judgment. I lean toward the proud city of the world, set in contrast to God's fruitful vineyard. The city that trusted its walls ends up as a pasture.

27:11 *When its branches dry up, they are broken off; women come **and** set it on fire. For it **is** not a people of understanding; therefore the One who made it will not have compassion on it, and the One who formed it will not show it favor.*

When its branches dry up, women break them off and use them for firewood. These are a people without understanding, so their Maker won't show them compassion, and their Creator won't show them favor. This is a hard verse. It reminds us that God's mercy is offered, but it can be refused. Those who won't understand or turn to Him will face their Maker without His favor.

27:12 *And it will be in that day **that** the LORD will beat out **grain** from the flowing stream of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, sons of Israel.*

In that day the LORD will thresh His harvest from the Euphrates River to the brook of Egypt, the old borders God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18). Then He will gather the sons of Israel "one by one." God doesn't gather His people in a crowd where some get lost. He knows each one by name and picks each one up by hand. That is how carefully He gathers you too.

27:13 *And it will be in that day **that** a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and the outcasts in the land of Egypt will come, and they will bow down to the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.*

"A great trumpet will be blown." In that day a great trumpet sounds, and those who were perishing in Assyria and scattered in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem. The trumpet in Israel called the people together for feasts and for the year of jubilee, when slaves went free and land returned to its owners (Leviticus 25:9).

Jesus said that when He returns, He will send His angels "with a trumpet of great sound" to gather His elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31). I believe this verse looks ahead to that day, when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation, gathers His elect, and brings Israel home to worship Him in Jerusalem.

Chapters 24 through 27 began with the earth laid waste and end with worship on God's holy mountain. That is where history is headed. Judgment is real, but it isn't the last word. The last word belongs to the King, and His people gathered around Him in joy.

New Testament links: Matthew 24:31 (alluded to)

Chapter 27 Summary

In that day the LORD will kill Leviathan, the twisted serpent, with His great sword. He sings over Israel as His vineyard, watering and guarding it day and night, and invites even His enemies to make peace with Him. Israel will take root and fill the world with fruit. God's discipline of Israel was measured and had a purpose: to forgive her sin and remove her idols. In that day He will gather His people one by one, and a great trumpet will call them home to worship Him in Jerusalem.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. When have you heard a sound, like a bell or a trumpet, that meant something important was about to happen?

2. Who or what do you think Leviathan represents, and what will God do to it? (27:1)

3. How is the vineyard song in this chapter different from the one in chapter 5? (27:2-6)

4. What invitation does God give even to His enemies? (27:5)

5. How was God's discipline of Israel different from His judgment on her enemies? (27:7-8)

6. According to verse 9, what is the purpose of Israel's discipline, and how does Paul use it in Romans 11:26-27? (27:9)

7. What happens when the great trumpet is blown? (27:12-13)

8. God gathers His people "one by one." How does it feel to know that God knows you personally?

9. Is there an idol God may be asking you to break to pieces this week?

Chapter 28: The Cornerstone

Scripture: Woe to Ephraim and the Scoffers of Jerusalem

28:1-6 Woe ***to*** the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the withering flower of the beauty of its splendor, which ***is*** on the head of the valley of fatness of those struck down by wine. Look, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters; he has cast ***it*** down to the earth with ***his*** hand. With feet the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trampled. And the withering flower of the beauty of its splendor, which ***is*** on the head of the valley of fatness, will be like an early fig before summer, which the one who sees it sees; while it ***is*** still in his hand, he swallows it. In that day the LORD of armies will become a crown of beauty and a diadem of splendor for the remnant of His people, and a spirit of justice for the one who sits in judgment, and strength ***for*** those who turn back the battle toward the gate.

28:7-13 And these also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; priest and prophet reel with strong drink; they are swallowed up by the wine; they stagger from the strong drink; they reel in the vision; they totter ***in*** giving judgment. For all tables are full of vomit, filth, without ***a*** place. Whom will he teach knowledge, and whom will he make understand the message? Those weaned from milk, those removed from the breasts? For ***it is*** command to command, command to command, line to line, line to line, a little there, a little there. For with stammerings of lip and with another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, "This ***is*** the rest; give rest to the weary; and this ***is*** the repose"; and they were not willing to hear. And the word of the LORD will be to them command to command, command to command, line to line, line to line, a little there, a little there, so that they may go and stumble backward, and be broken, and be snared, and be captured.

28:14-22 Therefore hear the word of the LORD, men of mockery, rulers of this people who ***are*** in Jerusalem. Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made an agreement; an overflowing scourge, when it passes through, will not come to us; for we have made falsehood our refuge, and in deception we have hidden ourselves," therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Look, I ***am He who*** has laid in Zion a stone, a stone of testing, a precious corner of a foundation, firmly founded; the one who believes will not hurry. And I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of falsehood, and waters will overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; an overflowing scourge, when it passes through, you will become a trampling place for it. As often as it passes through, it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message." For the bed is too short to stretch oneself out, and the blanket is narrow when one wraps oneself up. For the LORD will rise up as ***at*** the mountain of Perazim; He will rage as ***in*** the valley in Gibeon, to do His deed, strange ***is*** His deed, and to work His work, alien ***is*** His work. And now, do not be mockers, lest your bonds become strong; for a complete end, and ***one*** decided, I have heard from the Lord GOD of armies upon all the earth.

28:23-29 Give ear and hear my voice; pay attention and hear my utterance. Does the plowman plow all day to sow? ***Does*** he ***keep*** loosening and harrowing his ground? Does he not, when he has leveled its surface, scatter black cumin and sprinkle cumin, and put wheat in rows and barley in ***its*** appointed ***place***, and spelt ***in*** its border? And his God instructs him for judgment; He teaches him. For black cumin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, and the wheel of a cart is ***not*** turned over cumin; for black cumin is beaten out with a staff, and cumin with a rod. ***Grain for*** bread is crushed, for he does not keep threshing it forever; and ***when*** he drives the wheel of his cart and his horses ***over it***, he does not crush it. This also has gone out from the LORD of armies; He has made counsel wonderful; He has made sound wisdom great.

Chapter 28 Preview

Chapter 28 opens a new section of Isaiah, a string of six "woes" that runs through chapter 33. Isaiah starts with Samaria, the proud capital of the northern kingdom, and then turns the same warning on the leaders in Jerusalem, who mocked his message and trusted in their own deals.

In the middle of the judgment, God lays a stone in Zion, a sure foundation for anyone who believes. The New Testament tells us who that stone is.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1 *Woe **to** the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the withering flower of the beauty of its splendor, which **is** on the head of the valley of fatness of those struck down by wine.*

Ephraim was the largest tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel, and Isaiah often uses the name for the whole nation. Its capital, Samaria, sat on a hill above a rich valley, like a crown of flowers on a drunk man's head at a feast. The picture is of a city proud of its beauty and soaked in luxury. Isaiah probably spoke these words shortly before Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.

28:2 *Look, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters; he has cast **it** down to the earth with **his** hand.*

"Look, the Lord has a mighty and strong one." The agent is Assyria, the great empire to the northeast that God used as His instrument of judgment. Isaiah has already called Assyria "the rod of My anger" (10:5). Here the army comes like hail and a flood. God isn't watching from a distance. Of His instrument Isaiah says, "he has cast it down to the earth with his hand."

28:3 *With feet the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trampled.*

The crown that Ephraim wore so proudly ends up in the dirt under the boots of soldiers. Pride always looks secure right up until the moment it falls (Proverbs 16:18).

28:4 *And the withering flower of the beauty of its splendor, which **is** on the head of the valley of fatness, will be like an early fig before summer, which the one who sees it sees; while it **is** still in his hand, he swallows it.*

A first-ripe fig was a treat. Anyone who spotted one early in the season would pick it and eat it on the spot. That is how quickly Assyria would take Samaria. The city looked like a prize, and the enemy would swallow it whole.

28:5 *In that day the LORD of armies will become a crown of beauty and a diadem of splendor for the remnant of His people,*

"In that day the LORD of armies will become a crown." Isaiah sets two crowns side by side. The drunkards' crown of fading flowers is trampled, but God Himself becomes the crown of the remnant. A remnant is the small group of God's people who survive judgment and stay faithful to Him. When everything people boasted in is gone, the faithful find that the Lord was their real glory all along.

I believe "that day" reaches past Isaiah's time to the day Christ reigns, when the remnant of Israel will finally have the Lord as their King.

28:6 *and a spirit of justice for the one who sits in judgment, and strength **for** those who turn back the battle toward the gate.*

The same Lord who is the remnant's crown gives wisdom to the judges and courage to the soldiers. Justice in the courtroom and strength at the city gate both come from Him. A nation is only as strong as the character God puts into its people.

28:7 *And these also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; priest and prophet reel with strong drink; they are swallowed up by the wine; they stagger from the strong drink; they reel in the vision; they totter **in** giving judgment.*

"These also reel with wine." Now Isaiah turns south. The leaders of Judah are no better than Ephraim. The priests, who were to teach God's law, and the prophets, who were to speak God's word, are drunk on the job. They stumble in their visions and in their judgments. When spiritual leaders are compromised, the whole nation loses its way.

28:8 *For all tables are full of vomit, filth, without **a** place.*

The picture is ugly on purpose. Every table at their feasts is covered in vomit. Isaiah wants his hearers to feel the disgust God feels toward leaders who should be clean and sober but aren't.

28:9 *Whom will he teach knowledge, and whom will he make understand the message? Those weaned from milk, those removed from the breasts?*

Here the drunken priests and prophets answer back. They mock Isaiah: "Whom will he teach knowledge ... Those weaned from milk, those removed from the breasts?" In other words, who

does he think he is teaching, babies? They were insulted that he spoke to them so plainly. Proud people often resent simple truth.

28:10 *For **it is** command to command, command to command, line to line, line to line, a little there, a little there.*

In Hebrew this verse is a string of short sounds, something like "tsav la-tsav, tsav la-tsav, kav la-kav, kav la-kav." The scoffers are imitating Isaiah as if he were talking baby talk. To them, his message was the same thing over and over, a little bit at a time, like a teacher drilling children.

28:11 *For with stammerings of lip and with another tongue He will speak to this people,*

"With stammerings of lip and with another tongue." God answers the mockers. Since they wouldn't listen to His prophet in their own language, they would hear Him through the harsh, foreign speech of the Assyrian soldiers. Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 14:21 when he teaches about speaking in tongues, showing that unknown languages were a sign of judgment to people who wouldn't believe.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 14:21 (quoted)

28:12 *to whom He said, "This **is** the rest; give rest to the weary; and this **is** the repose"; and they were not willing to hear.*

God had offered them rest. "This is the rest; give rest to the weary." That was the heart of Isaiah's message: trust the Lord, stop running to foreign powers, and find peace in Him. They refused. Jesus makes the same offer today (Matthew 11:28), and people still refuse it.

Paul's quote in 1 Corinthians 14:21 runs on into this verse. He ends it with God's sad words, "and not even so will they listen to Me, says the Lord."

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 14:21 (quoted)

28:13 *And the word of the LORD will be to them command to command, command to command, line to line, line to line, a little there, a little there, so that they may go and stumble backward, and be broken, and be snared, and be captured.*

God turns their mockery back on them. They made fun of His word as "a little there, a little there," so that is all they will get, and it will trip them up. They will stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive. When people reject God's plain word, the same word becomes the thing that judges them.

28:14 *Therefore hear the word of the LORD, men of mockery, rulers of this people who **are** in Jerusalem.*

"Men of mockery, rulers of this people." Isaiah now speaks to the rulers in Jerusalem. A scoffer is someone who mocks what is holy. These weren't ordinary citizens but the men in charge, the ones making decisions for the nation.

28:15 *Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made an agreement; an overflowing scourge, when it passes through, will not come to us; for we have made falsehood our refuge, and in deception we have hidden ourselves,"*

The rulers bragged that they had made "a covenant with death" and a pact with Sheol. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the grave, the place of the dead. I take this to mean their political deals, most likely their alliance with Egypt against Assyria (chapters 30-31). They believed their treaty would keep the "overflowing scourge" away. Isaiah puts their real words in plain terms: they had made lies their refuge.

28:16 *therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Look, I* ***am He who*** *has laid in Zion a stone, a stone of testing, a precious corner of a foundation, firmly founded; the one who believes will not hurry.*

"Look, I am He who has laid in Zion a stone." This verse points straight to the Messiah. The word Messiah means "Anointed One," the King God promised to send. While the rulers built their safety on lies, God was laying a different foundation in Zion, a stone that had been tested and would never give way.

A cornerstone was the first and most important stone in a building. Every other stone was lined up by it. The New Testament tells us plainly who this stone is. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:33 and Peter quotes it in 1 Peter 2:6, and both apply it to Jesus Christ. Peter adds that the stone the builders rejected has become the very corner stone (1 Peter 2:7, quoting Psalm 118:22). Jesus was tested in every way and didn't fail. He is the only foundation that will hold (1 Corinthians 3:11).

"The one who believes will not hurry." The Hebrew word behind "hurry" carries the idea of rushing or panicking. The person who trusts in Christ doesn't have to run in a panic from one plan to another. That is exactly what the leaders of Judah were doing, rushing off to Egypt. So how do I know whether I'm standing on this stone? It's simple: are you trusting in Jesus, or in your own arrangements? Romans 10:11 quotes this line: "Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame."

New Testament links: Romans 9:33 (quoted); 1 Peter 2:6 (quoted); Romans 10:11 (quoted); Ephesians 2:20 (alluded to)

28:17 *And I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of falsehood, and waters will overflow the hiding place.*

God measures with justice and righteousness the way a builder checks a wall with a line and a level. Anything crooked will be torn down. The hail and the flood, the same pictures used of Assyria in verse 2, will wash away the "refuge of falsehood" the rulers were hiding in.

28:18 *And your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; an overflowing scourge, when it passes through, you will become a trampling place for it.*

Their covenant with death will be canceled. The deal they trusted wouldn't stand. When the scourge came through, they wouldn't be spared; they would be trampled by it. Every promise made apart from God will eventually be broken.

28:19 *As often as it passes through, it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message."*

This judgment wouldn't be one quick blow. It would come morning after morning, day and night. Isaiah says that simply understanding the message will be "sheer terror." When the truth finally sinks in, it will be too late to escape it.

28:20 *For the bed is too short to stretch oneself out, and the blanket is narrow when one wraps oneself up.*

"The bed is too short to stretch oneself out." This was probably a common saying. You lie down to rest, but your feet hang off the end, and the blanket won't cover you. Their plans for safety would leave them uncomfortable and exposed. Every human refuge apart from God turns out to be too small.

28:21 *For the LORD will rise up as **at** the mountain of Perazim; He will rage as **in** the valley in Gibeon, to do His deed, strange **is** His deed, and to work His work, alien **is** His work.*

Isaiah reminds them of two great victories. At Mount Perazim (also called Baal-perazim) God broke through the Philistines for David (2 Samuel 5:20). At Gibeon God threw down hailstones on the enemies of Israel in Joshua's day (Joshua 10:10-11). But now God will fight against His own people. That is why Isaiah says, "strange is His deed," and "alien is His work." Judging His own people isn't what God delights in, but He will do it.

28:22 *And now, do not be mockers, lest your bonds become strong; for a complete end, and **one** decided, I have heard from the Lord GOD of armies upon all the earth.*

Isaiah pleads with them to stop mocking, or their chains will only get tighter. He has heard of "a complete end, and one decided," from the Lord GOD of armies, "upon all the earth." I believe this points beyond Assyria to the final judgment on the whole earth at the end of the age, the Day of the LORD.

28:23 *Give ear and hear my voice; pay attention and hear my utterance.*

The tone changes. Isaiah becomes a teacher again and asks for their full attention. What follows is a short parable from the farm, the kind of thing every listener in Judah would understand.

28:24 *Does the plowman plow all day to sow? **Does** he **keep** loosening and harrowing his ground?*

A farmer plows, but he doesn't plow forever. Plowing has a purpose, and when the ground is ready he stops. In the same way, God's judgment isn't endless. It breaks up the hard ground of the heart so that something can grow.

28:25 *Does he not, when he has leveled its surface, scatter black cumin and sprinkle cumin, and put wheat in rows and barley in* ***its*** *appointed* ***place****, and spelt* ***in*** *its border?*

After plowing, the farmer plants each seed in its proper place. Dill and cummin are scattered. Wheat goes in rows. Barley and rye each have their spot. He has a plan for every crop. God also has a plan for every person and nation He deals with.

28:26 *And his God instructs him for judgment; He teaches him.*

"His God instructs him for judgment; He teaches him." Even a farmer's common sense is a gift from God. If God gives a farmer wisdom to know how to handle his field, how much more does God know how to handle His people?

28:27 *For black cumin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, and the wheel of a cart is* ***not*** *turned over cumin; for black cumin is beaten out with a staff, and cumin with a rod.*

Small, delicate seeds like dill and cummin aren't crushed under a heavy sledge or a cart wheel. They are beaten out gently with a stick. A good farmer uses only as much force as each crop needs. God's discipline is measured too. He knows how much each of us can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

28:28 ***Grain for*** *bread is crushed, for he does not keep threshing it forever; and* ***when*** *he drives the wheel of his cart and his horses* ***over it****, he does not crush it.*

Even wheat, which must be threshed hard, isn't threshed forever. A farmer stops before the grain is ruined. God's goal in judging His people isn't to destroy them but to separate the grain from the chaff. That's a comfort, because if you're walking through a hard season, God knows when to stop.

28:29 *This also has gone out from the LORD of armies; He has made counsel wonderful; He has made sound wisdom great.*

The lesson of the farmer comes from the LORD of armies. "He has made counsel wonderful," and the same Hebrew word is used of the Messiah, "Wonder, Counselor," in 9:6. God's ways may look harsh when we are in the middle of them, but His wisdom is great, and He never wastes a single blow.

Chapter 28 Summary

Isaiah warns the proud, drunken leaders of Ephraim that Assyria will swallow them like an early fig, and then he gives the same warning to the scoffing rulers of Jerusalem, who trusted a "covenant with death" instead of the Lord. Against their refuge of lies, God lays a tested cornerstone in Zion, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The chapter closes with a farmer's parable: God's discipline is measured, purposeful and wise.

The Six Woes (Chapters 28-33)

Chapters 28-33 are built around six "woes," warnings that open with the Hebrew word hoy, a cry also used in mourning for the dead.

Woe 1 (28:1): Against the drunkards of Ephraim and the scoffing rulers of Jerusalem.

Woe 2 (29:1): Against Ariel, a name for Jerusalem, for empty worship.

Woe 3 (29:15): Against those who hide their plans from the LORD.

Woe 4 (30:1): Against the rebellious children who make an alliance with Egypt.

Woe 5 (31:1): Against those who go down to Egypt for help.

Woe 6 (33:1): Against the destroyer, Assyria.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What are some things people today take pride in that can fade quickly?
2. What two crowns does Isaiah contrast at the start of the chapter? (28:1-5)
3. How did the priests and prophets of Judah respond to Isaiah's message? (28:7-10)
4. What rest did God offer His people, and why did they not receive it? (28:12)
5. What was the "covenant with death" the rulers trusted in, and what would happen to it? (28:14-18)
6. Who is the stone God lays in Zion, according to Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:6? (28:16)
7. What does the farmer's parable teach us about how God disciplines His people? (28:23-29)
8. Where are you tempted to make your own "deal" for safety instead of trusting God?
9. How can knowing that God measures His discipline help you in a hard season right now?

Chapter 29: Ariel

Scripture: Woe to Ariel and the Sealed Book

29:1-8 Woe ***to*** Ariel, Ariel, the town ***where*** David camped! Add year to year; let festivals go around. And I will bring distress to Ariel, and there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will be to Me like Ariel. And I will encamp like a circle against you, and I will lay siege against you ***with*** siege works, and I will raise up fortifications against you. And you will be brought low; from the earth you will speak, and from the dust your utterance will be humbled; and your voice will be like a medium from the earth, and from the dust your utterance will whisper. And the multitude of your strangers will be like fine dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like chaff that passes away; and it will be in an instant, suddenly. From the LORD of armies you will be visited with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, storm wind and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. And the multitude of all the nations that wage war against Ariel will be like a dream, a vision of the night, even all who wage war against her and her stronghold, and those who bring distress to her. And it will be just as when the hungry ***one*** dreams, and look, he is eating, and he awakes, and his soul ***is*** empty; and just as when the thirsty ***one*** dreams, and look, he is drinking, and he awakes, and look, ***he is*** faint, and his soul ***is*** longing; so will be the multitude of all the nations that wage war against Mount Zion.

29:9-14 Delay and be astounded; blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, and not ***with*** wine; they stagger, and not ***with*** strong drink. For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep, and He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and your heads, the seers, He has covered. And the vision of all has become to you like the words of the sealed scroll, which they give to one who knows writing, saying, "Read this, please," and he says, "I am not able, for it ***is*** sealed." And the scroll is given to one who does not know writing, saying, "Read this, please," and he says, "I do not know writing." And the Lord said, "Because this people has drawn near with its mouth, and with its lips they have honored Me, and its heart it has put far from Me, and their fear of Me has become a commandment of men that has been taught, therefore look, I ***am He who*** will again deal wonderfully with this people, wonderfully, and ***with*** a wonder; and the wisdom of its wise ones will perish, and the understanding of its discerning ones will hide itself."

29:15-16 Woe ***to*** those who go deep to hide counsel from the LORD, and their deeds are in a dark place, and they say, "Who sees us? And who knows us?" Your perversity! Is the potter to be regarded like the clay, that the thing made should say to its maker, "He did not make me," and the thing formed say to the one who formed it, "He has no understanding"?

29:17-24 Is it not yet a very little ***while***, and Lebanon will turn into the fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be regarded as the forest? And in that day the deaf will hear the words of a scroll, and out of gloom and out of darkness the eyes of the blind will see. And the humble will increase joy in the LORD, and the needy of mankind will be glad in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless one will come to an end, and the mocker will be finished, and all who watch for wickedness will be cut off, who make a man sin with a word, and lay a trap for the one who reproves in the gate, and turn aside the righteous with emptiness. Therefore thus says the LORD, who ransomed Abraham, to the house of Jacob: "Jacob will not now be ashamed, and his face will not now grow

pale. For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will sanctify My name; and they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and they will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who go astray in spirit will know understanding, and those who murmur will learn instruction."

Chapter 29 Preview

Isaiah calls Jerusalem by a new name, Ariel, and warns that God Himself will lay siege to it. The city will be brought down to the dust, and then, in a sudden turn, its enemies will vanish like a dream.

The rest of the chapter explains why judgment had to come. The people kept their religious feasts, but their hearts were far from God. Still, Isaiah ends with hope: a day when the deaf will hear and the blind will see.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1 *Woe **to** Ariel, Ariel, the town **where** David camped! Add year to year; let festivals go around.*

"Woe to Ariel, Ariel, the town where David camped!" This is the second woe. Ariel is a name for Jerusalem, the city David captured and made his capital (2 Samuel 5:6-9). The word can mean "lion of God," and in Ezekiel 43:15 a very similar word is used for the altar hearth, where sacrifices were burned. I lean toward the altar meaning here. Jerusalem kept its feasts right on schedule, year after year, but the routine had become empty.

29:2 *And I will bring distress to Ariel, and there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will be to Me like Ariel.*

God says He will bring distress on Ariel, and then she will be "to Me like Ariel." If Ariel means altar hearth, the meaning is sobering. The city that offered sacrifices on its altar would itself become like an altar, a place of fire and blood. Religion without a real heart for God doesn't protect anyone.

29:3 *And I will encamp like a circle against you, and I will lay siege against you **with** siege works, and I will raise up fortifications against you.*

Notice who is camping against the city. It isn't just Assyria; God says, "I will encamp like a circle against you." David once camped there as a conqueror and king. Now God surrounds it with siegeworks and towers. The enemy army was only the tool in His hand.

29:4 *And you will be brought low; from the earth you will speak, and from the dust your utterance will be humbled; and your voice will be like a medium from the earth, and from the dust your utterance will whisper.*

The proud city would be brought so low that its voice sounds like a whisper rising out of the dust. The phrase about "like a medium from the earth" pictures the faint, eerie voice that people believed came from the dead. Jerusalem would be humbled almost to the point of death.

29:5 *And the multitude of your strangers will be like fine dust, and the multitude of the ruthless like chaff that passes away; and it will be in an instant, suddenly.*

"It will be in an instant, suddenly." Then the picture flips. The enemies who surrounded the city become fine dust and blowing chaff. I believe this was fulfilled in 701 B.C., when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, surrounded Jerusalem and the angel of the LORD struck 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (Isaiah 37:36). The danger was real, and so was the rescue.

29:6 *From the LORD of armies you will be visited with thunder and with earthquake and great noise, storm wind and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.*

Thunder, earthquake, whirlwind and fire are the signs of God stepping in Himself. The word "visited" is a Hebrew word that God can use for a visit in judgment or in rescue. Some read it one way here and some the other. Because verses 5 and 7 have the enemy blown away, I read the storm as falling mainly on the attackers. God's presence is terrifying, and Jerusalem would feel the shaking, but the fire comes against the enemies of His people.

29:7 *And the multitude of all the nations that wage war against Ariel will be like a dream, a vision of the night, even all who wage war against her and her stronghold, and those who bring distress to her.*

All the nations that fought against Ariel would become like a dream that is gone when you wake up. Assyria's army was made up of soldiers from many conquered nations, so "all the nations" fits Isaiah's own day. I also see a far fulfillment here. Zechariah 12:2-9 and 14:2-3 describe all the nations gathering against Jerusalem at the end of the age, and the Lord fighting for His city.

29:8 *And it will be just as when the hungry **one** dreams, and look, he is eating, and he awakes, and his soul **is** empty; and just as when the thirsty **one** dreams, and look, he is drinking, and he awakes, and look, **he is** faint, and his soul **is** longing; so will be the multitude of all the nations that wage war against Mount Zion.*

A hungry man dreams he is eating and wakes up still hungry. A thirsty man dreams he is drinking and wakes up faint. That is how the enemy will feel. They thought Jerusalem was theirs to swallow, and they woke up with nothing. Anyone who sets himself against God's purposes ends up empty.

29:9 *Delay and be astounded; blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, and not **with** wine; they stagger, and not **with** strong drink.*

"They are drunk, and not with wine." In chapter 28 the leaders were drunk on wine. Here they are drunk in another way, dazed and blind to what God is doing. Isaiah almost says, "Go ahead, stay blind." When people keep refusing to see, God eventually lets them have their blindness.

29:10 *For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep, and He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and your heads, the seers, He has covered.*

God poured over them "a spirit of deep sleep." The prophets and seers, who should have been the eyes of the nation, had their eyes shut. Paul draws on this verse in Romans 11:8 to explain why much of Israel didn't recognize Jesus. Yet that same chapter tells us the hardening is partial and temporary (Romans 11:25-26). God hasn't finished with Israel.

New Testament links: Romans 11:8 (quoted)

29:11 *And the vision of all has become to you like the words of the sealed scroll, which they give to one who knows writing, saying, "Read this, please," and he says, "I am not able, for it **is** sealed."*

God's message was like a sealed scroll. Hand it to someone who can read, and he says, "I am not able, for it is sealed." The truth was right in front of them, but they couldn't open it. The problem wasn't a lack of education; it was a closed heart.

29:12 *And the scroll is given to one who does not know writing, saying, "Read this, please," and he says, "I do not know writing."*

Hand the same scroll to someone who can't read, and he has a different excuse: "I do not know writing." Everyone had a reason not to understand. Many people today treat the Bible the same way. They say it is too hard or that it isn't for them, when the real issue is that they don't want to hear it.

29:13 *And the Lord said, "Because this people has drawn near with its mouth, and with its lips they have honored Me, and its heart it has put far from Me, and their fear of Me has become a commandment of men that has been taught,*

"This people has drawn near with its mouth." This verse should make every churchgoer stop and think, me included. The people said the right words and went through the right motions, but their hearts were far away. Their worship was "a commandment of men that has been taught," habits passed down without any love behind them.

Jesus quoted this verse against the religious leaders of His day (Matthew 15:7-9; Mark 7:6-7). It still applies. You can sing every song in church and still keep your heart at a distance. God isn't looking for performance. He wants you.

New Testament links: Mark 7:6-7 (quoted); Matthew 15:8-9 (quoted); Colossians 2:22 (alluded to)

29:14 *therefore look, I **am He who** will again deal wonderfully with this people, wonderfully, and **with** a wonder; and the wisdom of its wise ones will perish, and the understanding of its discerning ones will hide itself."*

Because their worship was empty, God would act in a way that left their wise men speechless. Their political experts and advisers, the ones pushing the alliance with Egypt, would be shown to be fools. Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 1:19 to show that God's plan of salvation through the cross makes the wisdom of this world look foolish.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 1:19 (quoted)

29:15 *Woe **to** those who go deep to hide counsel from the LORD, and their deeds are in a dark place, and they say, "Who sees us? And who knows us?"*

"Woe to those who go deep to hide counsel from the LORD." The third woe. The rulers made their plans in secret, probably the negotiations with Egypt, and acted as if God couldn't see. "Who sees us? And who knows us?" Nothing is hidden from God (Hebrews 4:13). Anything we plan in the dark, we plan in His full view.

29:16 *Your perversity! Is the potter to be regarded like the clay, that the thing made should say to its maker, "He did not make me," and the thing formed say to the one who formed it, "He has no understanding"?*

"Your perversity!" They had everything upside down. They acted as if they were the potter and God was the clay. Imagine a pot telling the man who shaped it, "You didn't make me," or "You don't know what you're doing." Paul uses the same picture in Romans 9:20-21. God is the Maker, and we are what He made. Our part is to trust Him, not to correct Him.

New Testament links: Romans 9:20 (alluded to)

29:17 *Is it not yet a very little **while**, and Lebanon will turn into the fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be regarded as the forest?*

Isaiah looks ahead to a great reversal. Lebanon, famous for its forests, will become a fertile field, and the fertile field will grow into a forest. Everything will be turned over and renewed. I believe this points to the kingdom age, when Christ reigns and even the land is restored.

29:18 *And in that day the deaf will hear the words of a scroll, and out of gloom and out of darkness the eyes of the blind will see.*

"In that day the deaf will hear the words of a scroll." The sealed book of verse 11 is opened. The deaf hear it and the blind see. Spiritually, this happens every time someone comes to faith. Physically, Jesus did exactly this in His ministry (Matthew 11:5), giving a preview of the healing that will fill the earth in His kingdom (see 35:5).

New Testament links: Matthew 11:5 (alluded to); Luke 7:22 (alluded to)

29:19 *And the humble will increase joy in the LORD, and the needy of mankind will be glad in the Holy One of Israel.*

The humble and the poor, the very people the powerful ignored, will be the ones rejoicing in the Holy One of Israel. God has always had a special care for the afflicted. Jesus said the gospel is preached to the poor (Luke 4:18).

29:20 *For the ruthless one will come to an end, and the mocker will be finished, and all who watch for wickedness will be cut off,*

The ruthless and the scorners will be gone. All "who watch for wickedness" will be cut down. Isaiah has in mind the corrupt leaders of his day, but the full answer to this verse comes when Christ returns and removes evil from the earth.

29:21 *who make a man sin with a word, and lay a trap for the one who reproves in the gate, and turn aside the righteous with emptiness.*

Isaiah describes how these men worked. They twisted words to get people charged with crimes. They set traps for the honest judge at the city gate, where court was held. They pushed aside innocent people with empty arguments. God sees injustice in the courtroom, and He will answer it.

29:22 *Therefore thus says the LORD, who ransomed Abraham, to the house of Jacob: "Jacob will not now be ashamed, and his face will not now grow pale.*

"Thus says the LORD, who ransomed Abraham, to the house of Jacob:" God reminds Israel of where it all started. He called Abraham out of an idol-worshiping family and land (Joshua 24:2-3) and made promises to him. God kept Abraham, and He will keep Jacob's descendants. The day is coming when Israel will no longer be ashamed.

29:23 *For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will sanctify My name; and they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and they will stand in awe of the God of Israel.*

When Jacob sees his children, the work of God's hands, he will see a people who honor God's name and stand in awe of Him. I take this as a promise to the nation of Israel. When Israel turns to Jesus as a nation (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26), they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob.

29:24 *And those who go astray in spirit will know understanding, and those who murmur will learn instruction."*

The chapter ends where it began, with the mind and the heart. People who had wandered in their thinking will know the truth, and those who grumbled will receive instruction. The sealed book is open at last. No heart is so hard that God can't open it.

Chapter 29 Summary

God warns Ariel, Jerusalem, that He will lay siege to it and bring it down to the dust, then suddenly scatter its enemies like a dream, as He did to Sennacherib's army in 701 B.C. The people's worship was empty, words without hearts, and their leaders hid their plans from God. Yet Isaiah ends with a day when the deaf hear, the blind see, the humble rejoice, and Israel stands in awe of the Holy One.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. Have you ever gone through the motions in something that used to mean a lot to you?

2. Why do you think Isaiah calls Jerusalem "Ariel"? (29:1-2)

3. How does Isaiah describe the sudden end of Jerusalem's enemies? (29:5-8)

4. What excuses do the two people give for not reading the sealed book? (29:11-12)

5. What was wrong with the people's worship, and how did Jesus use this verse? (29:13)

6. What does the picture of the potter and the clay teach about our relationship with God? (29:16)

7. What changes does Isaiah promise "in that day"? (29:17-24)

8. Is your heart close to God when you worship, or only your words? What helps you close that gap?

9. Are there plans in your life you would rather God not look at too closely?

Chapter 30: Help from Egypt

Scripture: Trusting Egypt, and the Lord Who Waits to Be Gracious

30:1-7 "Woe ***to*** rebellious sons," declares the LORD, "to make a plan, and not from Me, and to pour out a libation, and not ***of*** My Spirit, so as to add sin to sin; who walk to go down ***to*** Egypt, and My mouth they have not asked, to take shelter in the stronghold of Pharaoh, and to seek refuge in the shadow of Egypt. And the stronghold of Pharaoh will become to you for shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt for disgrace. For his officials have been in Zoan, and his messengers have reached Hanes. Everyone will be put to shame over a people ***who*** will not profit them, not for help and not for profit, but for shame and also for reproach." The oracle of the animals of the Negeb: In a land of trouble and distress, ***of*** lioness and lion, from which ***come*** viper and flying serpent, they carry their wealth on the shoulder of young donkeys, and their treasures on the hump of camels, to a people ***who*** will not profit. And Egypt, ***with*** futility and emptiness they will help; therefore I have called this ***one*** "Rahab, they ***are*** a sitting still."

30:8-17 Now go, write it on a tablet with them, and inscribe it on a scroll, and let it be for a latter day, for perpetuity, forever. For it ***is*** a people of rebellion, lying sons, sons ***who*** have not been willing to hear the law of the LORD; who have said to the seers, "You shall not see," and to the visionaries, "You shall not envision for us right things; speak to us smooth things; envision deceptions. Turn away from the way; turn aside from the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: "Because you have rejected this word, and you have trusted in oppression and crookedness, and you have leaned on it, therefore this iniquity will be to you like a breach about to fall, bulging out in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant. And He will break it like the breaking of a potters' jar, crushed; He will not spare, and there will not be found among its fragments a potsherd to snatch up fire from a hearth and to scoop water from a cistern." For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you will be saved; in keeping quiet and in trust will be your strength. And you were not willing. And you said, 'No, for on horse we will flee'; therefore you will flee! 'And on a swift ***one*** we will ride'; therefore those who pursue you will be swift. One thousand ***will flee*** because of the rebuke of one; because of the rebuke of five you will flee, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of the mountain, and like a banner on the hill."

30:18-26 And therefore the LORD waits to show favor to you, and therefore He rises up to have compassion on you. For the LORD ***is*** a God of justice; how blessed ***are*** all who wait for Him. For a people will dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you will surely not weep. He will surely show favor to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. And the Lord will give you bread ***of*** distress and water ***of*** oppression, and your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, and your eyes will be seeing your Teacher. And your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, "This ***is*** the way; walk in it," when you go to the right and when you go to the left. And you will defile the plating of your images of silver and the sheathing of your molten image of gold; you will scatter them like a menstrual ***rag***; "Filth!" you will say to it. And He will give the rain of your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, and it will be fat and rich. Your livestock will graze in that day ***in*** a roomy pasture. And the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat salted fodder, which ***one*** winnows with the shovel and with the fork. And ***there*** will be on

every high mountain and on every lifted-up hill streams, channels of water, in a day of great slaughter, when towers fall. And the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, in the day the LORD binds up the fracture of His people, and the wound of His blow He heals.

30:27-33 Look, the name of the LORD comes from afar; His anger ***is*** burning, and heavy ***is the*** rising ***smoke***; His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue ***is*** like a consuming fire. And His breath ***is*** like an overflowing torrent; up to the neck it reaches, to shake nations in a sieve of worthlessness, and a bridle that leads astray ***is*** on the jaws of the peoples. The song will be yours like a night of consecrating a festival, and gladness of heart like the one who walks with the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. And the LORD will cause the majesty of His voice to be heard, and He will show the lowering of His arm, with the raging of anger and a flame of consuming fire, a driving storm and a rainstorm and hailstones. For at the voice of the LORD Assyria will be shattered; with the rod He will strike. And every stroke of the staff of appointment which the LORD will lay on him will be with tambourines and with lyres; and in battles of brandishing He will fight against them. For a burning place is arranged from yesterday; it also has been prepared for the king; He has made ***it*** deep, He has made ***it*** large; its pile ***is*** fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a torrent of sulfur, burns in it.

Chapter 30 Preview

The leaders of Judah had a plan. Assyria was coming, so they sent ambassadors and treasure down to Egypt to buy protection. Isaiah calls this rebellion. God had told them where their strength was, "in keeping quiet and in trust," and they wouldn't listen.

Yet this chapter also holds some of the tenderest words in the book. The Lord waits to be gracious. He will guide His people with a voice behind them, heal their wounds, and break the power of Assyria.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1 *"Woe **to** rebellious sons," declares the LORD, "to make a plan, and not from Me, and to pour out a libation, and not **of** My Spirit, so as to add sin to sin;*

"Woe to rebellious sons." This is the fourth woe. God calls Judah His children, which makes their rebellion hurt more. They had a plan and made an alliance, but neither came from God. They were adding sin to sin, first by not asking Him and then by trusting someone else. Making plans isn't wrong. Making them without God is.

30:2 *who walk to go down **to** Egypt, and My mouth they have not asked, to take shelter in the stronghold of Pharaoh, and to seek refuge in the shadow of Egypt.*

They went "down to Egypt" without consulting the Lord. Most scholars place this around 705-701 B.C., when King Hezekiah's officials looked for Egyptian help against Assyria. The phrase "down to Egypt" carries weight in Israel's story. God had brought them up out of Egypt and out of slavery, and now they were running back for protection.

30:3 *And the stronghold of Pharaoh will become to you for shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt for disgrace.*

The thing they ran to for safety would become their shame. That is often how it goes when we lean on something other than God. The shelter turns into a source of humiliation.

30:4 *For his officials have been in Zoan, and his messengers have reached Hanes.*

Zoan was a royal city in the Nile Delta in northern Egypt, and Hanes was a city farther south. Judah's officials were traveling from one Egyptian court to another, working hard to secure a deal. All that effort was being spent in the wrong direction.

30:5 *Everyone will be put to shame over a people **who** will not profit them, not for help and not for profit, but for shame and also for reproach."*

Egypt couldn't help them. Isaiah piles up the words: no help, no profit, only shame and reproach. Egypt did send an army against Assyria in 701 B.C., but it didn't save Judah. Only the Lord did that (37:36).

30:6 *The oracle of the animals of the Negeb: In a land of trouble and distress, **of** lioness and lion, from which **come** viper and flying serpent, they carry their wealth on the shoulder of young donkeys, and their treasures on the hump of camels, to a people **who** will not profit.*

"The oracle of the animals of the Negeb." An oracle is a burden or message from God, often a message of judgment. The Negev is the dry southern desert between Judah and Egypt. Isaiah pictures the caravan of donkeys and camels carrying Judah's treasure through dangerous country full of lions and snakes, all to pay a nation that couldn't deliver.

30:7 *And Egypt, **with** futility and emptiness they will help; therefore I have called this **one** "Rahab, they **are** a sitting still."*

God gives Egypt a nickname: "Rahab, they are a sitting still." Rahab here isn't the woman of Jericho. It is a name for a proud sea monster and became a poetic name for Egypt (Psalm 87:4). Other versions render God's phrase differently, but the sense is clear: Egypt talks big and does nothing.

30:8 *Now go, write it on a tablet with them, and inscribe it on a scroll, and let it be for a latter day, for perpetuity, forever.*

God told Isaiah to write this message down on a tablet and a scroll. It would stand as a witness "forever," so that later generations could see that God had warned them. I am grateful God's warnings were written down. We hold that same record in our hands when we open the Bible.

30:9 *For it **is** a people of rebellion, lying sons, sons **who** have not been willing to hear the law of the LORD;*

God describes the people plainly. They are rebellious and false, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the LORD. The word for instruction is torah, God's teaching. The problem wasn't that they didn't know what God said. They didn't want to hear it.

30:10 *who have said to the seers, "You shall not see," and to the visionaries, "You shall not envision for us right things; speak to us smooth things; envision deceptions.*

"Speak to us smooth things; envision deceptions." This may be the most honest thing a rebellious people ever said. They didn't want the truth. They wanted the prophets to tell them nice things. Paul warned that a time would come when people would gather teachers who tell them what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4). That time is still with us.

30:11 *Turn away from the way; turn aside from the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us."*

They told the prophets to get out of the way and stop talking about the Holy One of Israel. That title, Isaiah's favorite name for God, reminded them that God is holy, set apart from sin. They were tired of hearing about a holy God. A holy God is uncomfortable for anyone who wants to keep sinning.

30:12 *Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: "Because you have rejected this word, and you have trusted in oppression and crookedness, and you have leaned on it,*

They rejected God's word and trusted instead in oppression and guile, meaning force and trickery. That is the trade they made: God's word for their own schemes.

30:13 *therefore this iniquity will be to you like a breach about to fall, bulging out in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant.*

Their sin is like a crack running through a high wall. The wall bulges outward and looks fine from a distance, but one day it collapses in an instant. Sin works this way. It builds pressure quietly, and then everything gives way at once.

30:14 *And He will break it like the breaking of a potters' jar, crushed; He will not spare, and there will not be found among its fragments a potsherd to snatch up fire from a hearth and to scoop water from a cistern."*

When the wall falls, it shatters like a clay jar smashed so hard that not even one piece is left big enough to carry a coal from the fire or scoop water from a cistern. Isaiah is describing complete ruin. There is nothing left to salvage.

30:15 *For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you will be saved; in keeping quiet and in trust will be your strength. And you were not willing.*

"In returning and rest you will be saved." This verse is the heart of the chapter. God's way of deliverance was simple. Turn back to Him (repentance), stop striving (rest), be quiet before Him, and trust Him. That was where their real strength was.

"And you were not willing." Those are some of the saddest words in Scripture. God's offer was on the table, and they turned it down. Jesus said something similar over Jerusalem: "How often I was willing to gather your children together ... and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). When you are anxious and tempted to grab for control, this verse is worth memorizing.

30:16 *And you said, 'No, for on horse we will flee'; therefore you will flee! 'And on a swift **one** we will ride'; therefore those who pursue you will be swift.*

They wanted horses, the fast war machines of the day. "On horse we will flee," they said. God answers with a play on words: "therefore you will flee!" They said, "On a swift one we will ride." God answers, "therefore those who pursue you will be swift." They would get exactly the speed they asked for, but they would be the ones running.

30:17 *One thousand **will flee** because of the rebuke of one; because of the rebuke of five you will flee, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of the mountain, and like a banner on the hill."*

God had promised that if Israel obeyed, five of them would chase a hundred (Leviticus 26:8). Now it is reversed: a thousand would run from one man. They would be left like a lone flagpole on a hilltop, a small and lonely remnant. I believe this describes what Judah looked like in 701 B.C., when Assyria took many of its fortified cities and only Jerusalem was left standing (36:1).

30:18 *And therefore the LORD waits to show favor to you, and therefore He rises up to have compassion on you. For the LORD **is** a God of justice; how blessed **are** all who wait for Him.*

"Therefore the LORD waits to show favor to you." After all that rebellion, I would expect the next word to be more judgment. Instead, God says He is waiting to show grace. He "rises up to have compassion on you." God is just, and He won't ignore sin, but His heart is to restore.

"Blessed are all who wait for Him." The verse begins with the LORD waiting "to show favor to you" and ends with His people waiting for Him. God waits to be gracious, and blessed are those who wait for Him. That is where God and His people meet.

30:19 *For a people will dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you will surely not weep. He will surely show favor to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.*

The people of Zion will weep no more. When they cry out, God will answer. I believe this looks ahead to the day of Israel's full restoration in the Millennium, when Christ reigns from Jerusalem. But it also tells us how God responds to anyone who cries to Him in humility. He hears.

30:20 *And the Lord will give you bread **of** distress and water **of** oppression, and your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, and your eyes will be seeing your Teacher.*

They would eat "bread of distress" and drink "water of oppression," the hard rations of a siege. But after the hardship, their Teacher would no longer be hidden. Their eyes would see Him. Some take "Teacher" to mean the prophets; others take it as the Lord Himself. The capital T in the SLB reflects that reading, and I agree with it: I take it as God Himself teaching His people.

30:21 *And your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, "This **is** the way; walk in it," when you go to the right and when you go to the left.*

"This is the way; walk in it." Picture a shepherd walking behind his sheep and calling out when one starts to wander. God promises to guide His people that closely. For the believer today, the Holy Spirit guides us into truth (John 16:13), usually through God's word. When you are unsure which way to turn, ask Him, and listen.

30:22 *And you will defile the plating of your images of silver and the sheathing of your molten image of gold; you will scatter them like a menstrual **rag**; "Filth!" you will say to it.*

When God's people truly return to Him, they will throw away their idols, even the expensive ones covered in silver and gold. They will treat them like something filthy and say, "Filth!" Real repentance always involves getting rid of whatever has taken God's place.

30:23 *And He will give the rain of your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, and it will be fat and rich. Your livestock will graze in that day **in** a roomy pasture.*

God promises rain for the seed, rich bread from the ground, and wide pastures for the livestock. Blessing on the land was part of God's covenant promises to Israel (Deuteronomy 28:12). I believe this will be fulfilled in full during Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, when the curse on the ground is lifted to a large degree.

30:24 *And the oxen and the donkeys that work the ground will eat salted fodder, which **one** winnows with the shovel and with the fork.*

Even the work animals will eat well, with salted fodder that has been carefully winnowed. It's a small detail, and it matters, because when God restores, His blessing reaches down even to the oxen and the donkeys.

30:25 *And **there** will be on every high mountain and on every lifted-up hill streams, channels of water, in a day of great slaughter, when towers fall.*

Streams will flow on every high hill "in a day of great slaughter, when towers fall." Blessing for God's people and judgment on His enemies come on the same day. This is the pattern of the Day of the LORD, God's appointed time of judgment. The towers that fall are the proud strongholds of the nations.

30:26 *And the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days, in the day the LORD binds up the fracture of His people, and the wound of His blow He heals.*

"The light of the sun will be sevenfold." Isaiah describes a world flooded with light on the day the LORD heals the wound of His people. I take this as describing real changes in creation when Christ returns, though Bible teachers differ on how far to press the details. Either way, the point is clear. The God who wounded them for their sin will bind them up (Hosea 6:1).

30:27 *Look, the name of the LORD comes from afar; His anger **is** burning, and heavy **is the** rising **smoke**; His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue **is** like a consuming fire.*

"Look, the name of the LORD comes from afar." The scene shifts to God coming in judgment against Assyria. His "name" stands for God Himself, in all His character and power. His anger burns, His smoke is thick, His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is like fire. This is the language of a storm, and of Sinai.

30:28 *And His breath **is** like an overflowing torrent; up to the neck it reaches, to shake nations in a sieve of worthlessness, and a bridle that leads astray **is** on the jaws of the peoples.*

His breath is like a flood that rises up to the neck. He shakes the nations in a sieve and puts a bridle in their jaws that leads them to ruin. Assyria thought it was leading the nations wherever it wanted. In reality God had a bridle in its mouth all along.

30:29 *The song will be yours like a night of consecrating a festival, and gladness of heart like the one who walks with the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.*

While God's enemies are shaken, His people sing. Isaiah compares it to the night songs of a festival, probably Passover, which began at night, and to pilgrims marching up to Jerusalem with flutes playing. Their deliverance will be like a holy feast.

30:30 *And the LORD will cause the majesty of His voice to be heard, and He will show the lowering of His arm, with the raging of anger and a flame of consuming fire, a driving storm and a rainstorm and hailstones.*

God's voice will be heard, and His arm will be seen coming down in fierce anger, with fire, cloudburst and hail. God doesn't need Egypt's horses. When He acts, He brings His own weapons from the sky.

30:31 *For at the voice of the LORD Assyria will be shattered; with the rod He will strike.*

"Assyria will be shattered." Here Isaiah names the enemy plainly. The great empire that terrified every nation would itself be terrified at the voice of the LORD. This is what happened when God struck Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem (37:36).

30:32 *And every stroke of the staff of appointment which the LORD will lay on him will be with tambourines and with lyres; and in battles of brandishing He will fight against them.*

Each blow God strikes against Assyria will be accompanied by tambourines and lyres, the music of God's people celebrating. God Himself fights the battle. His people's part is to trust and to praise.

30:33 *For a burning place is arranged from yesterday; it also has been prepared for the king; He has made **it** deep, He has made **it** large; its pile **is** fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a torrent of sulfur, burns in it.*

Topheth was a place in the valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem, where some of Judah's kings had burned their children as offerings to false gods (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31). God says Topheth has been prepared "for the king," a deep pyre of fire lit by the breath of the LORD. I take this first as the king of Assyria. In the New Testament the valley's name, Gehenna, becomes a word for hell (Mark 9:43), and that is the final end of everyone who sets himself against God.

Chapter 30 Summary

Judah's leaders sent treasure to Egypt to buy protection against Assyria without asking God, and Isaiah calls it rebellion. They told the prophets to speak smooth things and refused God's way of salvation, "In returning and rest you will be saved; in keeping quiet and in trust will be your strength." Yet the LORD waits to show favor. He promises to answer their cry, guide them with a voice behind them, heal their wounds, and shatter Assyria while His people sing.

Places in Chapter 30

Egypt (30:2): The great power to the south. Judah's leaders hoped Egypt would protect them from Assyria.

Zoan and Hanes (30:4): Egyptian cities where Judah's ambassadors went to seek help.

The Negev (30:6): The dry southern desert that caravans crossed between Judah and Egypt.

Topheth (30:33): A site in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem where children were sacrificed to false gods. Josiah later defiled it (2 Kings 23:10).

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. Have you ever paid for help that turned out to be no help at all?
2. Why does God call Judah's alliance with Egypt rebellion? (30:1-2)
3. What did the people want to hear from their prophets? (30:9-11)
4. What did God say was the way to be saved, and how did the people respond? (30:15-16)
5. What does verse 18 tell us about the heart of God toward His people? (30:18)
6. How does God promise to guide His people? (30:20-21)

7. What will happen to Assyria, and what will God's people be doing while it happens? (30:27-33)

8. Do you prefer "smooth things" over hard truth? How can you make room to hear what God is actually saying?

9. What would quiet trust in God look like in the situation that worries you most right now?

Chapter 31: Horses and Chariots

Scripture: The Folly of Trusting Egypt, and the Lord Who Defends Jerusalem

31:1-5 Woe ***to*** those who go down ***to*** Egypt for help; on horses they lean, and they trust in chariotry because ***it is*** much, and in horsemen because they are exceedingly numerous; and they have not looked to the Holy One of Israel, and the LORD they have not sought. And He also ***is*** wise, and He has brought calamity, and His words He has not turned aside; and He will rise up against the house of evildoers, and against the help of those who do wickedness. And Egypt ***is*** man and not God, and their horses ***are*** flesh and not spirit; and the LORD will stretch out His hand, and the one who helps will stumble, and the one who is helped will fall, and together all of them will come to an end. For thus the LORD has said to me: "Just as the lion growls, and the young lion, over its prey, against which a multitude of shepherds is called out, ***and*** it is not dismayed by their voice, and it does not cringe at their tumult, so the LORD of armies will come down to wage war on the mountain of Zion and on its hill. Like flying birds, so the LORD of armies will defend Jerusalem; He will defend and He will rescue ***it***; He will pass over and He will deliver ***it***."

31:6-9 Return to ***Him against*** whom the sons of Israel have made rebellion deep. For in that day they will reject, each man, his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have made for you ***as*** sin. And Assyria will fall by a sword not of a man, and a sword not of mankind will consume him; and he will flee for himself from before a sword, and his young men will become forced labor. And his rock will pass away because of terror, and his commanders will be dismayed at the banner, declares the LORD, who has a fire in Zion, and has an oven in Jerusalem.

Chapter 31 Preview

This short chapter is the fifth woe, and it presses the same point as chapter 30. Judah was counting horses and chariots in Egypt, and it forgot to look to the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah reminds them that Egyptians are only men and their horses are only flesh. Then he paints two pictures of the Lord defending Jerusalem, a lion that won't be scared off its prey and birds hovering over their nest. He ends with a call to return and a promise that Assyria will fall by a sword not of man.

Chapter 31 Study

31:1 *Woe **to** those who go down **to** Egypt for help; on horses they lean, and they trust in chariotry because **it is** much, and in horsemen because they are exceedingly numerous; and they have not looked to the Holy One of Israel, and the LORD they have not sought.*

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help." Egypt was famous for its horses and chariots, the tanks of the ancient world. Judah looked at the numbers and felt safe. But Isaiah names the real problem: "they have not looked to the Holy One of Israel, and the LORD they have not sought." Psalm 20:7 says it well: "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make

mention of the name of the LORD our God." The real issue was where Judah put its trust, not how strong Egypt was.

31:2 *And He also **is** wise, and He has brought calamity, and His words He has not turned aside; and He will rise up against the house of evildoers, and against the help of those who do wickedness.*

"He also is wise." There is a quiet bit of irony here. Judah's advisers thought they were the wise ones. Isaiah says God is wise too, and He doesn't take back His words. When He promised disaster on evildoers, He meant it. He will rise up against those who do evil and against anyone who helps them.

31:3 *And Egypt **is** man and not God, and their horses **are** flesh and not spirit; and the LORD will stretch out His hand, and the one who helps will stumble, and the one who is helped will fall, and together all of them will come to an end.*

"Egypt is man and not God." Isaiah couldn't say it more plainly: Egyptians are human, and their horses are flesh, not spirit. When God stretches out His hand, both the helper and the one being helped fall together. Any time we lean on people or things more than on God, we are leaning on something that can fall with us.

31:4 *For thus the LORD has said to me: "Just as the lion growls, and the young lion, over its prey, against which a multitude of shepherds is called out, **and** it is not dismayed by their voice, and it does not cringe at their tumult, so the LORD of armies will come down to wage war on the mountain of Zion and on its hill.*

God compares Himself to a lion growling over its prey. A crowd of shepherds can shout and bang their sticks, but the lion isn't frightened and won't let go. That is how the LORD of armies will come down to fight for Mount Zion. The "prey" here is Jerusalem, held firmly in God's grip, and the shepherds who can't scare Him off are the nations. No army on earth can pry the city out of His hand.

31:5 *Like flying birds, so the LORD of armies will defend Jerusalem; He will defend and He will rescue **it**; He will pass over and He will deliver **it**."*

"Like flying birds, so the LORD of armies will defend Jerusalem." The picture changes from a lion to a mother bird hovering over her nest. God will shield the city, deliver it, "pass over" it and rescue it. The words "pass over" call to mind the first Passover, when God passed over the homes marked with the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12:13). Jesus used the same tender image of a hen gathering her chicks (Matthew 23:37).

31:6 *Return to **Him against** whom the sons of Israel have made rebellion deep.*

"Return to Him against whom the sons of Israel have made rebellion deep." In the middle of the promises, Isaiah calls for repentance. The people hadn't just drifted a little; they had gone deep into rebellion. But the door was still open. No matter how far someone has gone, the call is still the same: come back to Him.

31:7 *For in that day they will reject, each man, his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have made for you **as** sin.*

"In that day" every person will throw away their idols of silver and gold, which their own sinful hands made. When God shows His power, the idols are exposed as worthless. Some saw this in Hezekiah's reforms (2 Kings 18:4). I believe the full answer comes when Israel turns to the Lord as a nation at Christ's return.

31:8 *And Assyria will fall by a sword not of a man, and a sword not of mankind will consume him; and he will flee for himself from before a sword, and his young men will become forced labor.*

"Assyria will fall by a sword not of a man." This was fulfilled plainly. In 701 B.C. the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night, without any human army lifting a weapon (37:36). Sennacherib went home, and years later he was killed by his own sons (37:37-38). Egypt's chariots didn't save Jerusalem. God did, exactly as Isaiah said.

31:9 *And his rock will pass away because of terror, and his commanders will be dismayed at the banner, declares the LORD, who has a fire in Zion, and has an oven in Jerusalem.*

The "rock" of Assyria, its king or its strength, would run away in panic, and its princes would be terrified at the sight of God's battle flag. Isaiah closes with a striking description of God: His fire is in Zion and His furnace is in Jerusalem. The same fire that warms and protects God's people consumes His enemies (Hebrews 12:29).

Chapter 31 Summary

Isaiah pronounces woe on those who go to Egypt for help and trust in horses and chariots instead of the Holy One of Israel. Egyptians are men and not God. The Lord Himself will defend Jerusalem like a lion over its prey and like birds over their nest. Isaiah calls the people to return, promises they will throw away their idols, and declares that Assyria will fall by a sword not of man, which happened in 701 B.C.

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. What are the horses and chariots people trust in today?

2. What did Judah look at instead of looking to the Lord? (31:1)

3. What does Isaiah say about the Egyptians and their horses? (31:3)

4. What two animal pictures does God use to show how He will defend Jerusalem? (31:4-5)

5. How does the phrase "pass over" connect to Israel's history? (31:5)

6. How was the promise that Assyria would fall "by a sword not of a man" fulfilled? (31:8)

7. Why do you think God calls His people to return right in the middle of His promises? (31:6)

8. What would it look like for you to look to "the Holy One of Israel" before you look anywhere else this week?

9. Is there a person or resource you lean on more heavily than you lean on God?

Chapter 32: A Righteous King

Scripture: The King Who Reigns in Righteousness

32:1-8 Look, a king will reign for righteousness, and as for princes, they will rule for justice. And a man will be like a hiding place from ***the*** wind, and a shelter from ***the*** rainstorm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shadow of a heavy rock in a weary land. And the eyes of those who see will not look away, and the ears of those who hear will pay attention. And the heart of the hasty will understand knowledge, and the tongue of stammerers will hasten to speak clearly. The fool will no longer be called noble, and of the scoundrel it will not be said, "eminent." For a fool speaks folly, and his heart does wickedness, to do godlessness and to speak error concerning the LORD, to keep empty the soul of the hungry; and the drink of the thirsty he causes to fail. And the scoundrel, his weapons ***are*** evil; he plans evil schemes to ruin the afflicted with words of falsehood, and when the needy speaks justice. And a noble plans noble things, and he stands on noble things.

32:9-14 Untroubled women, rise; hear my voice; confident daughters, give ear to my saying. Days beyond a year you will be agitated, confident ***women***; for the grape harvest will fail; the gathering will not come. Tremble, untroubled ***women***; be agitated, confident ***women***; strip, and make yourselves bare, and gird ***yourselves*** on ***your*** loins. Over ***the*** breasts ***they are*** mourning, over fields of delight, over ***the*** fruitful vine. Over the ground of my people thorn ***and*** brier will come up, indeed, over all the houses of joy, a jubilant town. For the palace has been forsaken; the tumult of the city has been abandoned; hill and watchtower have become for caves forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks;

32:15-20 until ***the*** Spirit is poured out on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes the orchard, and the orchard is considered the forest. And justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness will live in the orchard. And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the labor of righteousness keeping quiet and security forever. And my people will live in a habitation of peace, and in dwellings of confidence, and in untroubled resting places. And it will hail when the forest comes down, and in lowness the city will become low. How blessed ***are*** you who sow beside all waters, who let loose the foot of the ox and the donkey.

Chapter 32 Preview

After so many warnings, chapter 32 opens with a bright promise: a king who will reign in righteousness, with leaders who protect people instead of preying on them. Under His rule, blind eyes see and fools are called what they are.

Then Isaiah turns to the careless, comfortable women of Jerusalem and warns that the harvest will fail and the city will be left empty. It will stay that way until the Spirit is poured out from on high and peace and justice fill the land.

Chapter 32 Study

32:1 *Look, a king will reign for righteousness, and as for princes, they will rule for justice.*

"Look, a king will reign for righteousness." Some see good King Hezekiah here, and his reign did bring real reform. But I believe the full meaning points to the Messiah, the King promised in 9:6-7 and 11:1-5. Only Jesus reigns in perfect righteousness. The "princes" who rule justly with Him fit the New Testament promise that His people will reign with Him (Revelation 20:4-6; 2 Timothy 2:12).

32:2 *And a man will be like a hiding place from **the** wind, and a shelter from **the** rainstorm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shadow of a heavy rock in a weary land.*

Each of these rulers will be a refuge from the wind, a shelter in the storm, a stream in dry country, and shade from a great rock in a hot land. Isaiah's own leaders had been the storm. In the kingdom, leaders will be the shelter. Ultimately Christ Himself is all of this to His people.

32:3 *And the eyes of those who see will not look away, and the ears of those who hear will pay attention.*

In chapter 6 God told Isaiah that the people would see and not perceive and hear and not understand (6:9-10). Here that judgment is lifted. Eyes that see will no longer be blinded, and ears will listen. The hardening of chapter 6 isn't the end of the story.

32:4 *And the heart of the hasty will understand knowledge, and the tongue of stammerers will hasten to speak clearly.*

The hasty, who jump to conclusions without thinking, will discern the truth. Those who stammer will speak clearly. Isaiah may mean people who stammered in confusion about spiritual things. In the King's reign, people will understand God's truth and speak it plainly.

32:5 *The fool will no longer be called noble, and of the scoundrel it will not be said, "eminent."*

In a corrupt society, words get twisted. Fools are praised as noble, and scoundrels are called generous. In the coming kingdom, things will be called by their right names. Isaiah already warned against those who call evil good and good evil (5:20).

32:6 *For a fool speaks folly, and his heart does wickedness, to do godlessness and to speak error concerning the LORD, to keep empty the soul of the hungry; and the drink of the thirsty he causes to fail.*

Isaiah describes the fool. In the Bible a fool isn't someone with a low IQ but someone who lives as though there is no God (Psalm 14:1). He speaks nonsense, plans wickedness, says false things about the LORD, and leaves the hungry and thirsty without help. Foolishness always shows up eventually in how we treat people in need.

32:7 *And the scoundrel, his weapons **are** evil; he plans evil schemes to ruin the afflicted with words of falsehood, and when the needy speaks justice.*

The rogue, or scoundrel, uses evil methods. He schemes to ruin the poor with lies, even when the poor man is in the right. Isaiah's society was full of this, and so is ours. God notices every lie told to crush someone weaker.

32:8 *And a noble plans noble things, and he stands on noble things.*

"A noble plans noble things." In contrast, a truly noble person plans noble things, and he stands by them. What we plan reveals who we are. I find this a good test for my own heart: what am I planning, and would God call it noble?

32:9 *Untroubled women, rise; hear my voice; confident daughters, give ear to my saying.*

Isaiah now speaks to the "untroubled women" and "confident daughters" of Jerusalem. The word for untroubled means at ease in a careless way, feeling safe when they weren't. Isaiah addressed the women of Zion before (3:16-4:1). He isn't singling women out as worse. He is speaking to a comfortable class of people who assumed life would go on as it always had.

32:10 *Days beyond a year you will be agitated, confident **women**; for the grape harvest will fail; the gathering will not come.*

"Days beyond a year." Isaiah gives a short timeline. The vintage, the grape harvest, would fail, and the fruit gathering wouldn't come. I take this as the Assyrian invasion of 701 B.C., which ruined the countryside of Judah (37:30 mentions the people eating what grows by itself for two years). Most scholars date this prophecy shortly before that invasion.

32:11 *Tremble, untroubled **women**; be agitated, confident **women**; strip, and make yourselves bare, and gird **yourselves** on **your** loins.*

Isaiah tells the women to tremble, to take off their fine clothes and put on sackcloth, the rough cloth people wore in mourning. Comfort was about to turn into grief. Sometimes God's kindest word is a warning that shakes us out of complacency.

32:12-13 *Over **the** breasts **they are** mourning, over fields of delight, over **the** fruitful vine. Over the ground of my people thorn **and** brier will come up, indeed, over all the houses of joy, a jubilant town.*

They will beat their breasts in grief for the good fields and fruitful vines. Thorns and briars will grow up over the land of God's people, and over the happy homes and the lively city. Isaiah used the same picture of thorns and briars in his vineyard song (5:6). When God's people reject Him, the land itself shows it.

32:14 *For the palace has been forsaken; the tumult of the city has been abandoned; hill and watchtower have become for caves forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks;*

The palace stands abandoned. The busy city is empty. The hill and the watchtower, probably the Ophel area of Jerusalem, become dens for wild donkeys and pasture for flocks. It's not clear whether Isaiah has a single event in mind. I believe it covers the long period of desolation that came with Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem in about 586 B.C. and the years of foreign rule after that.

32:15 *until **the** Spirit is poured out on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes the orchard, and the orchard is considered the forest.*

"Until the Spirit is poured out on us from on high." Everything turns on this word "until." The desolation isn't permanent. When God pours out His Spirit, the wilderness becomes a fertile field. Joel 2:28-29 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 promise the same thing for Israel. The church received the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-17), but I believe the full outpouring on the nation of Israel comes at Christ's return (Zechariah 12:10).

32:16 *And justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness will live in the orchard.*

When the Spirit comes, justice and righteousness settle down and live in the land, in the wilderness and in the fertile field alike. These are more than laws on paper; they're the character of a people changed from the inside.

32:17 *And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the labor of righteousness keeping quiet and security forever.*

"The work of righteousness will be peace." This is a beautiful verse. Peace is the fruit of righteousness. Quietness and confidence come from it, and they last forever. The world keeps trying to have peace without righteousness, and it never works. For the believer, peace with God comes through being made righteous by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

32:18 *And my people will live in a habitation of peace, and in dwellings of confidence, and in untroubled resting places.*

God's people will live in peaceful homes, secure dwellings and undisturbed resting places. Compare this with the "untroubled women" of verse 9. Their ease was false and temporary. This rest is real, because God gives it.

32:19 *And it will hail when the forest comes down, and in lowness the city will become low.*

Hail will fall when "the forest" comes down, and "the city" will be laid low. In Isaiah, a forest is sometimes a picture of a proud enemy army (10:18-19, 33-34). I take this as the fall of God's enemies at the time He restores His people. The city may be the proud world city that opposes God, as in 24:10 and 25:2.

32:20 *How blessed **are** you who sow beside all waters, who let loose the foot of the ox and the donkey.*

The chapter closes on a peaceful farm scene. Blessed are those who sow beside every stream and let their ox and donkey roam freely, with no fear of raiders. It is a simple picture of a world where God reigns: plenty of water, good soil, and no enemy at the gate.

Chapter 32 Summary

Isaiah promises a King who will reign in righteousness, with rulers who shelter the people. Under Him, blind eyes see, the fool and the scoundrel are exposed, and the noble stand firm. Isaiah warns the complacent women of Jerusalem that the harvest will fail and the city will be abandoned, until the Spirit is poured out from on high. Then justice, righteousness, peace and security will fill the land.

Chapter 32 Study Questions

1. Think of a leader who has been a real "shelter" to you. What made them that way?

2. Who is the king who will reign righteously, and how will His rulers treat the people? (32:1-2)

3. How does verse 3 reverse what God said to Isaiah in chapter 6? (32:3; 6:9-10)

4. How does Isaiah describe the fool and the rogue, and how is the noble man different? (32:5-8)

5. Why does Isaiah warn the "untroubled women"? (32:9-11)

6. What changes when the Spirit is poured out from on high? (32:15-18)

7. What does Isaiah say the work of righteousness produces? (32:17)

8. Where are you tempted to feel "untroubled" in a way that keeps you from taking God seriously?

9. What noble plan could you make this week that reflects the King you serve?

Chapter 33: The King in His Beauty

Scripture: The Destroyer Destroyed, and Zion's Glorious King

33:1-6 Woe, destroyer, and you ***have*** not ***been*** destroyed; and one who deals treacherously, and they have not dealt treacherously with him! When you finish destroying, you will be destroyed; when you complete dealing treacherously, they will deal treacherously with you. LORD, show favor to us; for You we have waited. Be their arm in the mornings, also our salvation in a time of distress. At the sound of tumult peoples have fled; at Your rising nations have scattered. And your plunder will be gathered ***as*** the gathering of the caterpillar; like the rushing of locusts ***one*** is rushing on it. The LORD is exalted, for He dwells ***on*** high; He has filled Zion ***with*** justice and righteousness. And He will be the faithfulness of your times, a wealth of salvations, of wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD, it ***is*** His treasure.

33:7-12 Look, their valiant ones have cried outside; the messengers of peace weep bitterly. Highways have been made desolate; the one who passes on the path has ceased; he has broken covenant, he has rejected cities, he has not valued man. The land has mourned, it has languished; Lebanon has been put to shame, it has withered; Sharon has become like the Arabah, and Bashan and Carmel are shaking off ***their leaves***. "Now I will arise," says the LORD, "now I will exalt Myself, now I will lift Myself up. You will conceive chaff; you will give birth to stubble; your breath, a fire, will consume you. And the peoples will be burnings of lime; thorns cut down, they will be kindled with fire.

33:13-16 Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and know, you who are near, My might." Sinners in Zion are in dread; trembling has seized the godless: "Who of us will sojourn ***with*** the consuming fire? Who of us will sojourn ***with*** everlasting burnings?" He who walks ***in*** righteousness and speaks uprightness, who rejects the unjust gain of extortion, who shakes out his palms from grasping the bribe, who stops his ear from hearing ***of*** bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from looking on evil, he will dwell ***on*** the heights; strongholds of cliffs ***will be*** his fortress; his bread will be given, his water ***will be*** sure.

33:17-24 Your eyes will see a king in his beauty; they will see a land of distances. Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where ***is*** the one who counted? Where ***is*** the one who weighed? Where ***is*** the one who counted the towers?" You will not see the barbarous people, a people too deep of lip to hear, of stammering tongue, ***with*** no understanding. Look upon Zion, the town of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, an untroubled habitation, a tent ***that no one*** will pack up; ***no one*** will pull out its tent pegs forever, and all its ropes will not be torn apart. But there the LORD ***will be*** majestic for us, a place of rivers, canals wide on both sides; a ship with oars will not go on it, and a majestic ship will not pass along it. For the LORD ***is*** our judge; the LORD ***is*** our lawgiver; the LORD ***is*** our king; He, He will save us. Your ropes hang loose; they do not hold firm the base of their mast; they have not spread out the sail. Then the booty of abundant plunder will be divided; the lame will plunder spoil. And no inhabitant will say, "I am sick"; the people who dwell in it ***will be*** forgiven of iniquity.

Chapter 33 Preview

The sixth and last woe falls on the destroyer, Assyria, who broke his word and plundered without mercy. Isaiah's people pray, the land mourns, and then God rises up and says, "Now I will arise."

The question becomes personal: who can live with a holy God who is a consuming fire? Isaiah answers, and then he lifts our eyes to a beautiful promise. We will see the King in His beauty, in a Zion where the LORD is judge, lawgiver and king, and no one says, "I am sick."

Chapter 33 Study

33:1 *Woe, destroyer, and you **have** not **been** destroyed; and one who deals treacherously, and they have not dealt treacherously with him! When you finish destroying, you will be destroyed; when you complete dealing treacherously, they will deal treacherously with you.*

"Woe, destroyer." The destroyer here is Assyria, the empire that crushed nation after nation and broke every promise it made. Isaiah tells him that when he finishes destroying, he will be destroyed, and when he is done betraying others, he will be betrayed. God's justice often works this way. What a nation or a person sows, it eventually reaps (Galatians 6:7).

33:2 *LORD, show favor to us; for You we have waited. Be their arm in the mornings, also our salvation in a time of distress.*

"LORD, show favor to us; for You we have waited." This is a prayer, and it is the right response to everything in chapters 28-32. Instead of running to Egypt, the faithful turn to God and ask for grace. They ask Him to be their strength every morning. That is a good prayer for any of us: Lord, be my strength this morning, and save me in my time of distress.

33:3 *At the sound of tumult peoples have fled; at Your rising nations have scattered.*

When God rises up and the roar of His coming is heard, whole peoples run and nations scatter. Assyria made the nations flee. Now the nations flee before the Lord.

33:4 *And your plunder will be gathered **as** the gathering of the caterpillar; like the rushing of locusts **one** is rushing on it.*

The plunder Assyria collected will be stripped away the way caterpillars strip a field and locusts swarm over a crop. Jerusalem's people would be the ones gathering the spoil. This happened after God struck Sennacherib's army, when the abandoned Assyrian camp was left for the taking (compare verse 23).

33:5 *The LORD is exalted, for He dwells **on** high; He has filled Zion **with** justice and righteousness.*

"The LORD is exalted, for He dwells on high." While the destroyer rages, the Lord is still on His throne. He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. Zion is the hill in Jerusalem where the temple stood, and Isaiah often uses it for the city and people of God.

33:6 *And He will be the faithfulness of your times, a wealth of salvations, of wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD, it* ***is*** *His treasure.*

God will be the faithfulness of their times. Life felt anything but stable with Assyria at the gates, but God was their steady ground. He gives a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. And Isaiah says the fear of the LORD is "His treasure," the treasure God Himself gives and values. The fear of the LORD is the deep respect and awe that makes us take God seriously.

33:7 *Look, their valiant ones have cried outside; the messengers of peace weep bitterly.*

Now we hear what it was like on the ground. The brave men cry out in the streets. The ambassadors of peace weep bitterly. This matches what happened in 701 B.C. Hezekiah sent messengers and paid Sennacherib a huge tribute to make peace (2 Kings 18:14-16), and Assyria still sent its army against Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17).

33:8 *Highways have been made desolate; the one who passes on the path has ceased; he has broken covenant, he has rejected cities, he has not valued man.*

"He has broken covenant." The highways are empty because travel is too dangerous. The enemy broke his agreement, despised the cities, and showed no regard for people. Trusting the word of a godless power is a dangerous thing. Assyria took the money and came anyway.

33:9 *The land has mourned, it has languished; Lebanon has been put to shame, it has withered; Sharon has become like the Arabah, and Bashan and Carmel are shaking off* ***their leaves****.*

The whole land suffers. Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan and Carmel were the most fertile and beautiful regions of the land, famous for forests and pastures. Now they wither and mourn. War doesn't only destroy people; it ruins the land too.

33:10 *"Now I will arise," says the LORD, "now I will exalt Myself, now I will lift Myself up.*

"Now I will arise," says the LORD. Three times God says "now." When things are at their worst, God steps in. God's timing often seems late to us, but He knows the exact moment to rise up.

33:11 *You will conceive chaff; you will give birth to stubble; your breath, a fire, will consume you.*

God speaks to the enemy. They "conceive chaff" and will "give birth to stubble," meaning all their plans will produce nothing of value. In fact, their own breath, their raging, will become the fire that burns them up. Evil carries the seeds of its own destruction.

33:12 *And the peoples will be burnings of lime; thorns cut down, they will be kindled with fire.*

The peoples will be burned down to lime, like thorns cut and thrown in the fire. Lime is what is left after something is burned completely. Nothing will be left of the enemy's power.

33:13 *Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and know, you who are near, My might."*

God calls both the far and the near to pay attention. Those far away are the nations who will hear what God did to Assyria. Those near are God's own people in Jerusalem, who saw it happen. Everyone is called to acknowledge His might.

33:14 *Sinners in Zion are in dread; trembling has seized the godless: "Who of us will sojourn **with** the consuming fire? Who of us will sojourn **with** everlasting burnings?"*

"Who of us will sojourn with the consuming fire?" Here is a surprise. The sinners who are terrified aren't the Assyrians but the godless people in Zion. Once they saw God's fire fall on the enemy, they realized the same holy God lived among them. If God is a consuming fire, who can stand near Him? It is the most important question a person can ask.

33:15 *He who walks **in** righteousness and speaks uprightness, who rejects the unjust gain of extortion, who shakes out his palms from grasping the bribe, who stops his ear from hearing **of** bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from looking on evil,*

Isaiah answers, much like Psalm 15 and Psalm 24:3-4. The person who walks righteously, speaks honestly, refuses dishonest profit, won't take a bribe, stops his ears from plots of violence, and closes his eyes to evil. Who can actually live like that? No one perfectly, except Jesus, and that's why we need His righteousness credited to us by faith (2 Corinthians 5:21). And those who are made right with God begin to live this way too.

33:16 *he will dwell **on** the heights; strongholds of cliffs **will be** his fortress; his bread will be given, his water **will be** sure.*

The righteous person will live "on the heights" in a fortress of rock. Even in a siege, his bread will be given and his water will be sure. God provides for those who walk with Him. This doesn't promise an easy life, but it does promise that God Himself will be our refuge.

33:17 *Your eyes will see a king in his beauty; they will see a land of distances.*

"Your eyes will see a king in his beauty." During the siege, the people saw King Hezekiah in sackcloth (37:1), dressed for mourning. But they would see a King in His beauty, and a land stretching far into the distance with no enemy left in it.

Yet the promise reaches past Hezekiah to the Messiah. In chapter 6 Isaiah saw the King, the LORD of armies, and John tells us Isaiah saw Christ's glory there (John 12:41). One day every believer will see Jesus face to face (1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4). Nothing on earth compares to that. If you are weary today, let this verse lift your eyes.

33:18 *Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where **is** the one who counted? Where **is** the one who weighed? Where **is** the one who counted the towers?"*

Looking back, the people will remember the terror: "Where is the one who counted? Where is the one who weighed? Where is the one who counted the towers?" These were Assyrian officials who counted tribute, weighed silver, and surveyed the defenses. Paul echoes these questions in 1 Corinthians 1:20 ("Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe?"). The enemy's experts are gone.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 1:20 (alluded to)

33:19 *You will not see the barbarous people, a people too deep of lip to hear, of stammering tongue, **with** no understanding.*

They will no longer see the fierce invaders who spoke a language no one understood. The "stammering tongue" recalls 28:11, the foreign speech that was God's judgment. That judgment will be over.

33:20 *Look upon Zion, the town of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, an untroubled habitation, a tent **that no one** will pack up; **no one** will pull out its tent pegs forever, and all its ropes will not be torn apart.*

"Look upon Zion, the town of our appointed feasts." Jerusalem will be a quiet, peaceful home, like a tent that never has to be taken down. Its stakes will never be pulled up, and its cords will never be cut. Jerusalem has been destroyed, rebuilt and fought over many times since Isaiah's day. I believe this promise is still waiting for its full fulfillment when Christ reigns from Jerusalem in the Millennium.

33:21 *But there the LORD **will be** majestic for us, a place of rivers, canals wide on both sides; a ship with oars will not go on it, and a majestic ship will not pass along it.*

Great cities like Nineveh and Babylon had rivers and canals for trade and defense. Jerusalem had none. But Isaiah says the majestic LORD Himself will be like broad rivers around the city. And no enemy warship with oars could ever sail on them. God is all the defense His city needs.

33:22 *For the LORD **is** our judge; the LORD **is** our lawgiver; the LORD **is** our king; He, He will save us.*

"For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king." In Israel, as in most nations, power was split among different roles. In the coming kingdom, all of it rests in one Person. I believe this is Christ in His reign. He judges rightly, He gives the law, and He rules as King. And the end of the verse is the best part: "He, He will save us."

New Testament links: James 4:12 (alluded to)

33:23 *Your ropes hang loose; they do not hold firm the base of their mast; they have not spread out the sail. Then the booty of abundant plunder will be divided; the lame will plunder spoil.*

Isaiah turns back to the enemy ship. Its ropes hang loose, it can't hold up its mast or spread its sail. It is helpless. Then the spoil is divided, and even the lame carry off plunder. When God wins the battle, even the weakest of His people share in the victory.

33:24 *And no inhabitant will say, "I am sick"; the people who dwell in it **will be** forgiven of iniquity.*

"And no inhabitant will say, 'I am sick.'" Healing and forgiveness come side by side here. No one will be sick, and the people will be forgiven their iniquity. I believe this looks ahead to Christ's kingdom on earth and finally to the new creation, where there will be no more pain (Revelation 21:4). Notice that forgiveness is the root and healing is the fruit. Sin is the deepest sickness, and Jesus came to heal it.

Chapter 33 Summary

Isaiah pronounces the final woe on Assyria, the destroyer who broke his covenant. The faithful pray for God's grace, and God rises up and burns the enemy like thorns. The sinners in Zion tremble before the consuming fire, and Isaiah describes the one who can dwell with God. At the end Isaiah sees the King in His beauty, a peaceful Jerusalem, and a people who are forgiven and never sick.

Chapter 33 Study Questions

1. What does it feel like when someone breaks a promise they made to you?
2. What does Isaiah say will happen to the destroyer? (33:1)
3. What do the faithful pray for, and what does God give in return? (33:2-6)
4. How does God respond when things are at their worst? (33:10-12)
5. What question do the sinners in Zion ask, and how does Isaiah answer it? (33:14-16)
6. What does Isaiah promise the people will see? (33:17)
7. What three roles does the LORD hold in the coming kingdom? (33:22)
8. How does the hope of seeing "a king in his beauty" change the way you face hard days?
9. Who in your life needs to hear that God is "the faithfulness of your times"? (33:6)

Chapter 34: The Day of Vengeance

Scripture: The Lord's Judgment on the Nations and on Edom

34:1-4 Draw near, nations, to hear; and peoples, pay attention! Let the earth hear, and what fills it, the world and all its offspring. For the LORD has wrath against all the nations, and rage against all their army; He has devoted them to destruction; He has given them to the slaughter. And their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses, their stench will go up, and mountains will melt with their blood. And all the host of the heavens will rot away, and the heavens will be rolled up like the scroll; and all their host will wither, as the leaf withers from the vine, and like the withered ***fruit*** from the fig tree.

34:5-10 For My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; look, it will come down on Edom, and on the people of My total destruction, for judgment. The LORD has a sword; it is filled ***with*** blood; it has been made fat with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. And wild oxen will go down with them, and young bulls with mighty ***bulls***; and their land will drink its fill of blood, and their dust will be made fat with fat. For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompenses for the cause of Zion. And its torrents will be turned into pitch, and its dust into sulfur, and its land will become burning pitch. Night and day it will not be quenched; forever its smoke will go up; from generation to generation it will lie desolate; to the perpetuity of perpetuities ***there will be*** none passing through it.

34:11-17 And the desert owl and the hedgehog will possess it, and the great owl and the raven will dwell in it; and He will stretch out over it a measuring line of formlessness and stones of emptiness. Its nobles, and ***there is*** none there ***whom*** they will call ***to*** kingship; and all its princes will be nothing. And thorns will grow up ***in*** its fortresses, nettle and thistle in its fortifications; and it will be a habitation of jackals, an abode for daughters of the ostrich. And desert creatures will meet hyenas, and the goat will call to its companion; surely there the night creature will rest and will find for itself a resting place. There the owl will make its nest and lay eggs and hatch and gather ***its brood*** in its shadow; surely there the black kites will be gathered, each ***with*** its companion. Seek from the scroll of the LORD and read: not one of these will be missing; each ***with*** its companion, they will not be lacking. For my mouth, it has commanded, and His Spirit, He has gathered them. And He, He has cast a lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them by the measuring line; forever they will possess it; to generation and generation they will dwell in it.

Chapter 34 Preview

Chapters 34 and 35 belong together. Chapter 34 is one of the darkest chapters in Isaiah, and chapter 35 is one of the brightest. First comes judgment, then the kingdom.

Isaiah summons the whole world to hear God's verdict on all the nations. The heavens roll up like a scroll. Then Edom, the old enemy of Israel, becomes the example of what happens to those who fight against God and His people. Its land burns and becomes a home for wild animals forever.

Chapter 34 Study

34:1 *Draw near, nations, to hear; and peoples, pay attention! Let the earth hear, and what fills it, the world and all its offspring.*

"Draw near, nations, to hear." Isaiah calls the whole earth into the courtroom: nations, peoples, the world and everything in it. This isn't a local judgment on one country. Chapters 13-23 dealt with nations one by one. Here every nation is summoned at once. I believe this is the final judgment on the nations at the end of the age, when Christ returns.

34:2 *For the LORD has wrath against all the nations, and rage against all their army; He has devoted them to destruction; He has given them to the slaughter.*

"The LORD has wrath against all the nations." God's anger is aimed at all the nations and their armies. Isaiah speaks as if it has already happened: He has utterly destroyed them. In Hebrew prophecy, a future event is sometimes described as finished because God's word makes it certain. Revelation 19:17-21 describes the armies of the world gathered against Christ at His return and destroyed by Him.

34:3 *And their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses, their stench will go up, and mountains will melt with their blood.*

This verse is grim. The dead will lie unburied, the smell will rise, and the mountains will run with blood. I don't believe Isaiah is exaggerating for effect. Revelation 14:20 also describes blood flowing in the great judgment. God takes sin and rebellion seriously, and the end of those who reject Him is real.

34:4 *And all the host of the heavens will rot away, and the heavens will be rolled up like the scroll; and all their host will wither, as the leaf withers from the vine, and like the withered **fruit** from the fig tree.*

"The heavens will be rolled up like the scroll." The judgment reaches the heavens. The stars and the sky wear away and fall like leaves from a vine or figs from a tree. Jesus described the sun and moon darkened and the stars falling before His return (Matthew 24:29). Revelation 6:13-14 uses almost the same words as Isaiah: the stars fall like figs and the sky is split apart like a scroll rolled up. I take this as real upheaval in the heavens during the Tribulation and at Christ's return, not just a figure for political change.

New Testament links: Revelation 6:13-14 (alluded to); Matthew 24:29 (alluded to); Mark 13:25 (alluded to); 2 Peter 3:12 (alluded to); 2 Peter 3:10 (alluded to)

34:5 *For My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; look, it will come down on Edom, and on the people of My total destruction, for judgment.*

"My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens." God's sword has done its work in heaven, and now it comes down on Edom. Edom was the nation descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 36:1). Edom lived south and east of the Dead Sea and was a bitter enemy of Israel for centuries.

When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, Edom cheered it on (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 10-14). Here Edom stands as the leading example of the nations that hate God's people.

34:6 *The LORD has a sword; it is filled **with** blood; it has been made fat with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.*

Isaiah pictures the judgment as a great sacrifice. The sword is covered with blood and fat, as if from lambs, goats and rams. "The LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah." Bozrah was a major city of Edom. Isaiah 63:1 also shows the Lord coming from Bozrah with His garments stained red. Revelation 19:13 describes Christ at His return "clothed with a garment dipped in blood." I see these passages as describing the same event.

34:7 *And wild oxen will go down with them, and young bulls with mighty **bulls**; and their land will drink its fill of blood, and their dust will be made fat with fat.*

The wild oxen and bulls stand for Edom's powerful men and leaders. They fall with the rest. The land is soaked with blood and the dust is thick with fat. No one in Edom is too strong to fall.

34:8 *For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompenses for the cause of Zion.*

"For the LORD has a day of vengeance." This verse explains everything in the chapter. God has a day of vengeance and a year of recompense, meaning repayment, "for the cause of Zion." God hasn't forgotten what the nations did to His people. Notice the wording, a "day" of vengeance and a "year" of payback. Isaiah 61:2 uses the same pairing in reverse, "a year of favor of the LORD" and "a day of vengeance of our God." God's time of favor is long, and His time of vengeance is short. When Jesus read Isaiah 61 in Nazareth, He stopped before the day of vengeance (Luke 4:18-21). That day waits for His second coming.

34:9 *And its torrents will be turned into pitch, and its dust into sulfur, and its land will become burning pitch.*

Edom's streams turn to pitch, a black, sticky tar, and its soil to brimstone (burning sulfur). The whole land burns. This is the same kind of judgment that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24).

34:10 *Night and day it will not be quenched; forever its smoke will go up; from generation to generation it will lie desolate; to the perpetuity of perpetuities **there will be** none passing through it.*

"Forever its smoke will go up." The fire won't go out night or day. From one generation to the next the land stays desolate, and no one passes through it. Revelation uses the same language for the judgment on Babylon, "her smoke goes up to the ages of the ages" (Revelation 19:3), and on those who worship the beast (Revelation 14:11). The Edomites, later called Idumeans, faded from history in Roman times. I believe the full and final fulfillment comes at the end of the age.

New Testament links: Revelation 14:11 (alluded to); Revelation 19:3 (alluded to)

34:11 *And the desert owl and the hedgehog will possess it, and the great owl and the raven will dwell in it; and He will stretch out over it a measuring line of formlessness and stones of emptiness.*

With the people gone, wild birds and animals take over: pelican, hedgehog, owl and raven. God stretches over Edom "a measuring line of formlessness and stones of emptiness." Builders used a measuring line and plumb stones to build straight walls. God uses them here to measure a ruin. Some animal names in this chapter are hard to identify, and translations differ, but the picture is the same.

New Testament links: Revelation 18:2 (alluded to)

34:12 *Its nobles, and **there is** none there **whom** they will call **to** kingship; and all its princes will be nothing.*

Edom's nobles will look for someone to proclaim as king, and there will be no one. All its princes will come to nothing. A proud nation that once had kings before Israel did (Genesis 36:31) will have no ruler at all.

34:13 *And thorns will grow up **in** its fortresses, nettle and thistle in its fortifications; and it will be a habitation of jackals, an abode for daughters of the ostrich.*

Thorns grow in the fortified towers, and nettles and thistles in the strong cities. Jackals and ostriches move in. The places Edom trusted for safety become the haunt of wild animals. Edom's cities were built high in the rocks and thought to be untouchable (Obadiah 3-4). God's judgment reaches the highest fortress.

34:14 *And desert creatures will meet hyenas, and the goat will call to its companion; surely there the night creature will rest and will find for itself a resting place.*

Desert creatures meet hyenas, the goat calls to its companion, and "the night creature" rests there. The Hebrew word for "night creature" is lilith. Scholars aren't sure whether it means a night bird, a wild animal, or a demonic creature in folklore. I think the point is simply that the land becomes a place of fear and darkness, abandoned by people.

34:15 *There the owl will make its nest and lay eggs and hatch and gather **its brood** in its shadow; surely there the black kites will be gathered, each **with** its companion.*

Even the tree snake and the hawks make their nests there and raise their young in peace. It is a strange contrast. The land is dead to people but full of wild creatures, each with its mate. The animals inherit what the proud nation lost.

34:16 *Seek from the scroll of the LORD and read: not one of these will be missing; each **with** its companion, they will not be lacking. For my mouth, it has commanded, and His Spirit, He has gathered them.*

"Seek from the scroll of the LORD and read." Isaiah tells his readers to check the record. Not one of these creatures will be missing, and none will lack its mate, because God's mouth commanded it

and His Spirit gathered them. God is so precise that He keeps track of the birds that will live in the ruins. If He is that careful in His judgments, we can trust Him to be that careful in His promises.

34:17 *And He, He has cast a lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them by the measuring line; forever they will possess it; to generation and generation they will dwell in it.*

God casts the lot and divides the land among the animals with a measuring line, the way Joshua divided Canaan among the tribes of Israel by lot (Joshua 18:10). The wild creatures will own Edom forever. This is the end of the story for everyone who sets himself against God. But turn the page. Chapter 35 tells the other side.

Chapter 34 Summary

Isaiah calls every nation to hear God's judgment. The LORD's anger is against all the nations and their armies, and even the heavens are rolled up like a scroll, as Jesus and Revelation also describe. Edom, Israel's ancient enemy, is singled out as the example. God's sword falls on Bozrah in a day of vengeance for the cause of Zion, and Edom's land burns and becomes a desolate home for wild animals forever.

Edom

Edom (34:5): The nation descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, also called Esau's people in Genesis 36. Edom lived in the rugged hills south and east of the Dead Sea.

Bozrah (34:6): One of Edom's chief cities. Isaiah 63:1 pictures the Lord coming from Bozrah with garments stained red.

Edom and Israel: Edom refused to let Israel pass through its land after the Exodus (Numbers 20:14-21) and rejoiced when Jerusalem fell to Babylon (Psalm 137:7). The whole book of Obadiah is a prophecy against Edom.

In prophecy: Edom often stands for all the nations that oppose God and His people (Ezekiel 35; Isaiah 63:1-6).

Chapter 34 Study Questions

1. How do you usually react when you read about God's judgment in the Bible?

2. Who does Isaiah call to hear God's verdict, and against whom is His anger directed? (34:1-2)

3. What happens to the heavens in this chapter, and where else does the Bible describe this? (34:4)

4. Who was Edom, and why do you think God singles Edom out? (34:5-6)

5. What does God say the day of vengeance is "for"? (34:8)

6. How does the "day of vengeance" in 34:8 connect with Isaiah 61:2 and Luke 4:18-21?

7. What does verse 16 teach us about how carefully God keeps His word? (34:16)

8. How does knowing that God will one day make every wrong right help you when you have been treated unjustly?

9. Who do you know who needs to hear about God's mercy before the day of vengeance comes?

Chapter 35: The Highway of Holiness

Scripture: The Desert Blossoms and the Redeemed Return

35:1-4 The wilderness and the dry land will be glad, and let the desert plain rejoice, and let it blossom like the crocus. It will surely blossom, and let it rejoice, also ***with*** rejoicing and shouting for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They, they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen slack hands, and make firm stumbling knees. Say to those who are hasty of heart, "Be strong; do not be afraid. Look, your God! Vengeance will come, the recompense of God; He, He will come and save you."

35:5-7 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like the deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy; for waters will burst forth in the wilderness, and torrents in the desert plain. And the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, its resting place, grass ***will become*** reed and papyrus.

35:8-10 And there will be a highway there, and a way, and it will be called the way of holiness; the unclean will not pass along it, and it ***will be*** for them; one who walks the way, and fools, will not wander about. No lion will be there, and a violent one of the living things will not go up on it; it will not be found there; and the redeemed will walk. And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come ***to*** Zion with a shout of joy, and everlasting gladness ***will be*** on their head; joy and gladness they will overtake, and sorrow and sighing will flee.

Chapter 35 Preview

After the smoke and ruin of chapter 34, chapter 35 bursts into bloom. The same Isaiah who saw Edom's land turn to burning pitch now sees the desert covered with flowers and running with streams.

This is a picture of the world when Christ reigns. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap, and a highway called the Highway of Holiness leads God's redeemed people home to Zion with everlasting joy on their heads.

Chapter 35 Study

35:1 *The wilderness and the dry land will be glad, and let the desert plain rejoice, and let it blossom like the crocus.*

"The wilderness and the dry land will be glad." Isaiah turns from judgment to joy without warning, and the contrast is the point. Edom's land became a desolate waste (34:9-10). Now the wilderness itself rejoices. The Arabah is the deep, dry rift valley that runs south from the Sea of Galilee through the Dead Sea toward the Gulf of Aqaba. It is some of the harshest land in the region, and here it bursts into flower like the crocus in spring.

I take this at face value. When Christ returns and reigns on earth for a thousand years, the land of Israel will be physically renewed. Paul says all creation is groaning, waiting to be set free from its slavery to corruption (Romans 8:19-22). The desert blooming is part of that freedom. Creation was cursed because of man's sin (Genesis 3:17-18), and the King will undo much of that curse in His kingdom. Of course, the picture also speaks to the dry places in our own lives. God specializes in making deserts bloom.

35:2 *It will surely blossom, and let it rejoice, also* ***with*** *rejoicing and shouting for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They, they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.*

"They will see the glory of the LORD." The desert "will surely blossom," with rejoicing and shouting for joy. It will be given the glory of Lebanon, famous for its cedars, and the beauty of Carmel and Sharon, famous for their rich pastures and flowers. In 33:9 those same places were withered and mourning. Now their beauty is given even to the desert.

The best part is the last line. The people will see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. The greatest gift of the kingdom isn't the flowers; it's God Himself, seen and known. Isaiah has already told us, "Your eyes will see a king in his beauty" (33:17). In the Millennium, Jesus will be physically present, reigning from Jerusalem, and His glory will be on display for the whole world.

35:3 *Strengthen slack hands, and make firm stumbling knees.*

"Strengthen slack hands, and make firm stumbling knees." Isaiah now speaks to God's people while they are still waiting. Many of them were worn out, their hands limp and their knees shaking. The writer of Hebrews quotes this verse to believers who were growing tired under hardship: "Therefore lift up the hands that hang down and the weakened knees" (Hebrews 12:12).

This is a job for all of us. You probably know someone right now whose hands are weak and whose knees are shaking. The way to strengthen them is with the hope in this chapter. Tell them where the story is going.

New Testament links: Hebrews 12:12 (quoted)

35:4 *Say to those who are hasty of heart, "Be strong; do not be afraid. Look, your God! Vengeance will come, the recompense of God; He, He will come and save you."*

"Be strong; do not be afraid." Say it to those with an anxious heart. The reason for courage is simple: "Look, your God!" He will come with vengeance and recompense, the same words used for Edom in 34:8. But for His people, the same coming means rescue: "He, He will come and save you."

This is how I understand the second coming of Christ. For those who reject Him, it is the day of vengeance (Revelation 19:11-21). For those who belong to Him, it is the day of salvation. The same event is terror to one and joy to the other. Notice that Isaiah says "Look, your God!" The One who comes is your own God, not a stranger. If you are anxious today, that is your reason to take heart. He is coming, and He is coming for you.

35:5 *Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.*

"Then the eyes of the blind will be opened." This verse and the next are among the clearest promises of the Messiah's work. When John the Baptist was in prison and sent messengers to ask Jesus, "Are You the One who is coming?" Jesus answered by pointing to this very kind of work: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear (Matthew 11:2-5). Jesus was telling John, in effect, "Read Isaiah 35. That is what I am doing."

So Jesus fulfilled this in part at His first coming. Every blind man He healed was a sign that the King had come. But I believe the complete fulfillment is still ahead. In my Revelation study I listed 35:5-6 among the promises fulfilled in the Millennium, when Christ reigns on earth. Then healing won't be one miracle here and another there. It will be the normal state of the kingdom. And in the eternal state there will be no more pain at all (Revelation 21:4).

New Testament links: Luke 7:22 (alluded to); Mark 7:35-37 (alluded to); Matthew 11:5 (alluded to)

35:6 *Then the lame will leap like the deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy; for waters will burst forth in the wilderness, and torrents in the desert plain.*

"Then the lame will leap like the deer." Picture it: a man who couldn't walk doesn't just stand up; he leaps like a deer. A tongue that couldn't speak doesn't just whisper; it shouts for joy. That's what God's healing is like. It brings us past normal and into joy. Acts 3:8 records a lame man healed in Jesus' name who went "walking and leaping and praising God."

The second half of the verse explains the joy in nature. Waters break out in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. The healing of people and the healing of the land go together. Water in the desert is one of Isaiah's favorite pictures of God's blessing (41:18; 43:19-20; 44:3). Jesus used the same picture for the Holy Spirit, "rivers of living water" (John 7:38-39).

New Testament links: Luke 7:22 (alluded to); Mark 7:35-37 (alluded to); Acts 3:8 (alluded to); Matthew 11:5 (alluded to); Matthew 15:31 (alluded to)

35:7 *And the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, its resting place, grass* ***will become*** *reed and papyrus.*

The scorched ground becomes a pool, and the thirsty land becomes springs. Even the dens where jackals lay, the dry, abandoned places like the ruins of Edom in 34:13, grow tall grass, reeds and rushes, plants that only grow where there is plenty of water.

God reverses the curse completely. The places that were the most dead become the most alive. There is a lesson here for us too. No life is so dry and no situation so hopeless that God can't bring living water into it.

35:8 *And there will be a highway there, and a way, and it will be called the way of holiness; the unclean will not pass along it, and it **will be** for them; one who walks the way, and fools, will not wander about.*

"And there will be a highway there, and a way, and it will be called the way of holiness." A highway is a raised road, built up and cleared so people can travel safely. This one has a name, the Way of Holiness, because it belongs to a holy God and leads to His holy city. The unclean won't travel on it. It is for those who walk God's way.

The last line reads, "one who walks the way, and fools, will not wander about." Translations differ here. Some read it to mean that even simple people won't get lost on it. Either way, the road is safe and clear, and those who belong to God won't lose their way home.

At face value, I believe this describes a real road in the restored land, on which God's people return to Zion in the kingdom (compare 11:16 and 19:23). It also teaches a truth for today. Jesus said He is the way (John 14:6), and the road to God is a road of holiness (Hebrews 12:14). We don't walk it by our own goodness. We walk it because He has made us clean.

35:9 *No lion will be there, and a violent one of the living things will not go up on it; it will not be found there; and the redeemed will walk.*

"And the redeemed will walk." No lion or vicious beast will be on the road. Travelers in Isaiah's day faced real dangers from wild animals and robbers. On this highway, there is nothing to fear.

The travelers are called "the redeemed." To redeem means to buy back, to pay the price to set someone free. In Israel, a close relative could redeem a family member out of slavery or buy back lost land (Leviticus 25:25, 47-49). God is our Redeemer. Peter says we were redeemed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). Only the redeemed walk this road, and every one of them was bought at the same price.

35:10 *And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come **to** Zion with a shout of joy, and everlasting gladness **will be** on their head; joy and gladness they will overtake, and sorrow and sighing will flee.*

"And the ransomed of the LORD will return." This verse is so important that Isaiah repeats it almost word for word in 51:11. The ransomed come home to Zion with singing, wearing everlasting joy like a crown on their heads. They find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing run away.

In Isaiah's near view, this includes the return of the exiles from Babylon. But I believe it reaches much further. It describes the regathering of Israel to the land at the start of Christ's kingdom, when the nation turns to Jesus and the promises to Israel are kept (Romans 11:26). And it looks all the way to the eternal state, where God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer" (Revelation 21:4).

Notice the order of the last two lines. Gladness and joy come and find us, and sorrow and sighing flee away. Sorrow doesn't get to stay. If you belong to Christ, your story ends here, on this road, with joy on your head and grief running away.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:4 (alluded to)

Chapter 35 Summary

After the judgment of chapter 34, Isaiah sees the desert blossom and the glory of the LORD revealed. He tells God's people to strengthen the weak and take courage, because God will come to save them. The blind will see, the deaf hear, the lame leap and the mute shout, signs Jesus pointed to in His ministry and will fulfill fully in His kingdom. The redeemed travel the Highway of Holiness home to Zion with everlasting joy, and sorrow and sighing flee away.

Chapter 35 Study Questions

1. Where is the most beautiful place you have ever seen, and how did it make you feel?

2. How does the beginning of chapter 35 contrast with the end of chapter 34? (35:1-2; 34:9-15)

3. What does Isaiah tell God's people to say to those with an anxious heart, and why? (35:3-4)

4. How did Jesus use the promises in verses 5-6 when John the Baptist questioned Him? (35:5-6; Matthew 11:2-5)

5. Who can travel on the Highway of Holiness, and who can't? (35:8-9)

6. What does it mean to be "redeemed" and "ransomed"? (35:9-10)

7. What happens to sorrow and sighing when the ransomed reach Zion? (35:10)

8. Who in your life is exhausted or anxious right now, and how could you encourage them this week with the hope of this chapter?

9. What "desert" in your life do you need to trust God to make bloom?

Chapter 36: The Taunt

Scripture: Sennacherib Invades Judah

36:1-3 And it was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah ***that*** Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and he seized them. And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah, with a heavy army; and he stood by the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the field of the launderer. And ***there*** went out to him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who ***was*** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder.

36:4-10 And the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say, please, to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: What ***is*** this trust in which you trust? I say, only a word of lips ***is*** counsel and strength for the war. Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me? Look, you trust in the staff of this crushed reed, in Egypt, on which a man will lean, and it will go into his palm and pierce it; so ***is*** Pharaoh the king of Egypt to all who trust in him. And if you say to me, "In the LORD our God we trust," is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has removed, and he has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, "Before this altar you shall bow down"? And now, make a wager, please, with my master the king of Assyria, and let me give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders on them for yourself. And how will you turn back the face of one governor of the least of the servants of my master, and you trust for yourself in Egypt for chariotry and for horsemen? And now, is it without the LORD ***that*** I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, "Go up to this land and destroy it."'"

36:11-20 And Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Speak, please, to your servants ***in*** Aramaic, for we understand; and do not speak to us ***in*** Judean in the ears of the people who ***are*** on the wall." And the Rabshakeh said, "Is it to your master and to you ***that*** my master has sent me to speak these words? ***Is it*** not to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their excrement and to drink the water of their feet with you?" And the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a great voice ***in*** Judean, and he said, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. And do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: "Make a blessing with me and come out to me, and eat, each man ***from*** his vine and each man ***from*** his fig tree, and drink, each man the water of his cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards." ***Beware*** lest Hezekiah mislead you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." Have the gods of the nations delivered, each one his land, from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where ***are*** the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where ***are*** the gods of Sepharvaim? And have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands ***are those*** who have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD will deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'"

36:21-22 And they kept silent and did not answer him a word, for it ***was*** the command of the king, saying, "You shall not answer him." And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who ***was*** over the

house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah ***with*** garments torn, and they told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

Chapter 36 Preview

For thirty-five chapters Isaiah has warned Judah not to trust in Egypt or in its own strength, and to trust the LORD instead. Now the warning becomes a real test. The armies of Assyria are camped outside Jerusalem, and a royal spokesman stands where everyone on the wall can hear him.

His speech is clever and cruel. He goes after the one thing that can save the city, its faith in God. Chapters 36-39 are history, not poetry, and the same events are told in 2 Kings 18-20.

Chapter 36 Study

36:1 *And it was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah **that** Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and he seized them.*

Isaiah now shifts from prophecy to history. Assyria was the great empire of the day, based in what is now northern Iraq, and it had already swallowed the northern kingdom of Israel. Most scholars date this invasion to 701 B.C. Sennacherib's own records, written on a clay prism now in the British Museum (the Taylor Prism), boast that he took forty-six walled cities of Judah and shut Hezekiah up in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." Notice what his records don't say. They never claim he took Jerusalem.

"All the fortified cities of Judah." From a human point of view, Judah was finished. Only the capital was left. That is often where God does His best work, when every other support has been knocked away.

36:2-3 *And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah, with a heavy army; and he stood by the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the field of the launderer. And **there** went out to him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who **was** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder.*

Lachish was Judah's second most important city, about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Sennacherib was besieging it when he sent his messenger, and carved stone panels showing the siege of Lachish were later found in his palace at Nineveh. "Rabshakeh" isn't a personal name. It is an Assyrian title for a high official, something like a chief of staff.

Look at where he stands. "The conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the field of the launderer" is the exact spot where Isaiah met King Ahaz in 7:3. Ahaz refused God's sign and leaned on Assyria for help. A generation later, Assyria is standing on that same ground, demanding the city. What we trust in place of God can become the very thing that comes against us.

36:4-6 *And the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say, please, to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: What **is** this trust in which you trust? I say, only a word of lips **is** counsel and strength for the war. Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me? Look, you trust in the staff of this crushed reed, in Egypt, on which a man will lean, and it will go into his palm and pierce it; so **is** Pharaoh the king of Egypt to all who trust in him.*

The whole speech turns on one word: trust. "What is this trust in which you trust?" Rabshakeh wants to know what Judah is leaning on, and his first guess is Egypt. Here he is right. Isaiah had said the same thing for years (30:1-3; 31:1). Egypt was a reed already crushed, and anyone who leans on it gets a hand full of splinters.

It is a strange moment when the enemy preaches Isaiah's sermon back to the people. Satan does this too. He will point out our real failures, not to lead us to God, but to make us give up.

36:7 *And if you say to me, "In the LORD our God we trust," is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has removed, and he has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, "Before this altar you shall bow down"?*

Here the Assyrian gets it wrong. Hezekiah had torn down the high places (2 Kings 18:4), the hilltop shrines where Israel mixed the worship of the LORD with pagan practice, and he had called the people back to the one altar at the temple. To an outsider who believed in many gods, that looked like an insult to Judah's God. In fact it was obedience.

Why would he say this? It's simple. He wants the people to doubt that God is on their side. The devil still uses this trick. He takes our faithfulness and tells us it was the reason things went wrong.

36:8-9 *And now, make a wager, please, with my master the king of Assyria, and let me give you two thousand horses, if you are able to put riders on them for yourself. And how will you turn back the face of one governor of the least of the servants of my master, and you trust for yourself in Egypt for chariotry and for horsemen?*

This is pure mockery. Rabshakeh offers two thousand horses, then laughs that Judah couldn't even find two thousand men who know how to ride them. Judah couldn't stand against the lowest officer in Sennacherib's army, so how could it think Egypt's chariots would save it?

On paper he was correct. Judah had no army to speak of. But the question was never about horses. "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

36:10 *And now, is it without the LORD **that** I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, "Go up to this land and destroy it."'"*

This is the boldest lie of the speech, and like the best lies it carries some truth. God really had called Assyria the "rod of My anger" against a godless nation (10:5-6). But in the same passage God said Assyria would go too far and would itself be judged for its pride (10:7, 12). God had never told Sennacherib to destroy Jerusalem.

When someone claims to speak for God, test the claim against what God has already said in His Word. A half-truth used to scare God's people is still a lie.

36:11-12 *And Eliakim and Shebna and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Speak, please, to your servants **in** Aramaic, for we understand; and do not speak to us **in** Judean in the ears of the people who **are** on the wall." And the Rabshakeh said, "Is it to your master and to you **that** my master has sent me to speak these words? **Is it** not to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their excrement and to drink the water of their feet with you?"*

Aramaic was the language of trade and diplomacy in that part of the world, much like English today. "Judean" means Hebrew, the language of the common people. Hezekiah's officials ask him to talk in Aramaic so the soldiers on the wall can't follow the conversation.

Rabshakeh refuses, and he does it as crudely as he can. He says the men on the wall are the ones who will starve in a long siege until they are eating their own waste. He isn't negotiating anymore. He is trying to break the will of the ordinary soldier.

36:13-15 *And the Rabshakeh stood and called out with a great voice **in** Judean, and he said, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. And do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."*

Now he turns and shouts straight to the crowd. His target is Hezekiah's leadership and, behind it, Hezekiah's faith. "Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD."

This is the heart of the attack. The Assyrian king didn't mind if Judah prayed. What he couldn't allow was for them to trust. Real trust in God is the one thing an enemy can't answer, and he knew it.

36:16-17 *Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: "Make a blessing with me and come out to me, and eat, each man **from** his vine and each man **from** his fig tree, and drink, each man the water of his cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards."*

Then comes the sales pitch. Surrender, and you can go back to sitting under your own vine and fig tree, a common picture of peace and plenty (Micah 4:4). But listen to the fine print: "until I come and take you to a land like your land." Assyria's policy was to move conquered peoples far from home, as it had done to Samaria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6).

The world still sells its offers this way. It promises rest and comfort now and leaves out where the road ends. Sin always takes more than it gives.

36:18-20 ***Beware*** *lest Hezekiah mislead you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." Have the gods of the nations delivered, each one his land, from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where* ***are*** *the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where* ***are*** *the gods of Sepharvaim? And have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands* ***are those*** *who have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD will deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'"*

Rabshakeh lists the cities Assyria had already crushed. Hamath and Arpad were in Syria, and Sepharvaim was probably in the same region. Their gods hadn't saved them, and neither had the God of Samaria. So why would the LORD save Jerusalem?

This was his fatal mistake. He put the living God on the same shelf as idols made of wood and stone. Up to this point he had insulted Hezekiah. Now he has insulted the LORD, and in the next chapter God answers him personally (37:23).

36:21 *And they kept silent and did not answer him a word, for it* ***was*** *the command of the king, saying, "You shall not answer him."*

The people on the wall said nothing, because Hezekiah had told them not to answer. There is real wisdom in this. Not every taunt needs a reply, and arguing with a liar on his own terms usually helps him. Their silence wasn't weakness. It left the answer to God.

Jesus did the same before His accusers (Matthew 27:12-14).

36:22 *And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who* ***was*** *over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah* ***with*** *garments torn, and they told him the words of the Rabshakeh.*

The three officials go back to the king with their clothes torn, a sign of grief and alarm in the ancient world. They report every word. Nothing is solved yet. The army is still outside, and the city is still trapped. What happens next depends on what Hezekiah does with the bad news, which we will see in chapter 37.

Chapter 36 Summary

In 701 B.C. Sennacherib of Assyria takes the fortified cities of Judah and sends his spokesman Rabshakeh to Jerusalem. Standing where Ahaz once rejected God's sign, Rabshakeh mocks Judah's hope in Egypt, twists Hezekiah's reforms, claims the LORD sent him, and shouts to the people not to trust in the LORD. He ranks the God of Israel with the idols of conquered nations. The people stay silent as the king ordered, and the officials bring the report to Hezekiah.

People in Jerusalem's Crisis

Hezekiah (36:1): King of Judah, son of Ahaz. He reformed worship and trusted the LORD (2 Kings 18:3-7).

Sennacherib (36:1): King of Assyria. He invaded Judah in 701 B.C. and was later killed by two of his sons (37:38).

Rabshakeh (36:2): An Assyrian title for a senior official sent as spokesman, not a personal name.

Eliakim (36:3): Hezekiah's palace administrator, the man Isaiah said would replace Shebna in that office (22:20-22).

Shebna (36:3): Formerly over the household (22:15), now serving as scribe or royal secretary.

Chapter 36 Study Questions

1. When has someone's discouraging words made you doubt something you believed?

2. What had Sennacherib already done to Judah before Rabshakeh arrived at Jerusalem? (36:1-2)

3. Why is it important where Rabshakeh stood, and what happened there in Isaiah 7? (36:2)

4. What did Rabshakeh say about Egypt, and why was he partly right? (36:4-6)

5. How did Rabshakeh twist Hezekiah's reforms to make the people doubt? (36:7)

6. What did Rabshakeh promise the people if they surrendered, and what did he leave out? (36:16-17)

7. What mistake did Rabshakeh make when he compared the LORD to the gods of other nations? (36:18-20)

8. When should a believer stay silent instead of answering an accuser, as the people did here?

9. What voices in your life are asking, "What is this trust in which you trust?" How will you answer them?

Chapter 37: The Answer

Scripture: Hezekiah's Prayer and God's Deliverance

37:1-7 And it was, when King Hezekiah heard, and he tore his clothes, and he covered himself with sackcloth, and he went ***into*** the house of the LORD. And he sent Eliakim, who ***was*** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet. And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'A day of distress and rebuke and contempt ***is*** this day, for children have come to birth, and ***there is*** no strength to give birth. Perhaps the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to taunt the living God, and will rebuke ***him*** for the words which the LORD your God has heard; and you shall lift up a prayer for the remnant that is found.'" And the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master: 'Thus says the LORD: "Do not be afraid because of the words which you have heard, ***with*** which the young men of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Look, I am about to put a spirit in him, and he will hear a report and return to his land; and I will make him fall by the sword in his land."'"

37:8-13 And the Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish. And he heard concerning Tirhakah the king of Cush, saying, "He has come out to fight with you." And he heard, and he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah the king of Judah, saying, 'Do not let your God, in whom you are trusting, deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, devoting them to destruction; and will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations deliver them, whom my fathers destroyed: Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who ***were*** in Telassar? Where ***is*** the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?'"

37:14-20 And Hezekiah took the letters from the hand of the messengers, and he read it; and he went up ***to*** the house of the LORD, and Hezekiah spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying, "LORD of armies, God of Israel, who sits ***on*** the cherubim, You are He, the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made the heavens and the earth. Incline Your ear, LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to taunt the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the lands and their land, and they have put their gods into the fire, for they ***were*** not gods, but the work of the hands of man, wood and stone; and they destroyed them. And now, LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You ***are*** the LORD, You alone."

37:21-29 And Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: '***As for*** what you have prayed to Me concerning Sennacherib the king of Assyria, this ***is*** the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: "She has despised you, she has mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion; behind you she has shaken ***her*** head, the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you taunted and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised a voice and lifted

up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel! By the hand of your servants you have taunted the Lord, and you have said, 'With the abundance of my chariots I, I have gone up ***to*** the height of mountains, ***to*** the remotest parts of Lebanon; and I will cut down the height of its cedars, the choicest of its cypresses; and I will come ***to*** the height of its end, the forest of its orchard. I, I have dug and drunk water, and I will dry up with the sole of my feet all the canals of Egypt.' Have you not heard? From afar I did it; from days of antiquity I formed it; now I have brought it, and you are to make fortified cities crash ***into*** ruined heaps. And their inhabitants ***were*** short of hand; they were dismayed and were ashamed; they were the vegetation of the field and the greenery of grass, the grass of roofs, and a field before standing grain. And your sitting down and your going out and your coming in I know, and your raging against Me. Because of your raging against Me, and your arrogance has come up into My ears, I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came.

37:30-35 And this ***will be*** the sign for you: eating this year self-sown grain, and in the second year self-seeded growth, and in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. And the escaped remnant of the house of Judah that remains will again ***take*** root downward and produce fruit upward. For from Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and an escaped remnant from the mountain of Zion; the zeal of the LORD of armies will do this. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He will not come into this city, and he will not shoot an arrow there, and he will not confront it ***with*** a shield, and he will not pour out a siege mound against it. By the way by which he came, by it he will return, and into this city he will not come, declares the LORD. And I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant."'"

37:36-38 And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and they rose early in the morning, and look, all of them ***were*** dead corpses. And Sennacherib the king of Assyria set out and went and returned, and he dwelt in Nineveh. And it was, he ***was*** bowing down ***in*** the house of Nisroch his god, and Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him down with the sword; and they escaped ***to*** the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 37 Preview

Chapter 36 ended with bad news delivered to the king. This chapter shows what a godly leader does with bad news. Hezekiah goes straight to the house of the LORD, and he sends for the prophet.

Twice he is threatened, and twice he brings the threat before God. The LORD answers through Isaiah with a poem of judgment against the proud king of Assyria. Then, in one night, God does what no army in the world could have done.

Chapter 37 Study

37:1-2 *And it was, when King Hezekiah heard, and he tore his clothes, and he covered himself with sackcloth, and he went **into** the house of the LORD. And he sent Eliakim, who **was** over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet.*

Hezekiah tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth, rough cloth worn in mourning and repentance. Then he goes into the temple. His first move isn't to call his generals but to seek God, and his second is to send his top men to Isaiah.

That order matters. When trouble comes, many of us try everything else first and pray last. Hezekiah turned it around.

37:3-4 *And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'A day of distress and rebuke and contempt **is** this day, for children have come to birth, and **there is** no strength to give birth. Perhaps the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to taunt the living God, and will rebuke **him** for the words which the LORD your God has heard; and you shall lift up a prayer for the remnant that is found.'"*

"Children have come to birth, and there is no strength to give birth." This was a common saying for a crisis with no way out. The baby is ready to be born, and the mother has no strength left to deliver it. Judah had come to the moment of decision and had nothing to bring to it.

Hezekiah's hope rests on one point: Rabshakeh had mocked "the living God." The king asks Isaiah to pray for "the remnant that is found." A remnant, a word we meet often in Isaiah, means the small group of God's people who survive a judgment and remain faithful. With the rest of Judah overrun, Jerusalem was that remnant.

37:5-7 *And the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master: 'Thus says the LORD: "Do not be afraid because of the words which you have heard, **with** which the young men of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Look, I am about to put a spirit in him, and he will hear a report and return to his land; and I will make him fall by the sword in his land."'"*

God's answer comes right away. "Do not be afraid." The insults were aimed at the LORD, and the LORD would handle them Himself.

God gives a very specific prophecy. Sennacherib would hear a report, go back home, and die by the sword in his own land. Every part of it came true, as the end of this chapter shows. When God names the details ahead of time, it is so we will know who did it when they happen.

37:8-9 *And the Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish. And he heard concerning Tirhakah the king of Cush, saying, "He has come out to fight with you." And he heard, and he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying,*

Rabshakeh found his king fighting at Libnah, a town not far from Lachish, which had apparently already fallen. Then news came that Tirhakah of Cush was marching out to fight. Cush was the land south of Egypt, in what is now Sudan, and its kings ruled Egypt in this period.

This was the "report" God had spoken of in verse 7, the first step toward Sennacherib's retreat. Rather than leave Jerusalem alone, though, he sends a second message to keep up the pressure.

37:10-13 *"Thus you shall say to Hezekiah the king of Judah, saying, 'Do not let your God, in whom you are trusting, deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Look, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, devoting them to destruction; and will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations deliver them, whom my fathers destroyed: Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who **were** in Telassar? Where **is** the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?'"*

The second message is a letter, and it goes a step further than the first. Rabshakeh had said, "Do not let Hezekiah deceive you." Now Sennacherib says, "Do not let your God, in whom you are trusting, deceive you." He calls God a liar to His face.

The list of fallen cities and kings is meant to make Jerusalem feel small and alone. Gozan, Haran, and Rezeph were in upper Mesopotamia, and Hamath and Arpad were in Syria. All of them had once felt safe. The argument is simple: no one has ever stopped Assyria, so no one will.

37:14 *And Hezekiah took the letters from the hand of the messengers, and he read it; and he went up **to** the house of the LORD, and Hezekiah spread it out before the LORD.*

Hezekiah takes the letter, goes up to the temple, and spreads it out before the LORD. He doesn't answer it. He doesn't hide it. He lays it open in front of God, as if to say, "You read it too."

Each of us has letters like this: a bad report from the doctor, a bill we can't pay, a hard word from someone we love. We can spread them out before the Lord in the same way. "Having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7).

37:15-16 *And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, saying, "LORD of armies, God of Israel, who sits **on** the cherubim, You are He, the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made the heavens and the earth.*

Look at how Hezekiah begins. Before he says a word about his problem, he tells God who God is. He is the "LORD of armies," the commander of every heavenly army. He is the One "who sits on the cherubim," the angels pictured over the ark of the covenant in the temple. He alone is God over every kingdom, and He made heaven and earth.

When we start our prayers by remembering how big God is, our problems take their right size.

37:17 *Incline Your ear, LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to taunt the living God.*

Hezekiah asks God to hear and to see. Of course God already hears and sees everything. This is the honest language of a man asking God to act on what He knows. The focus of the prayer stays on God's name. Sennacherib had reproached "the living God," and that is Hezekiah's whole case.

37:18-19 *Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the lands and their land, and they have put their gods into the fire, for they **were** not gods, but the work of the hands of man, wood and stone; and they destroyed them.*

Hezekiah doesn't pretend the threat is small. The Assyrians really had destroyed nation after nation and burned their gods. But he draws the right conclusion. Those gods fell because "they were not gods, but the work of the hands of man, wood and stone."

Sennacherib had beaten idols, not the living God. Faith doesn't deny the facts. It sees the facts in the light of who God is.

37:20 *And now, LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You **are** the LORD, You alone."*

Here is the goal of the whole prayer: "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone." Hezekiah wanted to be saved, but more than that he wanted God's name to be honored before the nations.

That is a good test for our own requests. Am I asking only for my comfort, or am I asking for God's glory as well? The two often go together, but His glory should come first.

37:21 *And Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: '**As for** what you have prayed to Me concerning Sennacherib the king of Assyria,*

Notice the words "As for what you have prayed to Me." God answers because Hezekiah prayed. Prayer isn't just a way of calming ourselves down. God hears it and acts in response to it. "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

37:22 *this **is** the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: "She has despised you, she has mocked you, the virgin daughter of Zion; behind you she has shaken **her** head, the daughter of Jerusalem.*

God's answer begins as a poem. Jerusalem is pictured as a young woman, "the virgin daughter of Zion," who hasn't been taken by the conqueror. Instead of trembling, she shakes her head and laughs at the Assyrian as he leaves. "Zion" is the hill in Jerusalem where the temple stood, and Isaiah often uses it as a name for the city and its people.

37:23 *Whom have you taunted and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised a voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel!*

"Against the Holy One of Israel!" This is God's charge. Sennacherib thought he was dealing with one more small kingdom. In fact he had raised his voice against the Holy One, Isaiah's favorite name for God, a name that stresses that He is set apart, pure, and over all.

37:24-25 *By the hand of your servants you have taunted the Lord, and you have said, 'With the abundance of my chariots I, I have gone up **to** the height of mountains, **to** the remotest parts of Lebanon; and I will cut down the height of its cedars, the choicest of its cypresses; and I will come **to** the height of its end, the forest of its orchard. I, I have dug and drunk water, and I will dry up with the sole of my feet all the canals of Egypt.'*

God quotes the king's own boasting back to him. Sennacherib bragged that his chariots climbed the highest mountains, cut down the cedars of Lebanon, and dried up the rivers of Egypt under his feet. Every line is about "I" and "my."

Pride always talks this way. It takes credit for what God allowed and forgets who gave the strength in the first place (Daniel 4:30-32).

37:26-27 *Have you not heard? From afar I did it; from days of antiquity I formed it; now I have brought it, and you are to make fortified cities crash **into** ruined heaps. And their inhabitants **were** short of hand; they were dismayed and were ashamed; they were the vegetation of the field and the greenery of grass, the grass of roofs, and a field before standing grain.*

"Have you not heard? From afar I did it." Here is the answer to the boasting. Assyria's victories weren't Sennacherib's plan. God had planned long before to use Assyria as His tool of judgment (10:5-6). The cities fell because God let them fall.

The people of those cities were like grass growing on a flat rooftop, quick to sprout and quick to wither in the sun. The same picture comes back in 40:6-8. Human power, even an empire's, doesn't last.

37:28-29 *And your sitting down and your going out and your coming in I know, and your raging against Me. Because of your raging against Me, and your arrogance has come up into My ears, I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came.*

God knows every move this king makes, his sitting down and his going out and even his rage. Now God will treat him like an animal. Assyrian kings were known to lead captives with hooks through the nose or lip. God turns the image on Sennacherib. He will be led back home the way he came, like a beast on a rope.

No ruler on earth is outside God's reach. The proudest of them is held on God's leash.

37:30-32 *And this **will be** the sign for you: eating this year self-sown grain, and in the second year self-seeded growth, and in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit. And the escaped remnant of the house of Judah that remains will again **take** root downward and produce fruit upward. For from Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and an escaped remnant from the mountain of Zion; the zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.*

Next God gives a sign to Hezekiah. With the land overrun, there was no planting that year or likely the next. The people would eat what grew wild. But in the third year they would plant and harvest again as normal.

The remnant of Judah would "take root downward and produce fruit upward." That is a picture of real life, roots that go deep and fruit that shows.

"The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this." The same phrase closes the great promise of the Messiah in 9:7. God's zeal, His burning commitment to His people, guarantees the outcome.

37:33-35 *Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He will not come into this city, and he will not shoot an arrow there, and he will not confront it **with** a shield, and he will not pour out a siege mound against it. By the way by which he came, by it he will return, and into this city he will not come, declares the LORD. And I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant."'"*

The promise is stated as plainly as it can be. Sennacherib wouldn't enter the city. He wouldn't shoot one arrow at it, wouldn't raise a shield before it, and wouldn't build a siege ramp against it. He would go home the way he came.

God gives two reasons: "for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant." God defended Jerusalem for His own name and because of His covenant promise to David (2 Samuel 7:16). His faithfulness to that promise runs all the way to Jesus, the Son of David, who will one day reign from Jerusalem.

37:36 *And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and they rose early in the morning, and look, all of them **were** dead corpses.*

In one night the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. In the morning the camp was full of dead men. Some try to explain this as a plague, but the text says the angel of the LORD did it, and I believe the text.

Sennacherib's own records describe his campaign against Judah and boast of the tribute Hezekiah paid him (see 2 Kings 18:14-16), but they never claim he captured Jerusalem. For a king who recorded every victory, that silence says a great deal.

37:37-38 *And Sennacherib the king of Assyria set out and went and returned, and he dwelt in Nineveh. And it was, he **was** bowing down **in** the house of Nisroch his god, and Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him down with the sword; and they escaped **to** the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.*

Sennacherib went home to Nineveh, his capital. Years later, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, two of his sons killed him with the sword. Most scholars date his death to 681 B.C. His son Esarhaddon took the throne.

Notice the irony. Sennacherib mocked the God of Israel for not being able to save His people. Then his own god couldn't save him in his own temple. Every word of Isaiah's prophecy in verse 7 came true.

Chapter 37 Summary

Hezekiah responds to Assyria's threats by going to the temple and sending for Isaiah, who tells him not to be afraid. When Sennacherib sends a letter calling God a deceiver, Hezekiah spreads it before the LORD and prays for deliverance so that all nations will know the LORD alone is God. God answers with a poem against Assyria's pride and a promise to defend the city. That night the angel of the LORD strikes down 185,000 Assyrians, and Sennacherib goes home, where his sons later kill him.

Places in Chapter 37

Libnah (37:8): A town in the low hills of Judah, not far from Lachish.

Cush (37:9): The land south of Egypt, roughly modern Sudan. Its kings ruled Egypt in Hezekiah's day.

Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, Telassar (37:12): Cities and regions of upper Mesopotamia conquered by earlier Assyrian kings.

Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, Ivvah (37:13): Cities and kingdoms in Syria and nearby regions that Assyria had taken.

Nineveh (37:37): The capital of Assyria, on the Tigris River across from modern Mosul in Iraq.

Ararat (37:38): The mountain region north of Assyria, known later as Armenia.

Chapter 37 Study Questions

1. What do you usually do first when you get bad news?
2. What did Hezekiah do when he heard Rabshakeh's words? (37:1-4)
3. What did God promise would happen to Sennacherib? (37:6-7)
4. How did the second message go further than the first in insulting God? (37:10-13)
5. What did Hezekiah do with the letter, and how did he begin his prayer? (37:14-16)

6. What was the main reason Hezekiah gave for asking God to save the city? (37:20)

7. According to God, who had really planned Assyria's victories? (37:26-27)

8. How was God's word fulfilled in the deaths of the Assyrian soldiers and of Sennacherib himself? (37:36-38)

9. What "letters" in your life do you need to spread out before the Lord this week?

Chapter 38: The Fifteen Years

Scripture: Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery

38:1-8 In those days Hezekiah became sick to ***the point of*** dying. And Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Command your house, for you ***are*** dying, and you will not live.'" And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD. And he said, "Please, LORD, remember, please, how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a complete heart, and I have done what ***is*** good in Your eyes." And Hezekiah wept ***with*** a great weeping. And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, "Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I ***am He who*** will add to your days fifteen years. And from the hand of the king of Assyria I will deliver you and this city; and I will defend this city. And this ***will be*** the sign for you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing which He has spoken: Look, I am about to turn back the shadow on the steps, which has gone down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, backward ten steps."'" And the sun returned ten steps on the steps which it had gone down.

38:9-14 A writing of Hezekiah the king of Judah, when he had been sick and had revived from his sickness: I, I said, "In the middle of my days I must go into the gates of Sheol; I have been deprived of the remainder of my years." I said, "I will not see ***the*** LORD, ***the*** LORD, in the land of the living; I will no longer look at man with the inhabitants of cessation. My dwelling has been pulled up and removed from me like the tent of a shepherd; I have rolled up my life like the weaver; He cuts me off from the loom; from day to night You make an end of me. I have lain down until morning; like the lion, so He breaks all my bones; from day to night You make an end of me. Like a swallow, a crane, so I chirp; I moan like the dove; my eyes have languished toward the height. Lord, oppression ***is*** mine; stand surety for me."

38:15-20 What shall I speak? And He has said to me, and He, He has acted. I will walk slowly all my years on ***account of*** the bitterness of my soul. Lord, by these ***things*** they live, and in all of them ***is*** the life of my spirit; and may You restore me to health and make me live. Look, for peace ***it*** was bitter to me, bitter; and You, You have loved my soul ***and kept it*** from the pit of destruction, for You have thrown all my sins behind Your back. For Sheol does not give thanks to You; death does not praise You; those who go down to the pit do not hope for Your faithfulness. The living, the living, he gives thanks to You, as I ***do*** this day; a father makes known to sons Your faithfulness. The LORD ***is ready*** to save me, and we will play my songs all the days of our life at the house of the LORD.

38:21-22 And Isaiah said, "Let them take a cake of figs, and let them rub ***it*** on the boil, and let him live." And Hezekiah said, "What ***is*** the sign that I will go up ***to*** the house of the LORD?"

Chapter 38 Preview

Hezekiah has just seen God save his city. Now he faces an enemy no army can fight, his own death. Isaiah brings him a hard message, and the king turns his face to the wall and prays.

God hears, adds fifteen years to his life, and confirms the promise with a sign in the sky. Then Hezekiah writes a song about what it felt like to stand at the edge of the grave and be brought back.

Chapter 38 Study

38:1 *In those days Hezekiah became sick to **the point of** dying. And Isaiah the son of Amoz, the prophet, came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Command your house, for you **are** dying, and you will not live.'"*

"In those days" is a loose time marker. Because God promises in verse 6 to deliver the city from Assyria, most scholars place this illness before the events of chapters 36-37, probably around the time the invasion began. Isaiah arranged his book by theme, and these two chapters lead us toward Babylon.

"Command your house." Isaiah's message was blunt. Hezekiah was going to die, so he should settle his affairs. It is a word every one of us will hear sooner or later. The wise thing is to have our house in order with God long before that day comes.

38:2-3 *And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD. And he said, "Please, LORD, remember, please, how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a complete heart, and I have done what **is** good in Your eyes." And Hezekiah wept **with** a great weeping.*

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, away from everyone in the room, and poured out his heart to God. He reminded the LORD that he had walked before Him faithfully and wholeheartedly. Then he wept bitterly.

Was he boasting? I don't believe so. He wasn't claiming to be sinless (verse 17 shows he knew his sins). He was speaking honestly to a God he had served. God invites that kind of honesty. The Psalms are full of it.

38:4-6 *And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, "Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I **am He who** will add to your days fifteen years. And from the hand of the king of Assyria I will deliver you and this city; and I will defend this city.*

Before Isaiah had even left the palace courtyard (2 Kings 20:4), God sent him back. "I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears." God added fifteen years to Hezekiah's life and promised again to defend Jerusalem from Assyria.

Does prayer change God's mind? Here's how I see it. God's first word showed Hezekiah where his illness was heading. God also planned all along to answer His servant's prayer. God doesn't change, but He has chosen to work through the prayers of His people. Our prayers matter.

38:7-8 *And this **will be** the sign for you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing which He has spoken: Look, I am about to turn back the shadow on the steps, which has gone down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, backward ten steps."'" And the sun returned ten steps on the steps which it had gone down.*

God gave a sign that He would keep His word. The shadow on "the steps of Ahaz," likely a set of steps that worked like a sundial, went backward ten steps. 2 Kings 20:8-11 tells us Hezekiah was given the choice of which way the shadow would move, and he chose the harder one.

How did God do it? The text doesn't say, and I won't guess. The God who made the sun can move a shadow. The point is that this was a real miracle and a real sign, and Hezekiah could see it with his own eyes.

38:9 *A writing of Hezekiah the king of Judah, when he had been sick and had revived from his sickness:*

Here Isaiah includes a psalm Hezekiah wrote after he recovered. It doesn't appear in the account in 2 Kings, so this is the only place we have it. It moves from despair to thanksgiving, and it gives us an honest look inside a believer facing death.

38:10 *I, I said, "In the middle of my days I must go into the gates of Sheol; I have been deprived of the remainder of my years."*

Hezekiah felt his life was being cut off halfway. He was about thirty-nine at this point (2 Kings 18:2 says he began to reign at twenty-five and reigned twenty-nine years, and he received fifteen more). "Sheol" is the Hebrew word for the grave, the place of the dead. To an Old Testament believer, going there in mid-life felt like being robbed.

38:11 *I said, "I will not see **the** LORD, **the** LORD, in the land of the living; I will no longer look at man with the inhabitants of cessation.*

His greatest grief was that he would no longer see the LORD "in the land of the living." He would no longer worship among God's people or enjoy the company of others. The Old Testament saints didn't yet have the full picture of life after death that came through Christ's resurrection (2 Timothy 1:10). We do. That makes this verse a reminder of how much we have been given.

38:12 *My dwelling has been pulled up and removed from me like the tent of a shepherd; I have rolled up my life like the weaver; He cuts me off from the loom; from day to night You make an end of me.*

Two pictures show how fragile life is. A shepherd's tent can be pulled down and moved in an afternoon. A weaver finishes a piece of cloth, cuts it from the loom, and rolls it up. Hezekiah felt God was cutting the thread of his life, and doing it fast, from morning to night.

38:13 *I have lain down until morning; like the lion, so He breaks all my bones; from day to night You make an end of me.*

Through the long night he tried to calm himself until morning, but the pain felt like a lion crushing his bones. He saw the hand of God in his suffering. That isn't a lack of faith. It's honest faith, admitting that God is in control even of the hard things.

38:14 *Like a swallow, a crane, so I chirp; I moan like the dove; my eyes have languished toward the height. Lord, oppression **is** mine; stand surety for me."*

Hezekiah could only chirp and moan like a small bird, too weak even to cry out properly. His eyes kept looking upward.

"Lord, oppression is mine; stand surety for me." To stand surety is to stand in for another and guarantee his debt. Hezekiah asks God to stand in for him. In the end, that is exactly what Jesus did for us.

38:15 *What shall I speak? And He has said to me, and He, He has acted. I will walk slowly all my years on **account of** the bitterness of my soul.*

Here the song turns. "What shall I speak?" God has spoken, and God has acted. Hezekiah says he will walk humbly all his years because of what he went through. Suffering had taught him something he wouldn't forget, at least for a while.

38:16 *Lord, by these **things** they live, and in all of them **is** the life of my spirit; and may You restore me to health and make me live.*

"By these things they live." Hezekiah had learned that life comes from God's word and God's acts, not from our own strength. His prayer is short and plain: restore me and let me live. God had already answered it.

38:17 *Look, for peace **it** was bitter to me, bitter; and You, You have loved my soul **and kept it** from the pit of destruction, for You have thrown all my sins behind Your back.*

This is the key verse of the song. Hezekiah now sees that his bitter trial was for his good. God had pulled his soul back from "the pit of destruction," and more than that, God had cast all his sins behind His back.

That is a picture of forgiveness. When you throw something behind your back, you can no longer see it. God doesn't keep our forgiven sins in front of Him. "As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us" (Psalm 103:12). For those who trust Jesus, this is ours too.

38:18-19 *For Sheol does not give thanks to You; death does not praise You; those who go down to the pit do not hope for Your faithfulness. The living, the living, he gives thanks to You, as I **do** this day; a father makes known to sons Your faithfulness.*

Hezekiah reasons that the dead can't stand in the temple and praise God, but the living can. So he will give thanks today and pass God's faithfulness on to his children. A father telling his sons about God's faithfulness is one of the best uses of the years God gives us.

Sadly, Hezekiah's son Manasseh, born during these extra years (2 Kings 21:1), became one of Judah's most wicked kings. It is a sober reminder that we must not only tell our children about God. We must keep on telling them.

38:20 *The LORD **is ready** to save me, and we will play my songs all the days of our life at the house of the LORD.*

The song closes with praise and worship among God's people "all the days of our life at the house of the LORD." Hezekiah's private pain becomes public worship. That is often how God uses our trials. What we go through alone becomes a testimony we share with others.

38:21-22 *And Isaiah said, "Let them take a cake of figs, and let them rub **it** on the boil, and let him live." And Hezekiah said, "What **is** the sign that I will go up **to** the house of the LORD?"*

These two verses fill in details from earlier in the story (compare 2 Kings 20:7-8). Isaiah told them to put a cake of figs on the king's boil, and Hezekiah had asked what sign would show he would go up to the temple again.

God healed Hezekiah, and He used a simple remedy to do it. Using medicine isn't a lack of faith. The healing still came from God.

Chapter 38 Summary

Hezekiah becomes deathly ill, and Isaiah tells him to prepare to die. The king turns to the wall, prays, and weeps, and God answers through Isaiah, adding fifteen years to his life and promising to defend Jerusalem. As a sign, the shadow on the stairway of Ahaz goes back ten steps. Afterward Hezekiah writes a song describing his despair at the edge of death, his cry for help, and his joy that God restored him and cast his sins behind His back.

Chapter 38 Study Questions

1. Have you or someone close to you ever faced a frightening diagnosis? What helped you most?
2. How did Hezekiah respond to the news that he would die? (38:1-3)
3. What did God promise Hezekiah, and what sign did He give? (38:4-8)
4. What pictures did Hezekiah use to describe how short his life felt? (38:12-14)
5. What did Hezekiah learn about his suffering looking back on it? (38:15-17)

6. What does it mean that God cast Hezekiah's sins "behind Your back"? (38:17)

7. Why did Hezekiah say the living, not the dead, praise God? (38:18-20)

8. How does knowing Christ's resurrection change the way a believer faces death compared to Hezekiah?

9. How can you tell the next generation about God's faithfulness in your own life?

Chapter 39: The Visitors from Babylon

Scripture: Hezekiah Shows His Treasures

39:1-4 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, and he heard that he had been sick and had become strong. And Hezekiah was glad over them, and he showed them the house of his treasure, the silver and the gold and the spices and the good oil, and all the house of his weapons, and all that was found in his storehouses. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them in his house and in all his realm. And Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where do they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "From a distant land they have come to me, from Babylon." And he said, "What did they see in your house?" And Hezekiah said, "All that ***is*** in my house they saw; there was not a thing which I did not show them in my storehouses."

39:5-8 And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of armies: 'Look, days ***are*** coming, and all that ***is*** in your house, and what your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried ***to*** Babylon; not a thing will be left,' says the LORD. 'And some of your sons who will come out from you, whom you will father, they will take; and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "Good ***is*** the word of the LORD which you have spoken." And he said, "For there will be peace and security in my days."

Chapter 39 Preview

After his recovery, Hezekiah receives friendly visitors from far away Babylon. Flattered by the attention, he shows them everything he owns. It seems harmless, but Isaiah arrives with a sobering word from the LORD.

This short chapter is a hinge for the whole book. The threat from Assyria is over, and from here Isaiah's gaze turns toward Babylon, the empire that would one day carry Judah away. Chapters 40-66 are written to God's people in light of that coming exile.

Chapter 39 Study

39:1 *At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, and he heard that he had been sick and had become strong.*

Merodach-baladan was a Chaldean leader who ruled Babylon more than once and spent years fighting to break free from Assyria. At this time Babylon was a restless city under Assyria's thumb, looking for allies, and not yet the great empire it would become.

So the "letters and a gift" were more than get-well cards. Most likely he was hoping to draw Judah into an alliance against their common enemy. 2 Chronicles 32:31 adds that the envoys also came to ask about the sign that had happened in the land.

39:2 *And Hezekiah was glad over them, and he showed them the house of his treasure, the silver and the gold and the spices and the good oil, and all the house of his weapons, and all that was found in his storehouses. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them in his house and in all his realm.*

"Hezekiah was glad over them." Hezekiah was flattered that a king from so far away would honor him, and he gave the visitors a full tour. Silver, gold, spices, precious oil, the armory, and every treasury he had. Nothing was held back.

2 Chronicles 32:25-26 and 32:31 tell us the deeper problem. Hezekiah's heart had grown proud after his healing, and God left him alone in this moment "to test him, to know all that was in his heart." Instead of telling the visitors about the God who had healed him and moved the shadow, he showed off his own wealth.

It is easy to trust God in a crisis and then slip into pride once the crisis is over. Our success can be a harder test than our suffering.

39:3-4 *And Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where do they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "From a distant land they have come to me, from Babylon." And he said, "What did they see in your house?" And Hezekiah said, "All that **is** in my house they saw; there was not a thing which I did not show them in my storehouses."*

Isaiah asks two questions, and Hezekiah answers both honestly. The visitors came "from a distant land ... from Babylon." They had seen everything.

There may be a touch of pride even in his answer. A far country had sought him out. But the prophet's questions are like God's question to Adam, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). God already knew. He wanted Hezekiah to say it out loud and see what he had done.

39:5-6 *And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of armies: 'Look, days **are** coming, and all that **is** in your house, and what your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried **to** Babylon; not a thing will be left,' says the LORD.*

Now comes the word of the LORD. The day would come when everything in the palace, all that Hezekiah's fathers had stored up, would be carried off to Babylon. Nothing would be left.

This is a remarkable prophecy. In Isaiah's day, Assyria was the great power and Babylon was a minor rebel. Yet Isaiah named Babylon as the nation that would plunder Jerusalem. It happened just as he said, more than a century later, when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took Jerusalem's treasures and finally destroyed the city in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 24:13; 25:13-15). Prophecy that is fulfilled is fulfilled plainly.

39:7 *'And some of your sons who will come out from you, whom you will father, they will take; and they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"*

The prophecy goes further. Some of Hezekiah's own descendants would be taken away to serve as officials in the palace of Babylon's king. Daniel 1:3-6 shows this coming true. Nebuchadnezzar

ordered young men from the royal family and the nobles of Judah to be trained for his service, and Daniel and his three friends were among them.

The things we show off to the world can end up in the world's hands. What Hezekiah treated as a display piece, God's enemies would one day carry away.

39:8 *And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "Good **is** the word of the LORD which you have spoken." And he said, "For there will be peace and security in my days."*

Hezekiah's reply is hard to read. He calls the word of the LORD "good," and then thinks, at least there will be peace and truth in my days.

Bible teachers read this in two ways. Some see humble acceptance of God's judgment. Others see a man relieved that the trouble would fall on someone else. I believe there is some of both. He did accept God's word, but his concern seems to stop at his own lifetime. As believers, we should care about the generations after us, not only about our own comfort. The faith we pass on, or fail to pass on, will outlive us.

Chapter 39 Summary

After Hezekiah recovers, Merodach-baladan king of Babylon sends envoys with letters and a gift. Flattered, Hezekiah shows them all his treasures and his armory. Isaiah comes and asks what they saw, then announces that everything in the palace will one day be carried to Babylon, and some of Hezekiah's descendants will serve in the palace of Babylon's king. Hezekiah calls the word good, relieved that there will be peace in his own days. This prophecy sets the stage for chapters 40-66.

Chapter 39 Study Questions

1. Why do you think it is so tempting to impress people with what we have?

2. Who was Merodach-baladan, and why might he have sent envoys to Hezekiah? (39:1)

3. What did Hezekiah show the visitors, and what did he leave out? (39:2)

4. What do we learn from 2 Chronicles 32:25-31 about what was happening in Hezekiah's heart? (39:2)

5. What did Isaiah prophesy would happen to Hezekiah's treasures and descendants? (39:5-7)

6. How was this prophecy fulfilled in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel? (39:6-7)

7. How do you read Hezekiah's response to Isaiah's message? (39:8)

8. When has success or blessing been a harder test for you than hardship?

9. What is one thing you can do to care for the faith of the generation after you?

Chapter 40: Comfort My People

Scripture: The Greatness of Israel's God

40:1-2 "Comfort, comfort My people," says your God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and call out to her that her service has been completed, that her iniquity has been accepted, that she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins."

40:3-5 A voice ***is*** calling, "In the wilderness clear the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert plain a highway for our God. Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will become low; and the steep ground will become level ground, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see ***it*** together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

40:6-8 A voice is saying, "Call out." And he said, "What shall I call out?" All flesh ***is*** grass, and all its steadfast love ***is*** like the flower of the field. Grass dries up, a flower withers, when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people ***is*** grass. Grass dries up, a flower withers, and the word of our God will stand forever.

40:9-11 On a high mountain go up for yourself, bearer of good news of Zion; lift up your voice with strength, bearer of good news of Jerusalem; lift ***it*** up, do not be afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Look, your God!" Look, the Lord GOD will come in strength, and His arm rules for Him; look, His reward ***is*** with Him, and His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will shepherd His flock; in His arm He will gather lambs, and in His bosom He will carry ***them***; nursing ***ewes*** He will lead.

40:12-17 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and gauged the heavens with the span, and contained the dust of the earth in the third-measure, and weighed the mountains in the balance and the hills in scales? Who has gauged the Spirit of the LORD, and ***who is*** the man of His counsel ***who*** will inform Him? With whom did He take counsel, and ***who*** gave Him understanding, and taught Him in the path of justice, and taught Him knowledge, and will inform Him ***of*** the way of understandings? Look, nations ***are*** like a drop from a bucket, and like the dust of the scales they are regarded; look, He lifts islands like fine ***dust***. And Lebanon ***is*** not enough to burn, and its living things ***are*** not enough ***for*** a burnt offering. All the nations ***are*** as nothing before Him; ***as*** less than nothingness and formlessness they are regarded by Him.

40:18-26 And to whom will you liken God, and what likeness will you compare to Him? The idol, a craftsman has cast ***it***, and a refiner overlays it with gold, and ***he is*** refining chains of silver. The impoverished ***one***, ***for*** a contribution he chooses wood ***that*** will not rot; he seeks for himself a skillful craftsman to prepare an idol ***that*** will not be shaken. Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you from ***the*** beginning? Have you not understood the foundations of the earth? ***It is*** the One who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants ***are*** like grasshoppers; the One who stretched out the heavens like the curtain, and He spread them out like the tent to dwell ***in***; the One who makes rulers into nothing; He makes the judges of the earth like formlessness. Scarcely have they been planted, scarcely have they been sown, scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, and He also blows on them and they dry up, and the tempest

carries them off like the stubble. "And to whom will you liken Me, that I should be equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? The One who brings out their host by number, He calls them all by name; from the abundance of vigor, and ***being*** strong in power, not one is missing.

40:27-31 Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my justice passes away from my God"? Have you not known? Or have you not heard? The LORD ***is*** the God of perpetuity, the Creator of the ends of the earth; He does not grow faint, and He does not grow weary; ***there is*** no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the faint, and to ***him who has*** no vigor He increases might. And youths may grow faint and grow weary, and young men will surely stumble; and those who wait for the LORD will renew power; they will go up ***with*** wings like the eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not grow faint.

Chapter 40 Preview

Chapter 39 ended with a dark promise: Babylon would carry Judah away. Chapter 40 opens with a single word, "Comfort." From here to the end of the book, Isaiah speaks to God's people as if the exile has already happened, and he tells them it won't last.

This chapter is one of the high points of the whole Bible. It announces a herald in the wilderness, a God who comes as a shepherd, and a Creator so great that the nations are like dust on a scale. It ends with a promise of new strength for the tired.

Chapter 40 Study

40:1 *"Comfort, comfort My people," says your God.*

"Comfort, comfort My people." The word is doubled, the way we repeat something when we really want it to sink in. Look at the words "My people" and "your God." After all the warnings of the first thirty-nine chapters, God hasn't disowned Israel. The covenant still stands.

Chapter 40 is where many scholars say a different writer, living during or after the exile, takes over the book. As I explained in chapter 1, I take the book's own claim at face value. Isaiah son of Amoz wrote all of it, and the New Testament credits these later chapters to Isaiah by name (Matthew 3:3; John 12:38-41). The God who knows the end from the beginning gave Isaiah words of comfort for a people who wouldn't need them for another century and more.

This is a good place to stop and notice that comfort comes after judgment in God's plan, not instead of it. God disciplines His children, but He never stops being their God.

New Testament links: Luke 2:25 (alluded to)

40:2 *"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and call out to her that her service has been completed, that her iniquity has been accepted, that she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins."*

"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem." That is the Hebrew way of saying speak tenderly. God wants His people to hear tenderness, not just information.

Three things are announced. Her warfare, her hard time of service, is over. Her iniquity has been removed, which means her sin has been paid for and forgiven. And she has received "double" for her sins. I take "double" to mean the punishment was full and complete. Nothing more is owed.

The near fulfillment was the end of the Babylonian exile, when Cyrus let the Jews go home in 538 B.C. But the deeper fulfillment is in Christ. Real removal of sin only comes through His death. One day Israel as a nation will hear this word of comfort and know that its iniquity is pardoned through the Messiah it once rejected (Romans 11:26-27).

40:3 *A voice **is** calling, "In the wilderness clear the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert plain a highway for our God.*

A voice calls out to prepare a road for the LORD in the wilderness. In the ancient world, when a king was coming, workers went ahead to build up and smooth the road for him.

All four Gospels apply this verse to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). John was the voice, and the One whose way he prepared was Jesus. Notice what that means. Isaiah says the road is for "the LORD" and for "our God." When the Gospels say John prepared the way for Jesus, they are telling us that Jesus is the LORD, God Himself come in the flesh.

The road John built wasn't made of stone. He called people to repent, to clear the sin out of their hearts so they would be ready for the King. That is still how we prepare for Jesus.

New Testament links: John 1:23 (quoted); Matthew 3:3 (quoted); Mark 1:3 (quoted); Luke 3:4-6 (quoted); Luke 1:76 (alluded to)

40:4 *Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will become low; and the steep ground will become level ground, and the rough places a plain.*

Every valley raised, every mountain brought low, every rough place made smooth. This is road-building language, but it also describes hearts. The proud are humbled, and the lowly are lifted. Luke quotes these words as part of John's ministry (Luke 3:5).

Many also see a far fulfillment here. When Christ returns, the earth itself will be changed. Zechariah 14:4 says the Mount of Olives will split in two when His feet stand on it. I believe the first coming fulfilled the spiritual side of this verse and the second coming will fulfill the physical side as well.

New Testament links: Luke 3:4-6 (quoted)

40:5 *And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see **it** together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

"All flesh will see it together." At Christ's first coming, the glory of God was revealed in Him (John 1:14), but only some saw it for what it was. Luke quotes this verse as "all flesh will see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6).

There is still a day ahead when every eye will see Him at once. "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7). That will be the full and final answer to this verse. And it is certain, because "the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

New Testament links: Luke 3:4-6 (quoted)

40:6 *A voice is saying, "Call out." And he said, "What shall I call out?" All flesh **is** grass, and all its steadfast love **is** like the flower of the field.*

A second voice tells the prophet to call out, and he asks what he should say. The answer is humbling. People are like grass, and all their steadfast love is "like the flower of the field." The Hebrew word here is hesed, the same word used for God's steadfast love. Even our best human love and loyalty don't last.

Peter quotes verses 6 through 8 in 1 Peter 1:24-25: "All flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man like the flower of grass."

New Testament links: 1 Peter 1:24-25 (quoted); James 1:10-11 (alluded to)

40:7 *Grass dries up, a flower withers, when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people **is** grass.*

Grass in Israel could be green in the morning and brown by evening when the hot east wind blew off the desert. God's breath passes over us the same way. "Surely the people is grass." Kings, armies, and empires, including the Assyria that had just bragged so loudly in chapter 37, all fade.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 1:24-25 (quoted); James 1:10-11 (alluded to)

40:8 *Grass dries up, a flower withers, and the word of our God will stand forever.*

"The word of our God will stand forever." Here is the contrast that makes all the difference. People fade, but God's word doesn't. Peter quotes this verse and then adds, "And this is the declaration which was preached as the gospel to you" (1 Peter 1:24-25).

This is why we can trust the promises in this chapter. They don't rest on Israel's strength or on ours. They rest on a word that can't fail. Anything we build our lives on besides God's word will wither like grass.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 1:24-25 (quoted); Matthew 24:35 (alluded to); Luke 21:33 (alluded to)

40:9 *On a high mountain go up for yourself, bearer of good news of Zion; lift up your voice with strength, bearer of good news of Jerusalem; lift **it** up, do not be afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Look, your God!"*

Zion, Jerusalem itself, is told to climb a high mountain and shout good news to the towns of Judah. The message is short and simple: "Look, your God!" The Greek translation of the Old Testament used the same word family the New Testament uses for "gospel." This is gospel language. The best news there is, is that God Himself has come.

Don't be afraid to say it, Isaiah tells them. We have the same calling. Lift up your voice, don't fear, and point people to the God who has come to save.

40:10 *Look, the Lord GOD will come in strength, and His arm rules for Him; look, His reward **is** with Him, and His recompense before Him.*

The Lord GOD "will come in strength," and His arm rules for Him. In Isaiah the "arm of the LORD" is a picture of His power in action, and later it is tied directly to the Servant (53:1). His reward is with Him.

Jesus picks up this verse at the very end of the Bible: "Look, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me" (Revelation 22:12). I believe this looks ahead to Christ's second coming, when He returns in power, reigns on the earth, and rewards His people.

New Testament links: Revelation 22:12 (alluded to)

40:11 *Like a shepherd He will shepherd His flock; in His arm He will gather lambs, and in His bosom He will carry **them**; nursing **ewes** He will lead.*

The same God who comes in power comes as a shepherd. He feeds His flock, gathers the lambs in His arm, carries them close to His chest, and gently leads the mother sheep who are nursing their young.

The arm that rules the nations in verse 10 is the same arm that carries the lambs in verse 11. That is the God we serve. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). He knows who is weak, who is young, and who is worn out, and He moves at their pace. If you feel like one of the weak ones today, this verse is for you.

40:12 *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and gauged the heavens with the span, and contained the dust of the earth in the third-measure, and weighed the mountains in the balance and the hills in scales?*

Now Isaiah turns to God's greatness as Creator, with a string of questions. Who has held all the oceans in the hollow of His hand? Who has measured the sky with the width of His hand, from thumb to little finger? Who has weighed the mountains?

The answer is obvious. Only God. What would take us a lifetime to measure, He holds in His palm.

40:13-14 *Who has gauged the Spirit of the LORD, and **who is** the man of His counsel **who** will inform Him? With whom did He take counsel, and **who** gave Him understanding, and taught Him in the path of justice, and taught Him knowledge, and will inform Him **of** the way of understandings?*

Who ever gave God advice? Who taught Him justice or showed Him the way of understanding? No one. God has never had to consult anyone. Paul quotes this in Romans 11:34 as he worships God for His wisdom in His plan for both Israel and the Gentiles.

This is humbling when we are tempted to tell God how to run our lives. He doesn't need our counsel. He wants our trust.

Paul also quotes verse 13 in 1 Corinthians 2:16, and then he adds something wonderful: "But we have the mind of Christ." No one can teach God anything, but God has opened His mind to us through His Spirit.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 2:16 (quoted); Romans 11:34 (quoted)

40:15 *Look, nations **are** like a drop from a bucket, and like the dust of the scales they are regarded; look, He lifts islands like fine **dust**.*

Next to God, whole nations are like a drop hanging off the edge of a bucket, or a speck of dust on a scale that doesn't even move the needle. The "islands," or coastlands, were the far-off lands across the sea. To God they weigh no more than dust.

Assyria had seemed unstoppable, and Babylon would seem so too. Isaiah wants the exiles to see their captors at their true size.

40:16-17 *And Lebanon **is** not enough to burn, and its living things **are** not enough **for** a burnt offering. All the nations **are** as nothing before Him; **as** less than nothingness and formlessness they are regarded by Him.*

Lebanon was famous for its great cedar forests and its animals. Yet if you burned every tree in Lebanon and offered every animal there as a sacrifice, it wouldn't be enough to honor God as He deserves.

All the nations together are counted as nothing before Him. That isn't because people don't matter to God. He made us and loves us. It is because no nation can stand next to Him or threaten His plans.

40:18 *And to whom will you liken God, and what likeness will you compare to Him?*

"To whom will you liken God?" After showing God's greatness, Isaiah asks the obvious question. What could you possibly compare Him to? This question leads straight into what people actually did compare Him to, idols.

40:19-20 *The idol, a craftsman has cast **it**, and a refiner overlays it with gold, and **he is** refining chains of silver. The impoverished **one**, **for** a contribution he chooses wood **that** will not rot; he seeks for himself a skillful craftsman to prepare an idol **that** will not be shaken.*

Isaiah describes how an idol is made, and the scene is almost funny in a sad way. A craftsman casts it, a goldsmith covers it in gold, and a silversmith makes silver chains for it. A poor man who can't afford metal picks a piece of wood that won't rot and hires a skilled worker to make sure his god won't tip over.

The God of verse 12 holds the oceans in His hand. The idol has to be nailed down so it doesn't fall over. We may not carve statues today, but anything we trust in place of God (money, success, a relationship) is just as unable to hold us up.

40:21 *Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you from **the** beginning? Have you not understood the foundations of the earth?*

Four questions in a row: Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has no one told you? Have you not understood? Isaiah is saying this truth has been plain from the beginning. Creation itself shows there is a God (Romans 1:20). People are without excuse.

40:22 ***It is** the One who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants **are** like grasshoppers; the One who stretched out the heavens like the curtain, and He spread them out like the tent to dwell **in**;*

God sits enthroned above "the circle of the earth," the vault or horizon of the world, and from that height the people below look like grasshoppers. He stretches out the sky like a curtain or a tent.

The picture is of a God who is far above us but who also made the heavens as a home, a tent for people to live under. He is high, but He isn't distant from what He made.

40:23-24 *the One who makes rulers into nothing; He makes the judges of the earth like formlessness. Scarcely have they been planted, scarcely have they been sown, scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, and He also blows on them and they dry up, and the tempest carries them off like the stubble.*

God brings rulers to nothing and makes the judges of the earth meaningless. They are barely planted, barely sown, barely rooted, and He blows on them and they wither, and the storm carries them off like straw.

History proves this. Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus all had their moment and passed away. The powerful people who seem to control our world today will do the same. Only God's kingdom lasts.

40:25 *"And to whom will you liken Me, that I should be equal?" says the Holy One.*

Now God Himself speaks and repeats the question of verse 18: "To whom will you liken Me?" He calls Himself "the Holy One." There is no one equal to Him. He's in a category of His own, not just the biggest of the gods.

40:26 *Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? The One who brings out their host by number, He calls them all by name; from the abundance of vigor, and* ***being*** *strong in power, not one is missing.*

Look up at night, Isaiah says, and ask who made all those stars. God leads them out like a general calling out his army, by number. He calls each one by name, and not one goes missing (Psalm 147:4).

In Isaiah's day, Babylon worshiped the stars and believed they controlled human life. Isaiah answers that the stars aren't gods. They are servants that show up for roll call. And if God keeps track of every star, He can keep track of you.

40:27 *Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my justice passes away from my God"?*

Here is the real problem. God's people were saying, "My way is hidden from the LORD." In other words, God doesn't see what I am going through, and He doesn't care about the justice I am owed.

Exiles in a foreign land could easily feel that way, and so can we. Isaiah has spent this entire chapter answering that complaint. The God who measures the oceans and names the stars hasn't lost track of Jacob.

40:28 *Have you not known? Or have you not heard? The LORD* ***is*** *the God of perpetuity, the Creator of the ends of the earth; He does not grow faint, and He does not grow weary;* ***there is*** *no searching of His understanding.*

"Have you not known? Or have you not heard?" Isaiah asks the same questions again, and this time he gives the answer directly. The LORD is the Everlasting God. He created the ends of the earth. He never gets tired or worn out, and no one can search out the depth of His understanding.

Notice the two things this verse says to the complaint of verse 27. First, God doesn't grow weary. Our trouble doesn't exhaust Him. Second, His understanding is beyond searching. When we can't see why He is allowing something, it's because His understanding goes deeper than ours, not because He has stopped paying attention.

Many of us have prayed and wondered whether God has forgotten us. This verse tells us plainly that He hasn't. He isn't tired of us, and He isn't confused about us.

40:29 *He gives power to the faint, and to* ***him who has*** *no vigor He increases might.*

The God who never tires gives strength to those who do. He doesn't just have power, He gives it away to the weary and the weak. Paul learned this when the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient

for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The less we have, the more room there is for His strength.

40:30 *And youths may grow faint and grow weary, and young men will surely stumble;*

Even the strongest young people, the ones at the peak of their energy, get tired and fall down. Human strength has limits, no matter how much of it we start with. Isaiah isn't insulting the young. He is saying that no one, even at their best, can carry life on their own strength forever.

40:31 *and those who wait for the LORD will renew power; they will go up* ***with*** *wings like the eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not grow faint.*

"And those who wait for the LORD will renew power." This is one of the best loved verses in the Bible, and it is worth reading slowly. To "wait" for the LORD doesn't mean sitting around doing nothing. It carries the idea of hoping in Him, looking to Him, and trusting Him to act. Those who wait this way don't just get strength back. They "will renew power," exchanging their weakness for His power.

Then come three pictures, and the order surprises us. First they fly like eagles, rising above their trouble. Then they run and don't get tired. Last of all, they walk and don't faint. Most of us would put walking first because it seems the easiest. But anyone who has gone through a long trial knows that walking day after day, putting one foot in front of the other, can take more strength than any burst of flying.

That is the promise for exiles in Babylon and for us. God may lift you up in a moment of joy. He may help you run through a busy season. And He will give you the strength to simply keep walking with Him when the road is long.

Chapter 40 Summary

God tells Isaiah to comfort His people, because their time of punishment is over and their sin is paid for. A voice calls for a road to be prepared for the LORD, fulfilled in John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. People fade like grass, but God's word stands forever, and God comes in power and as a gentle shepherd. No nation, ruler, idol, or star compares to Him. Since He never grows weary, He gives new strength to all who wait for Him.

Isaiah 40 in the New Testament

40:3-5: All four Gospels apply the voice in the wilderness to John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23).

40:6-8: Peter quotes these verses about grass and God's lasting word (1 Peter 1:24-25).

40:10: Jesus echoes this verse when He says His reward is with Him (Revelation 22:12).

40:13: Paul quotes this verse in praise of God's wisdom (Romans 11:34; 1 Corinthians 2:16).

I need to hear words of comfort all the time, especially when I doubt myself. Isaiah 40 opens with "Comfort, O comfort My people." God speaks tenderly to people who feel worn out. He still does.

Chapter 40 Study Questions

1. When have you most needed to hear a word of comfort?

2. What three things does God tell Isaiah to announce to Jerusalem? (40:1-2)

3. Who fulfilled the voice in the wilderness, and what does that tell us about who Jesus is? (40:3-5)

4. How does Isaiah contrast people with God's word? (40:6-8)

5. How do verses 10 and 11 show both God's power and His gentleness? (40:10-11)

6. What does Isaiah say about idols compared to the God who made the world? (40:18-26)

7. What were God's people saying about Him, and how does Isaiah answer them? (40:27-28)

8. What does it look like for you to "wait for the LORD" in a situation you are facing now? (40:31)

9. Which of the three pictures in verse 31, flying, running, or walking, describes the strength you need most this week?

Chapter 41: Do Not Fear

Scripture: God Challenges the Nations and Their Idols

41:1-7 Be silent to Me, coastlands, and let peoples renew strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us draw near together for judgment. Who has stirred up from the east ***the one whom*** righteousness calls to his foot? He gives nations before him, and He subdues kings; He makes ***them*** like the dust ***for*** his sword, like driven chaff ***for*** his bow. He pursues them, he passes on ***in*** peace, ***by*** a path ***on which*** he does not come with his feet. Who has worked and done ***it***, calling the generations from ***the*** beginning? I, the LORD, ***am*** first, and with the last ones I ***am*** He. Coastlands have seen and they are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near, and they have come. Each man helps his neighbor, and to his brother he says, "Be strong." And a craftsman strengthened a refiner, one smoothing ***with*** a hammer ***strengthened*** one striking an anvil, saying of the soldering, "It ***is*** good"; and he strengthened it with nails; it will not totter.

41:8-16 And you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, My friend, whom I took hold of from the ends of the earth, and from its remotest parts I called you, and I said to you, "You ***are*** My servant; I have chosen you, and I have not rejected you": do not be afraid, for I ***am*** with you; do not look about, for I ***am*** your God. I have strengthened you; indeed, I have helped you; indeed, I have upheld you with the right hand of My righteousness. Look, all who are angry with you will be ashamed and disgraced; the men of your strife will be as nothing, and they will perish. You will seek them, and you will not find them, the men of your contention; the men of your war will be as nothing and as nothingness. For I, the LORD your God, ***am*** holding your right hand, who says to you, "Do not be afraid; I will help you." Do not be afraid, worm of Jacob, men of Israel; I will help you, declares the LORD, and your Redeemer ***is*** the Holy One of Israel. Look, I have made you into a threshing sledge, sharp, new, possessing teeth; you will thresh mountains and crush ***them***, and you will make hills like the chaff. You will winnow them, and a wind will carry them away, and a tempest will scatter them; and you, you will rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you will boast.

41:17-20 The afflicted and the needy are seeking water, and ***there is*** none; their tongue has dried up with thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them; the God of Israel, I will not forsake them. I will open rivers on bare heights, and springs in the midst of valleys; I will make a wilderness into a pool of water, and a dry land into sources of water. I will put in the wilderness cedar, acacia and myrtle, and oil tree; I will set in the desert plain cypress, elm and box tree together, so that they may see and know, and set ***it to heart*** and have insight together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

41:21-29 Bring near your case, says the LORD; bring forward your strong arguments, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring ***them*** forward and tell us what will happen. The former things, what they ***were***, tell, and let us set our heart ***on them*** and know their end; or make us hear the coming things. Tell the things coming afterward, and let us know that you ***are*** gods; indeed, you may do good, and you may do harm, and let us look about and see together. Look, you ***are*** from nothing, and your work from worthlessness; an abomination ***is he who*** chooses you. I have stirred up ***one*** from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun he will call on My

name; and he will come ***on*** officials as ***on*** clay, and as a potter tramples mud. Who told ***it*** from ***the*** beginning, so that we may know, and from beforehand, so that we may say, "***He is*** right"? Indeed, ***there is*** none who told; indeed, ***there is*** none who made ***it*** heard; indeed, ***there is*** none who heard your words. First to Zion: "Look, look ***at*** them"; and to Jerusalem I will give one who brings good news. And I look, and ***there is*** no man; and from these ***there is*** no counselor, that I may ask them and they may return a word. Look, all of them ***are*** deception; their works ***are*** nothingness; their molten images ***are*** wind and formlessness.

Chapter 41 Preview

God calls the nations into court. The question on trial is simple: who controls history? God points to a conqueror He is raising up from the east and asks whether any idol could have planned or predicted such a thing.

In the middle of the courtroom scene, God turns to Israel with some of the most tender words in the book. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." Israel is His chosen servant, and He will help her, strengthen her, and turn her desert into a garden.

Chapter 41 Study

41:1 *Be silent to Me, coastlands, and let peoples renew strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us draw near together for judgment.*

The scene is a courtroom. God summons the "coastlands," the far-off nations, to come forward, be quiet, and then make their case. "Let peoples renew strength" picks up the same Hebrew words as 40:31. In effect God says, "Gather all the strength you can, and let's see whose argument stands."

41:2 *Who has stirred up from the east* ***the one whom*** *righteousness calls to his foot? He gives nations before him, and He subdues kings; He makes* ***them*** *like the dust* ***for*** *his sword, like driven chaff* ***for*** *his bow.*

"Who has stirred up from the east the one whom righteousness calls to his foot?" God raises up a conqueror and gives nations over to him. God Himself subdues kings and makes them like dust and chaff before the conqueror's sword and bow. Isaiah doesn't name him yet, but he does a few chapters later. This is Cyrus, king of Persia (44:28; 45:1), who rose from the east and conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.

Isaiah wrote this long before Cyrus was born. That is exactly God's point in this chapter. Only the true God can name the future before it happens.

41:3 *He pursues them, he passes on* ***in*** *peace,* ***by*** *a path* ***on which*** *he does not come with his feet.*

The conqueror moves so fast and so far that he seems to go places he has never set foot before, and nothing slows him down. History bears this out. Cyrus built one of the largest empires the world had yet seen in a short span of years.

41:4 *Who has worked and done **it**, calling the generations from **the** beginning? I, the LORD, **am** first, and with the last ones I **am** He.*

Who made all this happen? God answers His own question: "I, the LORD, am first, and with the last ones I am He." God was there before history started, and He will be there at its end. He is the One calling each generation onto the stage.

Jesus takes the same title in Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (Revelation 22:13). He is the LORD of this verse.

New Testament links: Revelation 1:17 (alluded to)

41:5 *Coastlands have seen and they are afraid; the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near, and they have come.*

The far-off nations see the conqueror coming and shake with fear. Instead of turning to the LORD, though, they huddle together. Fear without God usually makes people run to each other or to something they can make with their hands. That is what the next verses describe.

41:6-7 *Each man helps his neighbor, and to his brother he says, "Be strong." And a craftsman strengthened a refiner, one smoothing **with** a hammer **strengthened** one striking an anvil, saying of the soldering, "It **is** good"; and he strengthened it with nails; it will not totter.*

This is a sad picture. Everyone encourages everyone else. "Be strong!" The craftsman cheers on the metalworker, the man with the hammer cheers on the man at the anvil, they approve the welding, and they nail the new god down so it won't wobble.

They are making a god to save them from a conqueror whom the real God sent. People still do this. When fear comes, we build something to hold onto and tell each other it will be fine, and all the while the One who is actually in control goes ignored.

41:8 *And you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, My friend,*

"And you, Israel, My servant." After the panic of the nations, God turns to His own people, and the tone changes completely. Israel is His servant, chosen by Him, the offspring of "Abraham, My friend."

Abraham is the only person in the Old Testament God calls His friend in this way (compare 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23). Israel's standing didn't come from its own goodness. It came from God's choice and God's covenant with Abraham.

In chapters 41-48, "servant" usually means the nation of Israel, as it plainly does here. In 42:1 we will meet a Servant who does what Israel couldn't do.

New Testament links: James 2:23 (alluded to)

41:9 *whom I took hold of from the ends of the earth, and from its remotest parts I called you, and I said to you, "You **are** My servant; I have chosen you, and I have not rejected you":*

God took Abraham from the far end of the earth, from Ur and Haran, and called him to be His own. Now He reminds Israel, "I have chosen you, and I have not rejected you."

That is a word the exiles badly needed. Sitting in Babylon, they may well have thought God was finished with them. He wasn't, and He isn't. The New Testament says the same thing: "God did not reject His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:2).

41:10 *do not be afraid, for I **am** with you; do not look about, for I **am** your God. I have strengthened you; indeed, I have helped you; indeed, I have upheld you with the right hand of My righteousness.*

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you." This verse has carried believers through some of the darkest days of their lives. Notice that God doesn't say, "Do not be afraid, nothing bad will happen." He says don't fear because He is present.

"Do not look about, for I am your God." The Hebrew word behind "look about" pictures someone glancing around in panic, looking for help. You don't need to, God says, because I am your God. Then come the promises, stacked one on another: I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

If you are afraid today, read this verse slowly and out loud. The One who names the stars has His hand on you.

41:11 *Look, all who are angry with you will be ashamed and disgraced; the men of your strife will be as nothing, and they will perish.*

Those who rage against Israel will be put to shame and disgraced, and those who fight against her will perish. This was true of Babylon, which fell to Cyrus. It has been true of many nations through history that tried to destroy the Jewish people. And I believe it will be true in the final days, when the nations gather against Jerusalem and the Lord Himself fights for her (Zechariah 12:2-3, 9).

41:12 *You will seek them, and you will not find them, the men of your contention; the men of your war will be as nothing and as nothingness.*

Israel will go looking for her enemies and not be able to find them. They will simply be gone. Think of the Assyrian army in chapter 37. In the morning, the threat that had loomed over the city was nothing but dead men.

41:13 *For I, the LORD your God, **am** holding your right hand, who says to you, "Do not be afraid; I will help you."*

God repeats Himself, and I believe He does it on purpose. "I, the LORD your God, am holding your right hand." A parent walking with a small child holds the child's hand. That is the picture. God isn't just shouting encouragement from far away. He is holding on.

41:14 *Do not be afraid, worm of Jacob, men of Israel; I will help you, declares the LORD, and your Redeemer **is** the Holy One of Israel.*

"Do not be afraid, worm of Jacob." That sounds harsh, but it is tender. God is saying, "I know how small and weak you feel." A worm is helpless and easy to crush. David used the same picture in a psalm Jesus prayed on the cross: "And I am a worm and not a man" (Psalm 22:6).

Then comes the promise. "Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel." This is the first time Isaiah calls God Israel's Redeemer, and he uses the title often from here on. In Israel, a redeemer was a close relative who stepped in to buy back family land or free a family member sold into slavery (Leviticus 25:25, 47-49). God is Israel's next of kin. He will pay to set her free. For us, He did that in Jesus.

41:15 *Look, I have made you into a threshing sledge, sharp, new, possessing teeth; you will thresh mountains and crush **them**, and you will make hills like the chaff.*

Now the worm becomes a threshing sledge, a heavy wooden board with sharp stones or iron teeth on the bottom, dragged over grain to break it apart. Israel, so weak in herself, will crush mountains and turn hills to chaff.

The mountains here stand for the powers that opposed God's people. Micah 4:13 uses the same picture of Zion threshing many peoples, in a passage about the last days. I believe the full answer to this verse waits for Christ's return and His reign, when Israel is restored and her enemies are brought down.

41:16 *You will winnow them, and a wind will carry them away, and a tempest will scatter them; and you, you will rejoice in the LORD; in the Holy One of Israel you will boast.*

After threshing comes winnowing, tossing the crushed grain into the air so the wind blows the chaff away. The enemies are scattered like chaff in a storm.

But notice where Israel's joy ends up. She won't glory in her own strength. She will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel. When God gives us a victory, the credit goes to Him.

41:17 *The afflicted and the needy are seeking water, and **there is** none; their tongue has dried up with thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them; the God of Israel, I will not forsake them.*

The scene shifts. The poor and needy are searching for water, and their tongues are dry with thirst. God says, "I, the LORD, will answer them." He won't send someone else. He won't forsake them.

Thirst is a picture the Bible uses for deep need of the soul as well as the body. Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37).

41:18 *I will open rivers on bare heights, and springs in the midst of valleys; I will make a wilderness into a pool of water, and a dry land into sources of water.*

God promises rivers on bare hilltops, springs in the valleys, and pools in the desert. This repeats the promise of 35:6-7. It came true in part when God led the exiles home from Babylon. I believe it will come true in full during the Millennium, when the land of Israel is restored and the curse on creation begins to lift. And there is a spiritual side too. God brings life to dry hearts that have no water of their own.

41:19 *I will put in the wilderness cedar, acacia and myrtle, and oil tree; I will set in the desert plain cypress, elm and box tree together,*

God will plant a whole forest in the wilderness: cedar, acacia, myrtle, olive, juniper, box tree, cypress. These are trees that would never grow together naturally in a desert. Only God could make a garden out of a wasteland like this.

41:20 *so that they may see and know, and set **it to heart** and have insight together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

Here is God's purpose. He will do it so that people "may see and know" that the hand of the LORD did this. When God transforms something that can't be explained any other way, the glory goes to Him.

The same is true of a changed life. When God takes a person who was dry and dead and makes them fruitful, people notice, and the best answer we can give is, "The Lord did this."

41:21 *Bring near your case, says the LORD; bring forward your strong arguments, says the King of Jacob.*

Back to the courtroom. God calls the idols to present their case and bring out their best arguments. Notice His title, "the King of Jacob." Israel may have had no human king in exile, but she still had a King.

41:22 *Let them bring **them** forward and tell us what will happen. The former things, what they **were**, tell, and let us set our heart **on them** and know their end; or make us hear the coming things.*

The challenge is simple. Let the idols tell us what is going to happen. Or let them explain the past and show how it led to where we are now. Either one will do.

A real god should be able to explain history and predict the future. That is the test God sets, and He is the only One who passes it.

41:23 *Tell the things coming afterward, and let us know that you **are** gods; indeed, you may do good, and you may do harm, and let us look about and see together.*

God pushes further. Tell us the future so we can know you are gods. Or do anything at all, good or bad, just so we can see something happen.

There is a touch of holy mockery here, much like Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:27). The idols can't do good, and they can't even do harm. They can't do anything.

41:24 *Look, you **are** from nothing, and your work from worthlessness; an abomination **is he who** chooses you.*

The verdict is in. The idols are nothing, and their work is nothing. And the person who chooses them is "an abomination" to God.

That is a strong word, and it should make us think. Choosing something else in God's place is a choice God takes personally.

41:25 *I have stirred up **one** from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun he will call on My name; and he will come **on** officials as **on** clay, and as a potter tramples mud.*

God returns to the conqueror of verse 2, now from "the north" as well as "the east." Both fit Cyrus. Persia lay to the east of Babylon, and his armies swept down on Babylon from the north after taking Media and lands to the northwest.

"From the rising of the sun he will call on My name." Cyrus wasn't a worshiper of the LORD in the way Israel was, but in his decree he did name the LORD, the God of heaven, as the One who gave him his kingdoms and charged him to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:2-3). He trampled rulers like a potter treads clay.

41:26 *Who told **it** from **the** beginning, so that we may know, and from beforehand, so that we may say, "**He is** right"? Indeed, **there is** none who told; indeed, **there is** none who made **it** heard; indeed, **there is** none who heard your words.*

Who announced this ahead of time, so we could say, "He is right"? None of the idols did. No one heard a word from them. Only the LORD told His people beforehand. That is why fulfilled prophecy matters so much. It shows us who is really God.

41:27 *First to Zion: "Look, look **at** them"; and to Jerusalem I will give one who brings good news.*

God was the first to tell Zion, "Look, here they are!" and He gave Jerusalem a messenger of good news. That messenger connects back to 40:9. God doesn't leave His people guessing. He speaks first, and He speaks good news.

41:28-29 *And I look, and **there is** no man; and from these **there is** no counselor, that I may ask them and they may return a word. Look, all of them **are** deception; their works **are** nothingness; their molten images **are** wind and formlessness.*

When God looks among the idols and their followers, there is no one who can give an answer, no counselor at all. The final judgment: they are all false, their works are worthless, and their images are "wind and formlessness."

This ends the courtroom scene in silence. The nations have nothing to say. And it sets the stage for chapter 42, where God says, "Look, My servant." Over against the empty idols, God presents a real Person.

Chapter 41 Summary

God calls the nations into court and asks who has raised up a conqueror from the east, Cyrus, whom He names later. The frightened nations build idols, but God tells Israel, His chosen servant and the offspring of Abraham His friend, not to fear, because He is with her and will help her. Weak Israel will thresh mountains, and God will turn the desert into a forest. Then God challenges the idols to predict the future. They can't, and He declares them nothing.

Chapter 41 Study Questions

1. What is something you are afraid of right now?

2. Who is the conqueror "from the east," and how does his coming prove God's power? (41:2-4, 25)

3. How do the nations respond to their fear, and what does that show about people without God? (41:5-7)

4. What does God call Israel, and why does He choose her? (41:8-9)

5. What reasons does God give Israel not to be afraid? (41:10-14)

6. What is a redeemer, and why does it matter that God calls Himself Israel's Redeemer? (41:14)

7. What test does God give the idols, and what is the verdict? (41:21-24)

8. What "idols" do people today turn to when they are afraid?

9. How could Isaiah 41:10 change the way you face your fear this week?

Chapter 42: My Servant

Scripture: The Servant of the LORD and a Blind Servant

42:1-4 Look, My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one, ***in whom*** My soul is pleased; I have put My Spirit on Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out, and He will not lift up, and He will not make His voice heard in the street. A crushed reed He will not break, and a dim wick He will not extinguish; He will bring forth justice in truth. He will not grow dim, and He will not be crushed until He establishes justice on the earth; and the coastlands will wait for His law.

42:5-9 Thus says the God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its produce, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and I will take hold of Your hand, and I will watch over You, and I will give You for a covenant of ***the*** people, for a light of ***the*** nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out ***the*** prisoner from ***the*** dungeon, those who dwell ***in*** darkness from a house of confinement. I ***am*** the LORD; that ***is*** My name; and My glory I will not give to another, and My praise to carved images. The former things, look, have come, and new things I am telling; before they spring up I will make you hear ***them***.

42:10-17 Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise from the end of the earth, you who go down ***to*** the sea, and its fullness, coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the wilderness and its cities lift up ***their voice***, the villages ***where*** Kedar dwells; let the inhabitants of Sela shout for joy; let them cry aloud from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and let them declare His praise in the coastlands. The LORD will go forth like the mighty man; like a man of wars He will stir up zeal; He will shout, indeed, He will raise a battle cry; over His enemies He will show Himself mighty. I have kept quiet from long ago; I have been silent; I have restrained Myself; like the ***woman*** giving birth I will groan; I will gasp and pant together. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and all their vegetation I will dry up; and I will make rivers into islands, and pools I will dry up. And I will lead ***the*** blind by a way ***that*** they have not known; in paths ***that*** they have not known I will make them tread; I will make the dark place before them into light, and rough places into level ground. These ***are*** the things; I will do them, and I will not forsake them. They will be turned away backward, they will be ashamed ***with*** shame, those who trust in the carved image, who say to a molten image, "You ***are*** our gods."

42:18-25 You deaf, hear; and you blind, look, to see. Who ***is*** blind but My servant, and deaf like My messenger ***whom*** I send? Who ***is*** blind like the one at peace, and blind like the servant of the LORD? Seeing many things, and you do not keep ***them***; opening ears, and he does not hear. The LORD was pleased for the sake of His righteousness; He will magnify ***the*** law, and He will make ***it*** glorious. And it ***is*** a people despoiled and plundered; all of them are trapped in holes, and they are hidden in houses of confinement; they have become spoil, and ***there is*** no deliverer; plunder, and ***there is*** none who says, "Bring ***it*** back." Who among you will give ear to this, will pay attention and hear for ***the*** time afterward? Who gave Jacob to plunder, and Israel to despoilers? ***Was it*** not the LORD, ***He*** against whom we have sinned? And they were not willing to walk in His ways, and they did not listen to His law. And He poured out on him rage, His anger, and the fierceness of

battle; and it set him ablaze from all around, and he did not know; and it burned against him, and he does not lay ***it*** to heart.

Chapter 42 Preview

Chapter 41 ended with the idols standing silent, "wind and formlessness." Chapter 42 opens with God saying, "Look, My servant." Over against the empty idols stands a real Person, chosen by God, filled with His Spirit, gentle with the broken, and unstoppable in bringing justice to the whole earth.

This is the first of Isaiah's four Servant Songs, and Matthew tells us plainly who the Servant is. The chapter then calls the earth to sing, shows the LORD going out like a warrior, and closes with a sad contrast: Israel, God's other servant, blind and deaf.

Chapter 42 Study

42:1 *Look, My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one,* ***in whom*** *My soul is pleased; I have put My Spirit on Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.*

"Look, My servant, whom I uphold." God Himself introduces this Servant, and He uses words of deep love. He holds Him up, He chose Him, and His soul delights in Him. He has put His Spirit on Him, and the Servant will bring justice to the nations.

Who is this Servant? In chapter 41, the servant was Israel. But this Servant does things Israel never did and couldn't do, as the rest of the song shows. Matthew settles the question. After Jesus healed many and told them not to make Him known, Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 and says it was fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 12:15-21).

Listen also to what God said at Jesus' baptism. The Spirit came down on Him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17). That is this verse being spoken out loud from heaven: My chosen one, in whom My soul delights, with My Spirit upon Him.

The Servant is Jesus Christ. And His mission isn't small. He brings justice to "the nations," to Gentiles as well as Jews. In my Revelation study I pointed to this verse as one of the promises that will be fully kept when Christ reigns on the earth.

New Testament links: Matthew 12:18-20 (quoted); Luke 3:22 (alluded to); 2 Peter 1:17 (alluded to); Matthew 3:17 (alluded to); Matthew 17:5 (alluded to); Mark 1:10-11 (alluded to)

42:2 *He will not cry out, and He will not lift up, and He will not make His voice heard in the street.*

The Servant won't shout or make a scene in the streets. He doesn't come like a politician or a conqueror, promoting Himself. Jesus often told people He had healed not to spread the news (Matthew 12:16), and He didn't argue His way into power.

This was hard for many in Jesus' day to accept. They wanted a loud, mighty Messiah who would throw off Rome. Instead He came quietly. "Messiah" means "Anointed One," the King God promised to send, and He chose to come first in humility.

New Testament links: Matthew 12:18-20 (quoted); Matthew 12:16 (fulfilled)

42:3 *A crushed reed He will not break, and a dim wick He will not extinguish; He will bring forth justice in truth.*

"A crushed reed He will not break." A reed that is bent and cracked is useless, and most people would just snap it off and throw it away. A wick that is barely smoking gives no light, and most people would pinch it out. The Servant does neither.

This is how Jesus treats broken people. Think of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:10-11), or Peter after his denial (John 21:15-17), or the thief on the cross. He doesn't crush the one who is already bent. He doesn't put out the faith that is only a flicker. He fans it back into flame.

If you feel like a bruised reed today, this verse is a promise to you. Jesus won't break you. And yet, notice the end of the verse. He will "bring forth justice in truth." He is gentle and kind to the broken, and still completely committed to setting the world right.

New Testament links: Matthew 12:18-20 (quoted)

42:4 *He will not grow dim, and He will not be crushed until He establishes justice on the earth; and the coastlands will wait for His law.*

The Servant won't grow faint or be crushed until He has set up justice on the earth. Notice the same two words from verse 3. The reed is bruised and the wick is faint, but the Servant won't be. He has strength enough for all of them.

When will justice be established "on the earth"? Jesus began His work at His first coming, but the world is plainly not yet full of justice. I believe this verse looks ahead to His second coming and His thousand-year reign on earth, when He rules the nations in righteousness (Isaiah 2:4; Revelation 20:4-6). "The coastlands," the distant lands, will wait for His law, His teaching. The whole world will look to Him.

New Testament links: Matthew 12:20-21 (quoted)

42:5 *Thus says the God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its produce, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:*

Before God speaks to His Servant, Isaiah reminds us who is speaking. This is the God who created the heavens and stretched them out, spread out the earth and everything that grows from it, and gives breath and spirit to every person who walks on it.

The One who sends the Servant is the Creator of all things and the giver of every breath. That is why the Servant's mission can't fail.

42:6 *I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and I will take hold of Your hand, and I will watch over You, and I will give You for a covenant of **the** people, for a light of **the** nations,*

Now God speaks directly to the Servant. He has called Him in righteousness, will hold His hand, and will keep Him. Then comes an amazing statement: "I will give You for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations."

The Servant doesn't just bring a covenant. He is the covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement in which God commits Himself to His people. At the Last Supper Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). Jesus in His own body is the covenant between God and His people.

And He is a light to the nations. When the baby Jesus was brought to the temple, old Simeon took Him in his arms and called Him "a light for revelation of the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). From the start, God's plan reached past Israel to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:3).

New Testament links: Luke 2:32 (alluded to); Acts 26:23 (alluded to)

42:7 *to open blind eyes, to bring out **the** prisoner from **the** dungeon, those who dwell **in** darkness from a house of confinement.*

The Servant will open blind eyes and bring prisoners out of the dungeon and out of the darkness.

Jesus did this plainly. He gave sight to the blind again and again (Matthew 11:5; John 9). In the synagogue at Nazareth He read from a related passage in Isaiah and said it was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:18-21). But He also opens the eyes of the spiritually blind and sets free those held captive by sin. Paul said he was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18).

Every person who comes to Christ was once in that dark cell. He is the One who unlocks the door.

New Testament links: Acts 26:18 (alluded to)

42:8 *I **am** the LORD; that **is** My name; and My glory I will not give to another, and My praise to carved images.*

"I am the LORD; that is My name." God's personal name, written in our Bibles as LORD, is the name He gave Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15). He won't share His glory with anyone else, and He won't let idols take His praise.

This verse matters for understanding who Jesus is. God says He won't give His glory to another. Yet Jesus prayed, "Now You, Father, glorify Me with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). God doesn't share His glory with another, so the only way to make sense of this is that Jesus isn't "another." He is God the Son.

42:9 *The former things, look, have come, and new things I am telling; before they spring up I will make you hear* ***them****.*

God points to the "former things," the prophecies He already made that have come true, such as Assyria's fall in chapter 37. Now He announces "new things" before they happen.

That is the argument of chapters 40-48 in a sentence. The God who kept His word before will keep it again. The coming of the Servant is one of those new things. He said it about seven hundred years before Jesus was born, and it happened just as He said.

42:10 *Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise from the end of the earth, you who go down* ***to*** *the sea, and its fullness, coastlands and their inhabitants.*

Because of what God is doing, the whole earth is called to sing "a new song." New acts of God call for new praise. Sailors and everything in the sea, the islands and everyone on them, all are invited.

In Revelation, the redeemed sing a new song to the Lamb because He purchased people "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). That is where this verse is headed.

42:11-12 *Let the wilderness and its cities lift up* ***their voice****, the villages* ***where*** *Kedar dwells; let the inhabitants of Sela shout for joy; let them cry aloud from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and let them declare His praise in the coastlands.*

The call to praise reaches into the desert. Kedar was a nomadic Arab tribe living in the wilderness east of Israel. Sela means "rock" and was a stronghold in the rocky land of Edom. These were places Israel thought of as far away and often hostile.

Even there, people will lift their voices and shout from the mountaintops, giving glory to the LORD. The light to the nations of verse 6 reaches the edges of the map.

42:13 *The LORD will go forth like the mighty man; like a man of wars He will stir up zeal; He will shout, indeed, He will raise a battle cry; over His enemies He will show Himself mighty.*

The tone changes sharply. The LORD goes out like a warrior, stirred up with zeal, raising a battle cry, and He wins against His enemies.

The same God who is gentle with the bruised reed is fierce against evil. Both are true of Jesus. At His first coming He came quietly. At His second coming He rides out from heaven on a white horse to judge and make war in righteousness (Revelation 19:11-15). I believe this verse looks ahead to that day.

42:14 *I have kept quiet from long ago; I have been silent; I have restrained Myself; like the* ***woman*** *giving birth I will groan; I will gasp and pant together.*

God says He has held Himself back for a long time. Now He will cry out like a woman in labor, gasping and panting.

Why has God been silent for so long? Peter answers that question: "The Lord is not slow concerning the promise ... but is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). But patience has an end. The picture of labor pains means something new is about to be born, and it can't be held back once it starts. Jesus used the same picture for the troubles at the end of the age (Matthew 24:8).

42:15 *I will lay waste mountains and hills, and all their vegetation I will dry up; and I will make rivers into islands, and pools I will dry up.*

God will dry up mountains and hills, wither the plants, turn rivers into dry land, and dry up the pools. This is the reverse of 41:18, where God turned the desert into springs. The same power that blesses His people can bring judgment on His enemies. It is a picture of the Day of the LORD, when God steps in to judge the world.

42:16 *And I will lead **the** blind by a way **that** they have not known; in paths **that** they have not known I will make them tread; I will make the dark place before them into light, and rough places into level ground. These **are** the things; I will do them, and I will not forsake them.*

In the middle of judgment, God leads the blind on a road they don't know. He turns their darkness into light and their rough places into level ground.

"These are the things; I will do them, and I will not forsake them." God finishes what He starts. "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

42:17 *They will be turned away backward, they will be ashamed **with** shame, those who trust in the carved image, who say to a molten image, "You **are** our gods."*

Those who trust in idols and say to metal images, "You are our gods," will be turned back in shame. There is no middle ground. On the day God acts, everyone will see what they have been trusting in, and the idols will fail the people who leaned on them.

42:18 *You deaf, hear; and you blind, look, to see.*

Now God calls out, "You deaf, hear; and you blind, look, to see." The verse sounds almost like a riddle. How can the deaf hear or the blind see? Only if God opens their ears and eyes, which is exactly what the Servant came to do (verse 7).

42:19 *Who **is** blind but My servant, and deaf like My messenger **whom** I send? Who **is** blind like the one at peace, and blind like the servant of the LORD?*

Here is the painful twist. Who is blind? "My servant." Who is deaf? "My messenger whom I send." This servant is Israel, as verse 24 makes plain, and not the Servant of verses 1-9.

Israel was meant to be God's servant and messenger to the nations, a light to the world. Instead she was as blind as the nations she was meant to reach. This is why the true Servant had to come. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded, and He came to open Israel's eyes as well.

42:20 *Seeing many things, and you do not keep **them**; opening ears, and he does not hear.*

Israel had seen so much. The Exodus, the parting of the sea, the fall of Assyria's army outside Jerusalem. Her ears were open, but she didn't really listen.

This is a warning to us. It is possible to grow up around the things of God, to hear sermon after sermon, and still not see. Jesus said the same about His own generation, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 (Matthew 13:13-15).

42:21 *The LORD was pleased for the sake of His righteousness; He will magnify **the** law, and He will make **it** glorious.*

The LORD was pleased, for the sake of His righteousness, to make His law great and glorious. God's law was a gift, not a burden, and He meant for it to be honored. Israel's failure didn't make the law any less glorious. It showed how badly Israel, and all of us, need a Savior who would keep it perfectly. Jesus didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).

42:22 *And it **is** a people despoiled and plundered; all of them are trapped in holes, and they are hidden in houses of confinement; they have become spoil, and **there is** no deliverer; plunder, and **there is** none who says, "Bring **it** back."*

The result of Israel's blindness was disaster. Her people were plundered, robbed, trapped in caves, shut up in prisons, and carried off as spoil with no one to say, "Bring it back."

This is a picture of the Babylonian exile Isaiah foretold in 39:6-7. It is also a picture of every life that goes its own way. Sin promises freedom and leaves us captive.

42:23 *Who among you will give ear to this, will pay attention and hear for **the** time afterward?*

Who will listen this time? Who will pay attention from now on? God is still calling. The disaster didn't have to be the end of the story if Israel would only listen. That is the heart of God even in judgment. He disciplines in order to bring His people back.

42:24 *Who gave Jacob to plunder, and Israel to despoilers? **Was it** not the LORD, **He** against whom we have sinned? And they were not willing to walk in His ways, and they did not listen to His law.*

Who handed Jacob over to the robbers? It wasn't Babylon's strength or the power of her gods. "Was it not the LORD, He against whom we have sinned?" Israel wouldn't walk in His ways or obey His law.

This is hard to hear, but it is also a comfort. If the LORD allowed the exile, then the exile was in His hands, and He could also end it. The same God who sent the discipline would bring the restoration, which is the promise of the chapters ahead.

42:25 *And He poured out on him rage, His anger, and the fierceness of battle; and it set him ablaze from all around, and he did not know; and it burned against him, and he does not lay* ***it*** *to heart.*

God poured out the heat of His anger and the fury of battle on Israel. It burned all around her, and still she didn't understand. It burned her, and she didn't take it to heart.

The chapter ends on a sad note. Israel suffered and still didn't learn. But we have already heard God's answer at the start of this chapter: My Servant. In the Servant, God would do for Israel what she couldn't do for herself. And one day, as Paul promises, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). God isn't finished with His people.

Chapter 42 Summary

God presents His chosen Servant, Jesus, filled with the Spirit, gentle with the broken, and determined to bring justice to the nations. God makes Him a covenant for the people and a light to the nations, to open blind eyes and free prisoners. The whole earth is called to sing a new song as the LORD goes out like a warrior. Then God turns to Israel, His blind and deaf servant, who suffered for her sin and still didn't understand.

The Servant Songs

Isaiah has four passages often called the Servant Songs. In each one the Servant is an individual Person who does what the nation of Israel couldn't do, and the New Testament applies them to Jesus.

First Song (42:1-9): The Servant brings justice to the nations with gentleness (Matthew 12:18-21).

Second Song (49:1-13): The Servant is a light to the nations and restores Israel (Acts 13:47).

Third Song (50:4-11): The Servant suffers shame and beatings yet trusts God.

Fourth Song (52:13-53:12): The Servant dies for the sins of others and is raised and exalted (Acts 8:32-35).

Chapter 42 Study Questions

1. Who is the gentlest person you have ever known, and what made them that way?

2. How does God describe His Servant, and how does Matthew show us who He is? (42:1-4)

3. What does it mean that the Servant won't break a bruised reed or put out a dimly burning wick? (42:3)

4. What does it mean that the Servant is "a covenant of the people" and "a light of the nations"? (42:6-7)

5. How does the LORD as a warrior in verse 13 fit with the gentle Servant of verses 1-4? (42:13)

6. Who is the blind and deaf servant, and what went wrong? (42:18-25)

7. Why does God say He was the One who gave Jacob up to the plunderers? (42:24)

8. Is there an area of your life where you feel like a bruised reed? How does this passage speak to you?

9. How can you be a light to someone this week who doesn't yet know Jesus?

Chapter 43: You Are Mine

Scripture: Israel Redeemed and Called as Witnesses

43:1-7 And now thus says the LORD, who created you, Jacob, and who formed you, Israel: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called ***you*** by your name; you ***are*** Mine. When you pass through the waters, I ***will be*** with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you; when you walk through fire, you will not be burned, and a flame will not burn you. For I ***am*** the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt ***as*** your ransom, Cush and Seba in place of you. Because you are precious in My eyes, you are honored, and I, I love you; and I will give mankind in place of you, and peoples in place of your life. Do not be afraid, for I ***am*** with you; from the east I will bring your offspring, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, "Give ***them*** up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring My sons from far away, and My daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I created for My glory; I formed him; indeed, I made him."

43:8-13 Bring out a blind people, and there are eyes, and deaf ***ones***, and they have ears. All the nations have been gathered together, and let ***the*** peoples be assembled. Who among them will tell this, and make us hear former things? Let them give their witnesses, and let them be justified; and let them hear and say, "***It is*** truth." You ***are*** My witnesses, declares the LORD, and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I ***am*** He. Before Me no god was formed, and after Me ***there*** will be none. I, I ***am*** the LORD, and besides Me ***there is*** no Savior. I, I have declared, and I have saved, and I have made ***it*** heard, and ***there was*** no strange ***god*** among you; and you ***are*** My witnesses, declares the LORD, and I ***am*** God. Even from ***the*** day I ***am*** He, and ***there is*** no deliverer from My hand; I act, and who will turn it back?

43:14-21 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them ***as*** fugitives, and the Chaldeans, in the ships their shout of joy. I ***am*** the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and mighty ***one*** together: they lie down, they will not rise; they are snuffed out; like the wick they are extinguished. Do not remember former things, and ancient things do not consider. Look, I am doing a new thing; now it springs up; do you not know it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in a desolate place. The living things of the field will honor Me, jackals and daughters of an ostrich, for I have put water in the wilderness, rivers in a desolate place, to give drink to My people, My chosen, the people whom I formed for Myself; they will recount My praise.

43:22-28 And you have not called on Me, Jacob, for you have grown weary of Me, Israel. You have not brought to Me the sheep of your burnt offerings, and ***with*** your sacrifices you have not honored Me; I have not burdened you with grain offering, and I have not wearied you with frankincense. You have not bought calamus for Me with money, and ***with*** the fat of your sacrifices you have not satisfied Me; only, you have burdened Me with your sins; you have wearied Me with your iniquities. I, I ***am*** He who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and your sins I will not remember. Remind Me; let us enter into judgment together; you, recount,

so that you may be justified. Your first father sinned, and your spokesmen transgressed against Me. So I will profane the officials of holiness, and I will give Jacob ***to be*** devoted to destruction, and Israel to reviling words.

Chapter 43 Preview

Chapter 42 ended with Israel robbed, plundered and blind to why. Chapter 43 opens with two words that change everything: "And now." The same people who failed God hear Him say, "You are Mine." He promises to walk with them through water and fire and to gather their children from every direction.

Then God calls His people into a courtroom. The idols of the nations can't tell the future, but Israel has seen the LORD do it again and again. God's people are His witnesses. The chapter closes with a hard truth and a great mercy: Israel has worn God out with sin, and God wipes that sin away for His own sake.

Chapter 43 Study

43:1 *And now thus says the LORD, who created you, Jacob, and who formed you, Israel: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called* ***you*** *by your name; you* ***are*** *Mine.*

After the rebuke at the end of chapter 42, you might expect more anger. Instead God speaks tenderly. He reminds Israel that He is the One who created and formed them. A people God made on purpose is a people He won't throw away.

"I have called you by your name; you are Mine." To redeem means to buy back, to pay the price that sets someone free. God has done that for Israel, and He knows each of His people by name. That is what every believer has in Christ too. We were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and we belong to Him.

43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I* ***will be*** *with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you; when you walk through fire, you will not be burned, and a flame will not burn you.*

Notice God doesn't say "if" you pass through the waters. He says "when." Trouble will come. The promise isn't that God's people will be spared the river and the fire, but that He will be in it with them. Israel crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan on dry ground. Later Daniel's three friends walked out of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace without even the smell of smoke (Daniel 3:27). Whatever you are walking through right now, He hasn't left you alone in it.

43:3 *For I* ***am*** *the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt* ***as*** *your ransom, Cush and Seba in place of you.*

The LORD calls Himself Israel's Savior, and He says He gave nations as a "ransom" in Israel's place. Cush is the land south of Egypt (roughly modern Sudan), and Seba was probably nearby. Some see this fulfilled when Persia, after letting the Jews go home, went on to conquer Egypt in 525 B.C. under Cyrus's son Cambyses. Whatever the exact event, the point is plain: God values His people so highly that He moves empires around for their sake.

43:4 *Because you are precious in My eyes, you are honored, and I, I love you; and I will give mankind in place of you, and peoples in place of your life.*

Here is the reason behind it all. "You are precious in My eyes, you are honored." Israel had done nothing to earn this. They were blind and deaf to God (42:18-20). Yet God says, "I love you." That is grace, God's favor given to people who don't deserve it. You may feel far from precious today. God's love for His people has never rested on how lovely we are. It rests on Him.

43:5 *Do not be afraid, for I **am** with you; from the east I will bring your offspring, and from the west I will gather you.*

"Do not be afraid" comes a second time. Isaiah wrote this before the Babylonian exile ever happened, but he speaks to the scattered people God already sees. The LORD promises to bring their children back from the east and the west. A first fulfillment came when exiles returned from Babylon after 538 B.C. I believe the fuller fulfillment is still ahead, when God gathers Israel from the whole earth at the return of Christ (Matthew 24:31).

New Testament links: Luke 13:29 (alluded to)

43:6-7 *I will say to the north, "Give **them** up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring My sons from far away, and My daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I created for My glory; I formed him; indeed, I made him."*

God speaks to the four directions like a commander giving orders: "Give them up." No nation will be able to hold God's children back. He calls them "My sons" and "My daughters," family language.

"Created for My glory." This is why we exist. God made His people to show the world what He is like. Our lives aren't finally about our own comfort or plans. When we live for His glory, we are doing what we were made to do.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 6:18 (alluded to); Luke 13:29 (alluded to)

43:8 *Bring out a blind people, and there are eyes, and deaf **ones**, and they have ears.*

Now the scene shifts to a courtroom. God calls Israel forward, and He is honest about them: they are blind, though they have eyes, and deaf, though they have ears. They have seen His works and still don't understand. Yet these are exactly the people He will call as His witnesses. God doesn't wait for perfect people before He uses them.

43:9 *All the nations have been gathered together, and let **the** peoples be assembled. Who among them will tell this, and make us hear former things? Let them give their witnesses, and let them be justified; and let them hear and say, "**It is** truth."*

The other side of the courtroom fills with all the nations and their gods. The challenge is simple. Which of your gods foretold "the former things"? Let them bring witnesses to prove it, or else admit the LORD's word is true. Prophecy is history written in advance, and only God can write it. The idols have no record to show.

43:10 *You **are** My witnesses, declares the LORD, and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I **am** He. Before Me no god was formed, and after Me **there** will be none.*

"You are My witnesses." A witness tells what he has seen. Israel had seen God foretell events and then bring them to pass. Their history itself was the evidence.

"Understand that I am He." There was no god before the LORD and there will be none after Him. He wasn't "formed" like the idols in a workshop. He simply is. Jesus used this same language when He said, "unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). I believe He was claiming to be the God who speaks here.

New Testament links: John 13:19 (alluded to)

43:11 *I, I **am** the LORD, and besides Me **there is** no Savior.*

"I, I am the LORD." The doubling makes it emphatic. There is one Savior, and there is no other. The world offers many roads to rescue, and some sound very spiritual. Scripture says plainly that salvation belongs to God alone, and the New Testament says that God's salvation comes through one name, Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

43:12 *I, I have declared, and I have saved, and I have made **it** heard, and **there was** no strange **god** among you; and you **are** My witnesses, declares the LORD, and I **am** God.*

God reviews His track record: He declared what He would do, then saved, then proclaimed it. No "strange god" did these things for Israel. So Israel is the witness. In the same way, every believer has a testimony. What has God done in your life that you could tell someone else about this week?

43:13 *Even from **the** day I **am** He, and **there is** no deliverer from My hand; I act, and who will turn it back?*

"Even from the day I am He." God didn't start at some point in time. He has always been. And nobody can snatch anyone out of His hand. Jesus said the same about His sheep: "no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28). When God acts, no one can undo it. That is a great comfort to those who trust Him and a warning to those who fight Him.

43:14 *Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them **as** fugitives, and the Chaldeans, in the ships their shout of joy.*

Here Babylon is named for the first time in this part of Isaiah. Remember, in Isaiah's own day Assyria was the great threat, and Babylon wasn't yet the empire it would become. Yet God already says He will bring Babylon down "for your sake." The Chaldeans were the ruling people of Babylon, and they took pride in their river trade. The ships they rejoiced in would become boats for fleeing.

43:15 *I **am** the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.*

God piles up His titles: your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Israel had kings who failed them over and over. Their true King was the LORD. One day the King will reign in Jerusalem in plain sight, when Christ returns and rules the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

43:16-17 *Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and mighty **one** together: they lie down, they will not rise; they are snuffed out; like the wick they are extinguished.*

These verses look back to the Exodus. God made a path through the Red Sea, then brought Pharaoh's chariots and horses into that path, where they drowned. They lay down and didn't rise. Isaiah says they went out like the wick of a lamp. The God who did that for Israel at the Red Sea hasn't grown weaker since.

43:18 *Do not remember former things, and ancient things do not consider.*

This is surprising. After reminding them of the Exodus, God says, "Do not remember former things." He doesn't mean forget His past works. He means don't think the past was the best He can do. Some of us live looking backward, at our failures or at our "good old days." God isn't finished.

43:19 *Look, I am doing a new thing; now it springs up; do you not know it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in a desolate place.*

"Look, I am doing a new thing." The new thing is a second exodus, out of Babylon and back home. The first exodus went through the sea. This one runs through the desert, and God will make a road and rivers there for His people.

I believe this also reaches beyond the return from Babylon. God's greatest "new thing" is the new covenant in Christ, and Revelation ends with Him saying, "Look, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

New Testament links: Revelation 21:5 (alluded to); 2 Corinthians 5:17 (alluded to)

43:20 *The living things of the field will honor Me, jackals and daughters of an ostrich, for I have put water in the wilderness, rivers in a desolate place, to give drink to My people, My chosen,*

Even the wild animals will honor God when He brings water to the desert. Jackals and ostriches live in dry, lonely places, and they will benefit from the rivers He makes for His people. Creation itself shares in the blessing when God redeems His people. Paul says creation is waiting for that day (Romans 8:19-21).

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:9 (alluded to)

43:21 *the people whom I formed for Myself; they will recount My praise.*

This verse explains the whole chapter. God formed a people for Himself, and they will declare His praise. Peter applies this same idea to the church, "a people for His possession," called to proclaim His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9). Praise is the reason we were made, not an extra in the Christian life.

Some teachers take Peter's words to mean the church has taken Israel's place, but I believe Peter borrows Israel's titles to describe believers, while the promises of this chapter still belong to the nation of Israel, and God will keep them in Christ's thousand-year kingdom.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:9 (alluded to)

43:22 *And you have not called on Me, Jacob, for you have grown weary of Me, Israel.*

Now the tone turns. After all God has done, Israel hasn't called on Him. Worse, they became "weary" of Him. That is a sad word. Faith had become a chore. It is possible to go to church, sing the songs and still be tired of God. If that describes you, the cure isn't more effort. It is a fresh look at the God who never grows weary of you.

43:23 *You have not brought to Me the sheep of your burnt offerings, and **with** your sacrifices you have not honored Me; I have not burdened you with grain offering, and I have not wearied you with frankincense.*

God says Israel hadn't truly brought Him their offerings. Many think this speaks of the exile, when there was no temple and no sacrifices. Others see it as offerings brought with empty hearts, which God didn't count as given to Him at all (compare 1:11-13). Either way, God wasn't demanding more. He says, "I have not burdened you."

43:24 *You have not bought calamus for Me with money, and **with** the fat of your sacrifices you have not satisfied Me; only, you have burdened Me with your sins; you have wearied Me with your iniquities.*

"Calamus" was a fragrant reed used in making the holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:23). Israel didn't spend money for it. They didn't give God their best.

"You have burdened Me with your sins." Here is the turnaround. God didn't weigh Israel down with demands, but Israel weighed God down with sin. Their sin was a load the Lord Himself would one day carry. Isaiah 53:6 says, "the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us."

43:25 *I, I **am** He who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and your sins I will not remember.*

Right after listing Israel's sins, God doesn't say, "So I will punish you." He says, "I, I am He who wipes out your transgressions." Why? "For My own sake." Forgiveness comes from God's own nature, not our merit.

"Your sins I will not remember." God knows everything, so this doesn't mean He forgets the way we do. It means He won't hold our sins against us or bring them up again. Hebrews 8:12 repeats this promise as part of the new covenant in Christ.

43:26 *Remind Me; let us enter into judgment together; you, recount, so that you may be justified.*

God invites Israel back into the courtroom: "You, recount, so that you may be justified." It is a challenge. If you think you are innocent, make your case. Of course, no one can. Paul says the whole world stands guilty before God (Romans 3:19). The only way to be declared right is the way God just announced in verse 25, His own forgiveness.

43:27 *Your first father sinned, and your spokesmen transgressed against Me.*

"Your first father sinned." Bible teachers differ on who is meant. Many take it as Jacob, whose life was full of scheming (Hosea 12:2-3). Some think of Adam. I lean toward Jacob, since the chapter speaks to "Jacob" by name. Israel's "spokesmen" (likely their priests, prophets and leaders) also sinned. From the start, the family has needed grace.

43:28 *So I will profane the officials of holiness, and I will give Jacob **to be** devoted to destruction, and Israel to reviling words.*

"I will give Jacob to be devoted to destruction." The Hebrew word means something set apart for destruction. God says He would hand Israel over to judgment, and that their holy leaders would be defiled. This happened when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. But this isn't the end of the story. The very next verse, 44:1, opens again with "And now."

Chapter 43 Summary

God tells Israel not to fear, because He created them, redeemed them and calls them by name. He will be with them in water and fire and will gather their children from every corner of the earth. In a courtroom scene, God challenges the nations' idols to foretell the future, and names Israel as His witnesses that He alone is God and Savior. He promises a new exodus through the desert. Though Israel has burdened Him with sin, He wipes out their transgressions for His own sake.

Chapter 43 Study Questions

1. When has a fear of what was coming kept you from taking the next step?
2. What does God promise His people when they pass through waters and fire? (43:2)
3. Why does God say He gives other peoples in Israel's place? (43:3-4)
4. What challenge does God give the nations and their gods? (43:9)
5. What does it mean that Israel is God's witness? (43:10-12)
6. What "new thing" does God promise to do? (43:18-21)
7. How had Israel treated God, and how does God answer them? (43:22-25)

8. Is there a "former thing" in your life, good or bad, that keeps you from seeing what God is doing now?

9. What has God done in your life that you could share as His witness this week?

Chapter 44: The Living God and the Block of Wood

Scripture: God's Spirit Poured Out, the Folly of Idols, and Cyrus Named

44:1-5 And now listen, Jacob, My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen. Thus says the LORD, who made you and who formed you from the womb, ***who*** will help you: Do not be afraid, My servant Jacob, and Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour out water on ***the*** thirsty ***ground***, and streams on ***the*** dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, and My blessing on your descendants. And they will spring up in among ***the*** grass, like poplars by watercourses of water. This one will say, "I ***am*** the LORD's," and this one will call ***himself*** by the name of Jacob, and this one will write ***on*** his hand, "The LORD's," and he will surname ***himself*** with the name of Israel.

44:6-8 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of armies: I ***am*** first and I ***am*** last, and besides Me ***there is*** no God. And who ***is*** like Me? Let him proclaim ***it***, and let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I established the ancient people; and the coming things, and what will come, let them declare to them. Do not be in dread, and do not be frightened. Did I not make you hear from then, and declare ***it***? And you ***are*** My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? And ***there is*** no Rock; I do not know ***one***.

44:9-14 Those who form a carved image, all of them ***are*** formlessness, and their desired things do not profit; and their witnesses, they do not see and they do not know, so that they will be ashamed. Who has formed a god and cast a carved image to no profit? Look, all his companions will be ashamed, and the craftsmen, they ***are*** from mankind; let them all gather together; let them stand up; let them be in dread; let them be ashamed together. A craftsman of iron ***uses*** a cutting tool, and he works ***it*** in the coals, and with hammers he forms it, and he works it with the arm of his strength; also he is hungry, and ***there is*** no strength; he has not drunk water, and he grows weary. A craftsman of wood stretches out a line; he outlines it with the marker; he makes it with scraping tools, and with the compass he outlines it; and he makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of mankind, to dwell ***in*** a house. ***He goes*** to cut down cedars for himself; and he takes a holm tree and an oak, and he lets it grow strong for himself among the trees of the forest; he plants a laurel, and the rain makes ***it*** grow.

44:15-20 And it is for man to burn, and he takes from them and warms himself; also he kindles ***a fire*** and bakes bread; also he makes a god and bows down; he makes it a carved image and prostrates himself to it. Half of it he burns in a fire; over half of it he eats meat; he roasts a roast and is satisfied; also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm; I have seen ***the*** fire." And the remainder of it he makes into a god, into his carved image; he prostrates himself to it, and he bows down, and he prays to it, and he says, "Deliver me, for you ***are*** my god." They do not know, and they do not understand, for He has smeared their eyes from seeing, their hearts from having insight. And he does not bring ***it*** back to his heart, and ***there is*** no knowledge and no understanding to say, "Half of it I burned in a fire, and also I baked bread on its coals; I roast meat and eat ***it***; and shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I prostrate myself to a block of wood?" He feeds ***on*** ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside, and he will not deliver his soul, and he will not say, "***Is there*** not a falsehood in my right hand?"

44:21-23 Remember these ***things***, Jacob, and Israel, for you ***are*** My servant; I formed you; you ***are*** a servant to Me, Israel; you will not be forgotten by Me. I have wiped out your transgressions like the thick cloud, and your sins like the cloud; return to Me, for I have redeemed you. Shout for joy, heavens, for the LORD has acted; shout aloud, lower parts of ***the*** earth; break forth ***into*** a shout of joy, mountains, forest, and every tree in it; for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and in Israel He will glorify Himself.

44:24-28 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the One who formed you from the womb: I ***am*** the LORD, who makes everything, who stretches out the heavens alone, who spreads out the earth by Myself, who frustrates the signs of empty talkers, and makes diviners mad; who turns ***the*** wise backward, and makes their knowledge foolish; who establishes the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says of Jerusalem, "She will be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They will be rebuilt, and I will raise up her ruins"; who says to the ocean depth, "Be dried up, and I will make your rivers dry"; who says of Cyrus, "My shepherd, and he will perform all My desire," even saying of Jerusalem, "Let her be rebuilt," and ***of*** the temple, "Let it be founded."

Chapter 44 Preview

Chapter 43 ended with judgment on Jacob. Chapter 44 opens, again, with "And now." God promises to pour out His Spirit on Israel's children like water on dry ground. Then He declares that He is the first and the last, and that there is no God besides Him.

The middle of the chapter is one of the sharpest passages in the Bible on idolatry. Isaiah describes a man who cuts down a tree, cooks his dinner over half of it and bows down to the other half. The chapter ends with a stunning prophecy: God calls a future king by name, Cyrus, and says he will order Jerusalem rebuilt.

Chapter 44 Study

44:1 *And now listen, Jacob, My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen.*

God turns from judgment straight back to grace. He calls Israel "My servant" and "whom I have chosen." In chapters 41 to 48 the word "servant" often means the nation of Israel, as it does here. Later Isaiah will show a Servant who does perfectly what Israel couldn't do. Israel's calling always depended on God's choice, not on Israel's success.

44:2 *Thus says the LORD, who made you and who formed you from the womb,* ***who*** *will help you: Do not be afraid, My servant Jacob, and Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.*

"Jeshurun" is a tender name for Israel, used only here and in Deuteronomy (32:15; 33:5, 26). It means "upright one." It is something like a pet name, calling Israel what God intended her to be, not what she had been. God formed them "from the womb," which means He has been caring for them from the very start of their life as a nation. Once again He says, "Do not be afraid."

44:3-4 *For I will pour out water on **the** thirsty **ground**, and streams on **the** dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, and My blessing on your descendants. And they will spring up in among **the** grass, like poplars by watercourses of water.*

"I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring." Water on thirsty ground is a picture of the Holy Spirit giving life where there was none. A first taste came when the exiles came home and God renewed their faith. The great outpouring came at Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on the first believers in Jerusalem, who were Jews (Acts 2:1-4, 17).

I also believe a future outpouring is coming for the nation of Israel. Zechariah 12:10 says God will pour out on Jerusalem "a spirit of grace and supplications," and they will look on Him whom they pierced. Then Israel's children will spring up like poplar trees by a stream.

New Testament links: John 7:38 (alluded to)

44:5 *This one will say, "I **am** the LORD's," and this one will call **himself** by the name of Jacob, and this one will write **on** his hand, "The LORD's," and he will surname **himself** with the name of Israel.*

When the Spirit comes, people gladly claim God as their own. One says, "I am the LORD's." Another writes on his hand that he belongs to the LORD. In those days a slave or soldier might be marked with his owner's name. This is a willing mark of love, not a forced one. Revelation shows the same contrast: the beast forces his mark on the hand or forehead (Revelation 13:16), but God's servants bear His name freely (Revelation 14:1).

44:6 *Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of armies: I **am** first and I **am** last, and besides Me **there is** no God.*

God gives His full title: King of Israel, Redeemer and LORD of armies. Then He says, "I am first and I am last." Nothing came before Him and nothing will outlast Him. In Revelation, Jesus takes these same words for Himself: "I am the First and the Last" (Revelation 1:17; 22:13). He wasn't borrowing a phrase. Jesus is the eternal God who speaks here.

New Testament links: Revelation 22:13 (alluded to); Revelation 1:17 (alluded to); Revelation 2:8 (alluded to); Revelation 1:11 (alluded to)

44:7 *And who **is** like Me? Let him proclaim **it**, and let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I established the ancient people; and the coming things, and what will come, let them declare to them.*

"Who is like Me?" God throws out the challenge again. Let any rival god tell what has happened from the beginning and announce what is coming. No idol can. God has been declaring the future ever since He made Israel a nation. This is why Bible prophecy matters so much. It shows that the God of the Bible is real and in control of history.

44:8 *Do not be in dread, and do not be frightened. Did I not make you hear from then, and declare* ***it****? And you* ***are*** *My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? And* ***there is*** *no Rock; I do not know* ***one****.*

"Do not be in dread, and do not be frightened." God's people had no reason to panic, because God had told them ahead of time what was coming. Prophecy is meant to settle our fear, not stir it up.

"There is no Rock; I do not know one." A rock was a place of safety and a firm foundation. If the all-knowing God doesn't know of another rock, there is none.

44:9 *Those who form a carved image, all of them* ***are*** *formlessness, and their desired things do not profit; and their witnesses, they do not see and they do not know, so that they will be ashamed.*

Now Isaiah turns to the idol makers. They "are formlessness," empty and worthless. The things they love bring them no profit. Even the "witnesses" of these idols (the people who worship them) can't see or understand. The LORD's witnesses had seen Him act. The idols' witnesses have seen nothing at all, and in the end they will be ashamed.

44:10 *Who has formed a god and cast a carved image to no profit?*

Isaiah asks a simple question that answers itself. Who would make a god that does him no good? Yet people did it all the time. The question still stands today. We may not carve statues, but we often build our lives around money, success or someone's approval, and those gods can't help us when it counts.

44:11 *Look, all his companions will be ashamed, and the craftsmen, they* ***are*** *from mankind; let them all gather together; let them stand up; let them be in dread; let them be ashamed together.*

The craftsmen who make idols "are from mankind." That is the whole problem. A god made by a man can be no greater than the man who made it. Isaiah pictures them called together to stand trial, like the nations in chapter 43. When the truth comes out, they will tremble and be put to shame.

44:12 *A craftsman of iron* ***uses*** *a cutting tool, and he works* ***it*** *in the coals, and with hammers he forms it, and he works it with the arm of his strength; also he is hungry, and* ***there is*** *no strength; he has not drunk water, and he grows weary.*

Isaiah describes the blacksmith at work. He shapes iron over hot coals with hammers and his strong arm. Then a very human detail: he gets hungry, his strength fails and he gets tired. The man who makes the god can't keep himself going without food and water. How can the thing he makes keep him going? The God of Israel never grows weary (40:28).

44:13-14 *A craftsman of wood stretches out a line; he outlines it with the marker; he makes it with scraping tools, and with the compass he outlines it; and he makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of mankind, to dwell* ***in*** *a house.* ***He goes*** *to cut down cedars for himself; and he takes a holm tree and an oak, and he lets it grow strong for himself among the trees of the forest; he plants a laurel, and the rain makes* ***it*** *grow.*

Next comes the woodworker. He measures, marks the wood with red chalk and shapes it into the form of a man, "like the beauty of mankind, to dwell in a house." The god can't even get up and walk. It must be set in place.

Before that, someone had to plant the tree, and the rain made it grow. Who sends the rain? The LORD does. The idol depends, from start to finish, on the God it replaces.

44:15-17 *And it is for man to burn, and he takes from them and warms himself; also he kindles* ***a fire*** *and bakes bread; also he makes a god and bows down; he makes it a carved image and prostrates himself to it. Half of it he burns in a fire; over half of it he eats meat; he roasts a roast and is satisfied; also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm; I have seen* ***the*** *fire." And the remainder of it he makes into a god, into his carved image; he prostrates himself to it, and he bows down, and he prays to it, and he says, "Deliver me, for you* ***are*** *my god."*

Here is the heart of Isaiah's argument, and it is almost painful to read. The same tree gives the man firewood. He warms himself, bakes bread and roasts his meat, and he is satisfied. Then he takes the rest of the same wood, makes a god and prays to it, "Deliver me, for you are my god."

One half of the log is fuel. The other half is his savior. Isaiah wants us to see how foolish that is. A god you made with your own hands can't rescue you.

44:18 *They do not know, and they do not understand, for He has smeared their eyes from seeing, their hearts from having insight.*

Why can't these people see it? Isaiah says "He has smeared their eyes." This is God's judgment on people who keep refusing the truth. When someone rejects God long enough, God may give him over to his own choice (Romans 1:21-25). It echoes Isaiah's call in 6:10. Blindness to the truth isn't only a mistake. It can become a judgment.

44:19-20 *And he does not bring* ***it*** *back to his heart, and* ***there is*** *no knowledge and no understanding to say, "Half of it I burned in a fire, and also I baked bread on its coals; I roast meat and eat* ***it****; and shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I prostrate myself to a block of wood?" He feeds* ***on*** *ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside, and he will not deliver his soul, and he will not say, "****Is there*** *not a falsehood in my right hand?"*

No one stops to think, "I baked bread over half of this. Why am I bowing down to the other half?"

"He feeds on ashes." Ashes are what is left when the fire is gone. They don't nourish anyone. A "deceived heart" leads him off, and he can't even ask, "Is there not a falsehood in my right hand?" That is a question worth asking ourselves. What am I holding onto that I trust to save me, that can't?

44:21 *Remember these **things**, Jacob, and Israel, for you **are** My servant; I formed you; you **are** a servant to Me, Israel; you will not be forgotten by Me.*

"Remember these things." God turns back to Israel. Don't be like the idol makers. Remember that you are My servant and that I formed you. The idol maker formed his god. Israel's God formed Israel. That is the difference between false religion and the truth. Then a tender promise: "You will not be forgotten by Me."

44:22 *I have wiped out your transgressions like the thick cloud, and your sins like the cloud; return to Me, for I have redeemed you.*

"I have wiped out your transgressions like the thick cloud." A cloud that hides the sun can be gone in an hour when the wind blows. God says that is what He has done with Israel's sin. Notice the order: He forgives first, then says, "Return to Me." God doesn't ask us to clean ourselves up before we come home. He has already paid the price to redeem us.

44:23 *Shout for joy, heavens, for the LORD has acted; shout aloud, lower parts of **the** earth; break forth **into** a shout of joy, mountains, forest, and every tree in it; for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and in Israel He will glorify Himself.*

Isaiah bursts into song. He calls on the heavens, the depths of the earth, the mountains and the forest to shout for joy. Why? "The LORD has redeemed Jacob." The idols couldn't make a single tree. The true God made the trees, and now even they are told to sing. When God saves His people, all creation has reason to celebrate.

44:24 *Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the One who formed you from the womb: I **am** the LORD, who makes everything, who stretches out the heavens alone, who spreads out the earth by Myself,*

God begins a long sentence that builds to the naming of Cyrus. He is the Redeemer who formed Israel from the womb. He made all things. He stretched out the heavens "alone" and spread out the earth "by Myself." No helper and no other god was there. That is what makes Him able to say what comes next.

44:25 *who frustrates the signs of empty talkers, and makes diviners mad; who turns **the** wise backward, and makes their knowledge foolish;*

The God who made everything also overrules the false prophets of the nations. Babylon was famous for its omen readers and fortune tellers. God says He makes their signs fail and makes fools of the diviners (people who claimed to read the future through signs and magic). The wise men of the world have to back down when God speaks.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 1:20 (alluded to)

44:26 *who establishes the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says of Jerusalem, "She will be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They will be rebuilt, and I will raise up her ruins";*

In contrast to the diviners, God confirms the word of "His servant" and carries out what His messengers foretold. The servant here is likely Isaiah himself, along with the prophets God sent. Then God says something that, in Isaiah's day, sounded impossible: Jerusalem will be lived in, the cities of Judah will be rebuilt and their ruins raised up. Jerusalem hadn't even fallen yet.

44:27 *who says to the ocean depth, "Be dried up, and I will make your rivers dry";*

God speaks to the deep and to the rivers, and they dry up. This recalls the Red Sea and the Jordan. It may also point ahead to Babylon, a city protected by the Euphrates River and its canals. Nothing that seems to protect God's enemies can stand when He says, "Be dried up."

44:28 *who says of Cyrus, "My shepherd, and he will perform all My desire," even saying of Jerusalem, "Let her be rebuilt," and* ***of*** *the temple, "Let it be founded."*

"Who says of Cyrus." God names the Persian king who would let the Jews go home and order Jerusalem and the temple rebuilt. Isaiah wrote this in the late 700s or early 600s B.C. Cyrus took Babylon in 539 B.C. and issued his decree soon after (Ezra 1:1-4). So Isaiah named him well over a hundred years before he did it.

No man can name a king before he is born. But God can, and He did it through Isaiah. This is what real predictive prophecy looks like.

God calls Cyrus "My shepherd," a title for a king who leads and cares for a people. A pagan king was doing God's will without knowing it.

Chapter 44 Summary

God promises to pour out His Spirit on Israel's descendants like water on dry land, and people will gladly say, "I am the LORD's." He declares that He is the first and the last, and that no other god or rock exists. Isaiah exposes idolatry: a man burns half a log to cook his meal and bows down to the other half. God calls Israel to remember Him, because He has wiped away their sins. He ends by naming Cyrus, who will order Jerusalem and the temple rebuilt.

Chapter 44 Study Questions

1. What are some things people in our culture look to for security or rescue?
2. What does God promise to pour out on Israel's descendants? (44:3-4)
3. What does God mean when He says, "I am first and I am last"? (44:6)
4. Describe how the idol maker uses the tree he cuts down. (44:14-17)
5. Why can't the idol worshiper see his own foolishness? (44:18-20)
6. What does God do with Israel's sins, and what does He then ask of them? (44:22)

7. What does God say about Cyrus and Jerusalem? (44:26-28)

8. Is there anything in your life that, like the half-burned log, you are trusting to do what only God can do?

9. How does God naming Cyrus long before his time encourage your trust in the promises still unfulfilled?

Chapter 45: Cyrus, God's Anointed

Scripture: God Raises Up Cyrus and Calls the Nations to Be Saved

45:1-7 Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of, to subdue nations before him, and I will loosen the loins of kings, to open doors before him, and gates will not be shut: I, I will go before you, and I will make the swelling places straight; I will break doors of bronze, and I will cut through bars of iron. And I will give you treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, so that you may know that I ***am*** the LORD, who calls ***you*** by your name, the God of Israel. For the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen one, I called you by your name; I surname you, and you have not known Me. I ***am*** the LORD, and ***there is*** none else; besides Me ***there is*** no God. I will gird you, and you have not known Me, so that they may know from the rising of the sun and from its setting that ***there is*** none apart from Me; I ***am*** the LORD, and ***there is*** none else, who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates calamity; I ***am*** the LORD, who does all these ***things***.

45:8-13 Drip down, heavens, from above, and let clouds pour down righteousness; let ***the*** earth open, and let them be fruitful ***with*** salvation, and let it make righteousness sprout together; I, the LORD, have created it. Woe ***to him who*** contends with the one who formed him, a potsherd with potsherds of the ground! Does the clay say to the one who forms it, "What are you making?" and your work, "He has no hands"? Woe ***to him who*** says to a father, "What are you fathering?" and to a woman, "What are you in labor with?" Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the One who formed him: Ask Me ***about*** the coming things; concerning My sons and concerning the work of My hands you command Me. I, I made ***the*** earth, and I created mankind on it; I, My hands stretched out ***the*** heavens, and all their host I commanded. I, I have stirred him up in righteousness, and all his ways I will make straight; he, he will build My city, and he will let My exiles go, not for price and not for bribe, says the LORD of armies.

45:14-19 Thus says the LORD: The toil of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, will pass over to you, and they will be yours; they will walk behind you; in the fetters they will pass over; and to you they will bow down; to you they will pray: "Surely God ***is*** among you, and ***there is*** none else, no God." Truly You ***are*** a God who hides Himself, God of Israel, Savior. They have been ashamed and also disgraced, all of them; together they have gone in humiliation, the craftsmen of images. Israel has been saved by the LORD ***with*** a salvation of ages; you will not be ashamed, and you will not be disgraced, to ages of perpetuity. For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He ***is*** the God), who formed the earth and made it (He established it; He did not create it ***as*** formlessness; He formed it to be dwelt in): I ***am*** the LORD, and ***there is*** none else. I did not speak in secret, in a place of a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, "Seek Me ***in*** formlessness." I ***am*** the LORD, speaking righteousness, declaring upright things.

45:20-25 Gather yourselves and come; draw near together, survivors of the nations. They do not know, those who carry the wood of their carved image, and who pray to a god ***that*** will not save. Declare and bring ***it*** near; indeed, let them take counsel together. Who made this heard from antiquity, ***who*** declared it from then? ***Was it*** not I, the LORD? And ***there is*** no other God besides

Me, a righteous God and a Savior; ***there is*** none besides Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I ***am*** God, and ***there is*** none else. By Myself I have sworn; righteousness has gone out from My mouth, a word, and it will not return, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear. Only in the LORD, ***one*** has said of Me, ***are*** righteousnesses and strength; to Him ***one*** will come, and all who are angry with Him will be ashamed. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel will be justified, and they will boast.

Chapter 45 Preview

In this chapter God speaks directly to Cyrus, the Persian king He named at the end of chapter 44. He will go before Cyrus, break open gates and hand him the treasures of nations, all for the sake of Israel. Cyrus doesn't know the LORD, but the LORD knows him.

Then the chapter widens to the whole world. God answers those who question His ways, promises Israel an everlasting salvation and calls every nation to turn to Him and be saved. One day every knee will bow to Him. Paul applies that promise to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 45 Study

45:1 *Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of, to subdue nations before him, and I will loosen the loins of kings, to open doors before him, and gates will not be shut:*

"Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus." "Anointed" is the Hebrew word from which we get "Messiah." It means someone set apart by God for a task. Cyrus wasn't the Messiah, and he wasn't a believer. But God chose him for one job: to free God's people and let them rebuild.

God holds Cyrus by the right hand, the way a father leads a child. Kings will fall before him and gates will open. Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. with little fighting.

45:2 *I, I will go before you, and I will make the swelling places straight; I will break doors of bronze, and I will cut through bars of iron.*

God promises to go ahead of Cyrus, flatten the rough places and break bronze doors and iron bars. Ancient cities depended on their walls and gates. Babylon's were among the greatest in the world. But no gate is strong enough when God is the One opening it. That is true for us too. When God sends you through a door, nothing can keep it shut (Revelation 3:8).

45:3 *And I will give you treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, so that you may know that I* ***am*** *the LORD, who calls* ***you*** *by your name, the God of Israel.*

God would give Cyrus "treasures of darkness," wealth hidden away in royal storehouses. Cyrus did gather great riches from the kingdoms he conquered, including Lydia and Babylon. But God had a purpose beyond the gold: "so that you may know that I am the LORD." God wanted even this pagan king to recognize who had called him by name.

45:4 *For the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen one, I called you by your name; I surname you, and you have not known Me.*

Here is the reason for everything God does for Cyrus: "For the sake of My servant Jacob." God's main interest wasn't the Persian Empire; He was looking after His people. Notice the phrase "and you have not known Me." God can use people who don't follow Him to bless those who do. He is in charge of the whole world, not just the church.

45:5 *I **am** the LORD, and **there is** none else; besides Me **there is** no God. I will gird you, and you have not known Me,*

"I am the LORD, and there is none else." This line rings through the whole chapter. God says He will "gird" Cyrus, which means to strap on his belt and armor, to prepare him for battle. Again, "and you have not known Me." Why would God help a man who doesn't even worship Him? Because God's plans are bigger than one man, and He was keeping His promises to Israel.

45:6-7 *so that they may know from the rising of the sun and from its setting that **there is** none apart from Me; I **am** the LORD, and **there is** none else, who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates calamity; I **am** the LORD, who does all these **things**.*

God's goal is that people "from the rising of the sun and from its setting," all over the earth, will know there is no other God.

"Who makes peace and creates calamity." The King James Version reads "create evil," which has confused many readers. The Hebrew word here means disaster or trouble, not moral sin. God is never the author of sin (James 1:13). But He is sovereign over both good days and hard days, over the rise of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon. Nothing happens outside His rule.

45:8 *Drip down, heavens, from above, and let clouds pour down righteousness; let **the** earth open, and let them be fruitful **with** salvation, and let it make righteousness sprout together; I, the LORD, have created it.*

Isaiah breaks into a prayer that sounds like a song. He asks the skies to rain down righteousness and the earth to open up and grow salvation. The picture is of a field after the rain, bursting with life. When God acts, right living and rescue spring up together. Notice the last line: "I, the LORD, have created it." This harvest is God's work, not ours.

45:9 *Woe **to him who** contends with the one who formed him, a potsherd with potsherds of the ground! Does the clay say to the one who forms it, "What are you making?" and your work, "He has no hands"?*

Some in Israel must have complained. "A pagan king to save us? What is God doing?" God answers with a picture Isaiah used before (29:16). A clay pot doesn't tell the potter what to do. It doesn't say, "He has no hands." Paul uses this same picture in Romans 9:20-21. When we argue with God's plans, we forget who is the potter and who is the clay.

New Testament links: Romans 9:20 (alluded to)

45:10 *Woe **to him who** says to a father, "What are you fathering?" and to a woman, "What are you in labor with?"*

Imagine a child saying to his father, "What have you begotten?" or to his mother, "What have you brought forth?" It is foolish. A child has no say in being born. In the same way, Israel had no business questioning how God chose to bring about their new birth as a nation. That doesn't mean we can't bring our honest questions to God. It means we don't put Him on trial.

45:11 *Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the One who formed him: Ask Me **about** the coming things; concerning My sons and concerning the work of My hands you command Me.*

God says, "Ask Me about the coming things; concerning My sons and concerning the work of My hands you command Me." Instead of arguing with Him, His people can come to Him and trust Him with the work of His hands. His children are His handiwork. That is a good way to pray: not "God, why are You doing this to me?" but "God, I trust You with what You are making of me."

45:12 *I, I made **the** earth, and I created mankind on it; I, My hands stretched out **the** heavens, and all their host I commanded.*

God reminds them who He is. He made the earth and created man on it. He stretched out the heavens and commands all their "host," the stars. If He did all that with His own hands, He can surely handle the return of some fifty thousand exiles (Ezra 2:64-65). Our biggest problems are small things to the Creator of the universe.

45:13 *I, I have stirred him up in righteousness, and all his ways I will make straight; he, he will build My city, and he will let My exiles go, not for price and not for bribe, says the LORD of armies.*

"I, I have stirred him up in righteousness." God stirred him up, and Ezra 1:1 uses almost the same idea: "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." He would rebuild God's city and free God's exiles.

"Not for price and not for bribe." Conquerors usually demanded ransom to let captives go. Cyrus let the Jews go home freely, and even sent back the gold and silver temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar had taken (Ezra 1:7-11).

45:14 *Thus says the LORD: The toil of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and the Sabeans, men of stature, will pass over to you, and they will be yours; they will walk behind you; in the fetters they will pass over; and to you they will bow down; to you they will pray: "Surely God **is** among you, and **there is** none else, no God."*

Now the picture looks further ahead. The wealth of Egypt, Cush and the Sabeans (tall men from a land south of Egypt) comes to Israel. These nations bow and say, "Surely God is among you, and there is none else, no God." I believe this points to the Millennium, when Christ reigns from Jerusalem and the nations come to worship (Zechariah 8:22-23; 14:16). The chains here, I think, picture full surrender to Israel's God.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 14:25 (alluded to)

45:15 *Truly You **are** a God who hides Himself, God of Israel, Savior.*

"Truly You are a God who hides Himself." This is a confession, probably from Isaiah or from the nations who have just bowed. God often works out of sight, through a pagan king, through exile, through hard years, and we don't see His hand until later. Many believers know this feeling. God may seem hidden, but He is still "Savior." Hidden doesn't mean absent.

45:16 *They have been ashamed and also disgraced, all of them; together they have gone in humiliation, the craftsmen of images.*

Those who make idols go off together in disgrace. The two outcomes in this chapter are sharp. Idol makers end in shame. Israel, in the next verse, ends in salvation. There is no middle ground. Every person will one day either be ashamed of what he trusted or glad he trusted the LORD.

45:17 *Israel has been saved by the LORD **with** a salvation of ages; you will not be ashamed, and you will not be disgraced, to ages of perpetuity.*

"A salvation of ages." The return from Babylon was a real salvation, but it didn't last forever. Israel was later conquered again. So this promise reaches further, to the salvation God brings through the Messiah. Paul says "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). I believe that promise is still ahead for the nation, and that God will keep it. Those who belong to Him will never be put to shame.

45:18 *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He **is** the God), who formed the earth and made it (He established it; He did not create it **as** formlessness; He formed it to be dwelt in): I **am** the LORD, and **there is** none else.*

God made the earth "to be dwelt in." He "did not create it as formlessness," empty and wasted. That is the same Hebrew word, tohu, used in Genesis 1:2, where the earth "was formlessness and emptiness." God's purpose in creation was a world full of life and people who know Him. That purpose hasn't changed, and the new earth will fulfill it (Revelation 21:3).

45:19 *I did not speak in secret, in a place of a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, "Seek Me **in** formlessness." I **am** the LORD, speaking righteousness, declaring upright things.*

God didn't speak in secret like the pagan oracles, whose answers were murky and hidden. He spoke openly to Israel, through Moses and the prophets. He never told them, "Seek Me in formlessness," as if looking for Him were useless. When God speaks, He tells the truth and says what is right. If you seek Him, you will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13).

45:20 *Gather yourselves and come; draw near together, survivors of the nations. They do not know, those who carry the wood of their carved image, and who pray to a god **that** will not save.*

God calls the "survivors of the nations," the survivors from the peoples who will be defeated. They carry their wooden idols around, praying to gods that can't save. Think of it: the idol has to be carried. The LORD carries His people (46:3-4). This invitation is the first hint of the open door coming in verse 22.

45:21 *Declare and bring **it** near; indeed, let them take counsel together. Who made this heard from antiquity, **who** declared it from then? **Was it** not I, the LORD? And **there is** no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; **there is** none besides Me.*

Once more God sets up His courtroom. Who told about these things long ago? Was it not the LORD? He calls Himself "A righteous God and a Savior." Those two belong together, and that is a wonder. A righteous judge must punish sin. A Savior rescues sinners. At the cross of Jesus both are true at once. God stays just, and He saves those who believe (Romans 3:26).

45:22 *Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I **am** God, and **there is** none else.*

"Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth." Here the gospel invitation goes out past Israel to every nation on earth. Salvation is as simple as turning to God and looking to Him.

It doesn't ask you to earn anything or climb anywhere. It asks you to turn. I believe that invitation now comes to us through Jesus Christ, the only Savior. If you have never turned to Him, today is the day.

45:23 *By Myself I have sworn; righteousness has gone out from My mouth, a word, and it will not return, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear.*

God swears by Himself, since there is no one greater to swear by (Hebrews 6:13). His word won't be taken back: "to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear."

Paul quotes this verse twice. In Romans 14:11 he applies it to the final judgment. In Philippians 2:10-11 he says every knee will bow "at the name of Jesus" and every tongue confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord." What Isaiah says of the LORD, Paul says of Jesus. I believe that tells us plainly who Jesus is.

New Testament links: Philippians 2:10-11 (quoted); Romans 14:11 (quoted)

45:24 *Only in the LORD, **one** has said of Me, **are** righteousnesses and strength; to Him **one** will come, and all who are angry with Him will be ashamed.*

On that day people will confess, "Only in the LORD ... are righteousnesses and strength." Righteousness is being right with God. Strength is the power to live for Him. Neither comes from ourselves. Those who were angry at God will come to Him too, but in shame. Every knee will bow, some in joy and some in defeat. Better to bow now, willingly.

45:25 *In the LORD all the offspring of Israel will be justified, and they will boast.*

Last of all, God speaks to Israel. "All the offspring of Israel" will be justified, declared right with God, and will boast in the LORD. That word "justified" is the same idea Paul uses for how God declares sinners righteous by faith. I believe this looks ahead to the day Israel as a nation turns to Jesus, the One they once rejected.

Chapter 45 Summary

God speaks to Cyrus, calling him His anointed and promising to open gates and hand him the treasures of nations, all for Israel's sake, though Cyrus doesn't know Him. God answers those who question His plan with the picture of the potter and the clay. He promises Israel an everlasting salvation and calls all the ends of the earth to turn to Him and be saved. He swears that every knee will bow to Him, a promise Paul applies to Jesus Christ.

Who Was Cyrus?

Cyrus II (44:28; 45:1), often called Cyrus the Great, was king of Persia and founder of the Persian Empire. He conquered the Medes, then Lydia in Asia Minor, and took Babylon in 539 B.C.

His decree (Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23): in his first year as ruler of Babylon, about 538 B.C., Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. He also returned the temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar had taken.

The Cyrus Cylinder: a clay cylinder found in Babylon in the 1800s records Cyrus returning the gods and people of several Mesopotamian cities to their homes. It doesn't name the Jews, but it shows the kind of thing Ezra says he did.

Chapter 45 Study Questions

1. Have you ever seen God work through someone who didn't know Him?
2. What does God promise to do for Cyrus, and why? (45:1-4)
3. What does it mean that God makes "peace" and creates "calamity"? (45:7)
4. What picture does God use to answer those who question Him? (45:9-10)
5. How did Cyrus let the exiles go? (45:13)
6. Why does Isaiah call God "a God who hides Himself"? (45:15)
7. Who is invited to turn to God and be saved? (45:22)
8. How does Paul use Isaiah 45:23 to show who Jesus is? (Philippians 2:10-11)
9. Is there a part of God's plan for your life that you have been arguing with like the clay with the potter?

Chapter 46: The God Who Carries

Scripture: The Idols of Babylon and the God of Israel

46:1-7 Bel has bowed down; Nebo is stooping low; their idols have become ***a load*** for the beast and for the livestock; the things you carry ***are*** loaded, a load for a weary ***one***. They have stooped low; they have bowed down together; they have not been able to rescue the load, and their soul has gone into captivity. Listen to Me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been loaded from ***the*** belly, who have been carried from ***the*** womb: and to old age I ***am*** He, and to gray hair I, I will bear ***you***; I, I have made ***you***, and I, I will carry, and I, I will bear and will rescue. To whom will you liken Me and make ***Me*** equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike? Those who pour out gold from a bag, and weigh out silver on the scale, hire a refiner, and he makes it a god; they prostrate themselves; indeed, they bow down. They lift it up on ***the*** shoulder; they bear it, and they set it down in its place, and it stands; from its place it does not move. Indeed, ***one*** cries out to it, and it does not answer; it does not save him from his trouble.

46:8-13 Remember this, and be firm; bring ***it*** back to heart, transgressors. Remember former things from long ago, for I ***am*** God, and ***there is*** none else; ***I am*** God, and ***there is*** none like Me, declaring the end from ***the*** beginning, and from antiquity what has not been done, saying, "My counsel will stand, and all My desire I will do," calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My counsel from a far land. Indeed, I have spoken; indeed, I will bring it ***about***; I have formed ***it***; indeed, I will do it. Listen to Me, mighty of heart, who ***are*** far from righteousness: I have brought near My righteousness; it is not far away, and My salvation will not delay; and I will give salvation in Zion, to Israel My beauty.

Chapter 46 Preview

Chapter 46 is short, and it draws a sharp contrast. Babylon's chief gods, Bel and Nebo, are loaded onto carts and hauled away like baggage when the city falls. The idols can't save the people. They have to be carried by them.

The God of Israel is the opposite. He has carried His people from birth, and He promises to carry them into old age. He declares the end from the beginning, and what He plans, He does. The chapter closes by calling stubborn hearts to come near to His salvation.

Chapter 46 Study

46:1 *Bel has bowed down; Nebo is stooping low; their idols have become **a load** for the beast and for the livestock; the things you carry **are** loaded, a load for a weary **one**.*

Bel and Nebo were two of Babylon's greatest gods. Bel ("lord") was a title for Marduk, the city's chief god. Nebo was his son, the god of writing and wisdom, whose name shows up in the name Nebuchadnezzar. At Babylon's festivals their images were paraded through the streets in glory.

Isaiah sees a different parade. When Babylon falls, these gods are loaded onto animals and carted off. The beasts that carry them are weary. The gods are a "burden," a heavy load and nothing more.

46:2 *They have stooped low; they have bowed down together; they have not been able to rescue the load, and their soul has gone into captivity.*

"They have not been able to rescue the load." The gods couldn't even save their own statues, much less their worshipers. Instead "their soul has gone into captivity." Conquerors in that world often carried off the gods of the people they defeated as trophies. A god who can be captured is no god at all.

46:3 *Listen to Me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been loaded from **the** belly, who have been carried from **the** womb:*

Now God speaks to "the remnant of the house of Israel." A remnant is the small group that is left after judgment, the faithful survivors God keeps for Himself. God reminds them that He has carried them "from the belly" and "from the womb." Israel didn't carry God around. God carried Israel, ever since He made them a people in Egypt.

46:4 *and to old age I **am** He, and to gray hair I, I will bear **you**; I, I have made **you**, and I, I will carry, and I, I will bear and will rescue.*

"To old age I am He." God doesn't tire of His people as the years go by. When strength fails and hair turns gray, He says, "I will bear you." He made us, He will carry us and He will deliver us.

If you are getting older, or caring for someone who is, hold onto this verse. You were never meant to carry yourself. The God who carried you as a child still carries you now.

46:5 *To whom will you liken Me and make **Me** equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?*

God asks again, "To whom will you liken Me?" (compare 40:18, 25). There is nothing in heaven or on earth to compare Him with. Every idol is an attempt to make God smaller, something we can see, handle and control. But God won't be shrunk down to our size.

46:6 *Those who pour out gold from a bag, and weigh out silver on the scale, hire a refiner, and he makes it a god; they prostrate themselves; indeed, they bow down.*

Isaiah describes how an idol gets made. A rich man pours out gold from his purse and weighs his silver. He hires a goldsmith, who makes a god out of it. Then they bow down and worship it. Notice who is in charge. The man pays for the god, and the craftsman shapes it. The "god" has no say at all. How can something you bought be your Lord?

46:7 *They lift it up on **the** shoulder; they bear it, and they set it down in its place, and it stands; from its place it does not move. Indeed, **one** cries out to it, and it does not answer; it does not save him from his trouble.*

They carry the idol on their shoulders and set it in place, and there it stays. It can't move. When someone cries out to it in trouble, it can't answer and can't save. Compare that with the LORD, who hears His people when they call and comes to rescue them (Psalm 34:17). A god who can't hear is a god who can't help.

46:8 *Remember this, and be firm; bring **it** back to heart, transgressors.*

"Remember this." God calls the "transgressors," those who rebel against Him, to think it through and stand firm. Many Israelites in exile were tempted to worship Babylon's gods, which seemed to be winning. God says, Stop and remember what you have just seen. Stand like a man on solid ground. Don't be pulled away by what looks powerful today.

46:9 *Remember former things from long ago, for I **am** God, and **there is** none else; **I am** God, and **there is** none like Me,*

"Remember former things from long ago." Now God calls them to remember their own history: the Exodus, the wilderness, the conquest of the land, His promises kept one after another. Remembering what God has done is one of the best ways to trust what He will do.

"There is none like Me." That is the message of these chapters in a single sentence.

46:10 *declaring the end from **the** beginning, and from antiquity what has not been done, saying, "My counsel will stand, and all My desire I will do,"*

"Declaring the end from the beginning." This is what prophecy is: history written in advance. God tells the end of the story before the story begins, because He is the author. Nothing surprises Him.

"My counsel will stand." People make plans and see them fall apart. God's plans don't fail. That is why I take Bible prophecy at face value. What God said about the past came true exactly. What He says about the future, including the return of Christ, will come true as well.

46:11 *calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My counsel from a far land. Indeed, I have spoken; indeed, I will bring it **about**; I have formed **it**; indeed, I will do it.*

God calls "a bird of prey from the east." This is Cyrus, coming from Persia, east of Babylon, swift and strong like an eagle on its prey. God calls him "the man of My counsel." Then God makes four statements, one after another: I have spoken, I will bring it to pass, I have planned it, I will do it. There is no gap between God's word and God's deed.

46:12 *Listen to Me, mighty of heart, who **are** far from righteousness:*

God speaks to the "mighty of heart," people proud and hard, and "far from righteousness." That describes many in Israel at the time, and it describes every one of us apart from God's grace.

Notice that God doesn't walk away from stubborn people. He calls them to listen. Hard hearts are still within reach of His voice.

46:13 *I have brought near My righteousness; it is not far away, and My salvation will not delay; and I will give salvation in Zion, to Israel My beauty.*

"I have brought near My righteousness; it is not far away." The stubborn are far from righteousness, so God brings it near. We could never reach it, so He comes to us. That is the gospel in a sentence.

"My salvation will not delay." God promises salvation in Zion and His glory for Israel. The return from Babylon was a first step. The full answer came in Jesus Christ, and the final glory for Israel will come when He returns to reign from Jerusalem.

Chapter 46 Summary

Babylon's great gods, Bel and Nebo, are hauled away on weary animals when the city falls, unable even to save themselves. The LORD is the opposite: He has carried Israel from birth and promises to carry them into old age. Idols must be bought, made and carried, and they can't answer when people cry out. God declares the end from the beginning, calls Cyrus like a bird of prey from the east and brings His righteousness near to stubborn hearts.

Bel and Nebo

Bel (46:1): a title meaning "lord," used for Marduk, the chief god of the city of Babylon. Jeremiah also foretold his shame (Jeremiah 50:2; 51:44).

Nebo (46:1): the Babylonian god of writing and wisdom, son of Marduk. His name appears in the names of Babylonian kings such as Nebuchadnezzar, and in Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard (2 Kings 25:8).

Chapter 46 Study Questions

1. Who carried you, in one way or another, when you were young?
2. What happens to Bel and Nebo when Babylon falls? (46:1-2)
3. What does God promise His people from birth to old age? (46:3-4)
4. How is an idol made, and what can it not do? (46:6-7)
5. Why does God tell His people to remember the former things? (46:8-9)
6. What does it mean that God declares "the end from the beginning"? (46:10)
7. What does God do for those who are "far from righteousness"? (46:12-13)
8. Are you trying to carry something in your life that God wants to carry for you?
9. How can remembering what God has done in the past help you trust Him for the future?

Chapter 47: The Fall of the Queen

Scripture: Judgment on Babylon

47:1-7 Go down and sit on ***the*** dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the earth, ***where there is*** no throne, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you will not again ***have them*** call you tender and delicate. Take a pair of millstones and grind flour; uncover your veil; strip off ***the*** skirt; uncover ***the*** leg; pass through rivers. Let your nakedness be uncovered; also your reproach will be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will not meet a man. Our Redeemer, the LORD of armies ***is*** His name, the Holy One of Israel. Sit silently and go into the darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you will not again ***have them*** call you mistress of kingdoms. I was angry with My people; I profaned My inheritance, and I gave them into your hand; you did not set compassion for them; on the old man you made your yoke exceedingly heavy. And you said, "I will be mistress forever," so that you did not lay these ***things*** on your heart; you did not remember its end.

47:8-15 And now hear this, voluptuous ***one***, who sits in security, who says in her heart, "I ***am***, and besides me ***there is*** none else; I will not sit ***as*** a widow, and I will not know loss of children." And these two ***things*** will come to you in a moment, in one day: loss of children and widowhood; in their completeness they will come on you, in the abundance of your sorceries, in the very great power of your spells. And you trusted in your evil; you said, "***There is*** no one who sees me." Your wisdom and your knowledge, it has turned you away; and you said in your heart, "I ***am***, and besides me ***there is*** none else." And evil will come on you; you will not know ***how*** to charm it away; and disaster will fall on you; you will not be able to cover it; and ruin will come on you suddenly, ***which*** you will not know. Stand now in your spells and in the abundance of your sorceries, in which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit; perhaps you will strike terror. You are weary with the abundance of your counsels; let them stand now and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who make known at the new moons, from what will come on you. Look, they have become like chaff; fire has burned them; they will not deliver their soul from the hand of the flame; ***there is*** no coal to warm them, ***no*** fire to sit before it. So they have become to you, those ***for*** whom you have labored, your traders from your youth; they have wandered, each man to his side; ***there is*** none saving you.

Chapter 47 Preview

In chapter 46 Babylon's gods fell. In chapter 47 the city itself falls. Isaiah pictures Babylon as a proud queen, pampered and sure of herself, who is pulled off her throne and made to sit in the dust like a slave girl.

Babylon's sins are named plainly: cruelty to God's people, arrogance that says "I am, and besides me there is none else," and trust in sorcery and astrology. None of it can save her. Many of these words return in Revelation 18, where the end-times Babylon falls "in one day."

Chapter 47 Study

47:1 *Go down and sit on **the** dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the earth, **where there is** no throne, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you will not again **have them** call you tender and delicate.*

"Go down and sit on the dust." Babylon is called a "virgin daughter," meaning a city never before conquered. She was "tender and delicate," used to luxury. Now she must leave her throne and sit on the ground, the posture of mourning and humiliation.

This is the real city of Babylon and its empire. The Chaldeans were its ruling people. Isaiah wrote this before Babylon became the great power that destroyed Jerusalem. God was already announcing her fall.

47:2 *Take a pair of millstones and grind flour; uncover your veil; strip off **the** skirt; uncover **the** leg; pass through rivers.*

The queen is put to work like the lowest servant. Grinding grain at the millstone was the job of slaves and captives. She must lift her veil, strip off her long skirt and wade across rivers barefoot. This is a picture of a proud woman marched off into exile, the very thing Babylon did to others.

47:3 *Let your nakedness be uncovered; also your reproach will be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will not meet a man.*

Babylon's shame will be exposed for all to see. Then God says, "I will take vengeance." God's vengeance is the just punishment of a holy Judge, nothing like petty, out-of-control human revenge. Paul tells believers, "not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath," because vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19). We can leave wrongs in His hands.

47:4 *Our Redeemer, the LORD of armies **is** His name, the Holy One of Israel.*

In the middle of this judgment, Isaiah's voice breaks in with praise. "Our Redeemer, the LORD of armies is His name." The fall of Babylon is bad news for Babylon but good news for God's people. The One judging the proud empire is the same One redeeming His humble people. The "Holy One of Israel" is Isaiah's favorite title for God.

47:5 *Sit silently and go into the darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you will not again **have them** call you mistress of kingdoms.*

Babylon is sent into silence and darkness. She will no longer be called "mistress of kingdoms." For a time Babylon really was the greatest kingdom on earth. Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 pictured it as a head of gold. But God put a limit on that glory. Every earthly kingdom has an end date. Only Christ's kingdom lasts forever (Daniel 2:44).

47:6 *I was angry with My people; I profaned My inheritance, and I gave them into your hand; you did not set compassion for them; on the old man you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.*

God explains. He was angry with His own people and handed them over to Babylon as discipline. Babylon was God's tool. But Babylon went too far. "You did not set compassion for them." Even on

the old man Babylon made her yoke heavy. God uses nations to discipline, but He still holds them responsible for their cruelty. Being used by God isn't the same as being approved by Him.

47:7 *And you said, "I will be mistress forever," so that you did not lay these **things** on your heart; you did not remember its end.*

"I will be mistress forever." Babylon thought her power would never end. She "did not remember its end," where her choices would lead. Pride always forgets the end of the road. Jesus told a story about a rich man who planned to build bigger barns and take life easy, and God said, "Fool! This night they are demanding your soul from you" (Luke 12:20).

New Testament links: Revelation 18:7 (alluded to)

47:8 *And now hear this, voluptuous **one**, who sits in security, who says in her heart, "I **am**, and besides me **there is** none else; I will not sit **as** a widow, and I will not know loss of children."*

God calls Babylon "voluptuous one," living at ease and feeling safe. Then He quotes what she says in her heart: "I am, and besides me there is none else." That is the language God uses for Himself (45:5-6). Babylon has put herself in God's place. She also says she will never be a widow or lose children. Revelation 18:7 echoes this when the end-times Babylon says, "I sit as queen, and I am not a widow."

New Testament links: Revelation 18:7 (alluded to)

47:9 *And these two **things** will come to you in a moment, in one day: loss of children and widowhood; in their completeness they will come on you, in the abundance of your sorceries, in the very great power of your spells.*

"In a moment, in one day." The two losses Babylon was sure would never come will come all at once. Babylon fell to Cyrus in a single night in 539 B.C. Daniel 5 tells of the feast that ended with the king slain that same night (Daniel 5:30).

Revelation 18:8 uses the same words of the final Babylon: "in one day her plagues will come." I believe the ancient city is the first fulfillment, and that Revelation picks up the name for the world system of the last days. Babylon's many "sorceries" (magic and spells) won't stop it either time.

New Testament links: Revelation 18:8 (alluded to)

47:10 *And you trusted in your evil; you said, "**There is** no one who sees me." Your wisdom and your knowledge, it has turned you away; and you said in your heart, "I **am**, and besides me **there is** none else."*

Babylon felt safe in her wickedness and said, "No one sees me." That is what sinners have always told themselves. But God sees everything (Hebrews 4:13). Babylon's famous wisdom and learning didn't make her wise. They led her astray. Knowledge without the fear of the LORD only makes a person a more skillful fool.

47:11 *And evil will come on you; you will not know **how** to charm it away; and disaster will fall on you; you will not be able to cover it; and ruin will come on you suddenly, **which** you will not know.*

Disaster is coming that Babylon can't "charm it away" with spells. She "will not be able to cover it," can't pay her way out. It will come suddenly, and she won't see it coming. There is only one way to be protected from God's judgment, and that is God's own provision of mercy. For us, that provision is the blood of Christ.

47:12 *Stand now in your spells and in the abundance of your sorceries, in which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit; perhaps you will strike terror.*

Now God mocks Babylon's magic. "Stand now in your spells." Go ahead, try your sorceries, the ones you have worked at since you were young. "Perhaps" they will help. Of course they won't. The repeated "perhaps" shows how empty they are. You can't bet your life on a "perhaps."

47:13 *You are weary with the abundance of your counsels; let them stand now and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who make known at the new moons, from what will come on you.*

Babylon was famous for astrology, reading the stars to predict the future. Isaiah names the astrologers, the stargazers and those who make predictions by the new moon. Let them stand up and save you! God forbade His people to practice these things (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Horoscopes and fortune telling are still popular today. They are just as useless now as they were in Babylon.

47:14 *Look, they have become like chaff; fire has burned them; they will not deliver their soul from the hand of the flame; **there is** no coal to warm them, **no** fire to sit before it.*

"Look, they have become like chaff." Chaff is the dry husk left over when grain is threshed. It burns in a moment. The astrologers can't even save themselves from the flame. This isn't a cozy fire to sit by and warm your hands. It is a fire of judgment that leaves nothing behind.

47:15 *So they have become to you, those **for** whom you have labored, your traders from your youth; they have wandered, each man to his side; **there is** none saving you.*

Babylon is left alone at the end. The traders and partners Babylon dealt with since her youth all wander off, each his own way. "There is none saving you." In Revelation 18 the merchants of the earth likewise stand far off and weep for the fallen city, but they don't help her (Revelation 18:11, 15). The world's friends disappear in the day of judgment. Only God saves.

Chapter 47 Summary

Isaiah pictures Babylon as a pampered queen pulled from her throne to sit in the dust and grind grain like a slave. God had used Babylon to discipline Israel, but Babylon showed no mercy and claimed for herself, "I am, and besides me there is none else." Her losses will come suddenly in one day, and her sorceries and astrologers can't save her. Her friends will wander away. Revelation 18 takes up the same words for the fall of the end-times Babylon.

Babylon in Isaiah and Revelation

Babylon (47:1): an ancient city on the Euphrates River in what is now Iraq. Under Nebuchadnezzar it destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. and took the people of Judah into exile.

Its fall (47:9): Babylon fell to Cyrus of Persia in 539 B.C. Daniel 5 tells of that night.

Babylon in Revelation (Revelation 17-18): John uses the name "Babylon the great" for the proud, godless world system of the end times. Many of Isaiah's words reappear there: the queen who is "not a widow," and judgment that comes "in one day."

Chapter 47 Study Questions

1. What are some ways our culture tells people they are in control of their own future?
2. How does God describe Babylon before and after her fall? (47:1-3)
3. Why was God angry with Babylon, even though He had used her to discipline Israel? (47:6)
4. What did Babylon say in her heart? (47:7-8, 10)
5. How do Babylon's words compare with Revelation 18:7-8? (47:8-9)
6. What does God say about astrologers and sorcerers? (47:12-14)
7. What happens to Babylon's partners and traders? (47:15)
8. Where are you tempted to feel secure apart from God, as Babylon did?
9. How does it comfort you that God sees every injustice done to His people?

Chapter 48: Refined in the Furnace

Scripture: Stubborn Israel Called Out of Babylon

48:1-8 Listen to this, house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and who came out from the waters of Judah, who swear by the name of the LORD and make mention of the God of Israel, not in truth and not in righteousness. For they have called themselves after the city of holiness, and they have supported themselves on the God of Israel; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name. The former things I declared from then, and they went out from My mouth, and I made them heard; suddenly I acted, and they came. Because I knew that you ***are*** stubborn, and your neck ***is*** a sinew of iron, and your forehead bronze, I declared ***them*** to you from then; before ***it*** came I made ***it*** heard to you, lest you should say, "My idol did them, and my carved image and my molten image commanded them." You have heard; look at all of it; and you, will you not declare ***it***? I have made you hear new things from now, and hidden things, and you have not known them. Now they have been created, and not from then; and before today you had not heard them, lest you should say, "Look, I knew them." Neither have you heard, nor have you known, nor from then has your ear been opened; for I knew ***that*** you would surely act treacherously, and "a transgressor from ***the*** womb" you have been called.

48:9-16 For the sake of My name I will lengthen My anger, and ***for*** My praise I will restrain ***it*** for you, so as not to cut you off. Look, I have refined you, and not with silver; I have chosen you in a furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake I will act; for how should ***it*** be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another. Listen to Me, Jacob, and Israel, My called one: I ***am*** He; I ***am*** first; indeed, I ***am*** last. Indeed, My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; I call to them; they stand together. Gather together, all of you, and listen. Who among them has declared these ***things***? The LORD loves him; he will do His pleasure on Babylon, and his arm ***will be on*** the Chaldeans. I, I have spoken; indeed, I have called him; I have brought him, and he will make his way successful. Draw near to Me; listen to this: from ***the*** beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time it came to be, I ***was*** there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit.

48:17-22 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I ***am*** the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who makes you tread in the way ***that*** you should go. Oh that you had paid attention to My commandments! And your peace would have been like the river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; and your offspring would have been like the sand, and the descendants of your inward parts like its grains; his name would not be cut off and would not be destroyed from before Me. Go out from Babylon; flee from ***the*** Chaldeans; with a voice of a shout of joy declare, make this heard; send it out to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob." And they did not thirst ***when*** He led them through the waste places; He made water flow from a rock for them; and He split a rock, and waters gushed out. ***There is*** no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked.

Chapter 48 Preview

After judging Babylon in chapter 47, God turns to His own people. They use His name and claim His city, but their hearts are hard. God reminds them that He told them the future ahead of time so they could never give the credit to an idol.

Yet God doesn't cut them off. For His own name's sake He holds back His anger and refines them in the furnace of affliction. He wishes they had listened, and He calls them to leave Babylon with a shout of joy. The chapter ends with a warning that marks a turning point in the book: "There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked."

Chapter 48 Study

48:1 *Listen to this, house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and who came out from the waters of Judah, who swear by the name of the LORD and make mention of the God of Israel, not in truth and not in righteousness.*

God addresses the "house of Jacob" by all its proud names: Israel, descended from Judah, people who swear by the LORD's name. But then comes the hard line: "not in truth and not in righteousness." They said the right words, but their lives didn't match. It is possible to know all the right religious language and still not truly know God. Jesus said the same of people who honored Him with their lips while their hearts were far away (Matthew 15:8).

48:2 *For they have called themselves after the city of holiness, and they have supported themselves on the God of Israel; the LORD of armies **is** His name.*

They called themselves citizens of "the city of holiness" and claimed to lean on the God of Israel. Being from Jerusalem made them feel safe. But a holy address doesn't make a holy heart. Today some people trust that their church membership or their family's faith will carry them. God looks for faith that is real, not borrowed.

48:3 *The former things I declared from then, and they went out from My mouth, and I made them heard; suddenly I acted, and they came.*

God told "the former things" long ago, and then He acted suddenly, and they happened. Throughout Israel's history, God announced events in advance through His prophets and then brought them about. That pattern is the proof of who He is.

48:4 *Because I knew that you **are** stubborn, and your neck **is** a sinew of iron, and your forehead bronze,*

Here God is blunt. He knew Israel was "stubborn." Their necks were like iron, unwilling to bend, and their foreheads like bronze, hard and unashamed. A stiff neck is a picture of an ox that won't take the yoke. God had called Israel stiff-necked as far back as the golden calf (Exodus 32:9). Nothing had changed.

48:5 *I declared **them** to you from then; before **it** came I made **it** heard to you, lest you should say, "My idol did them, and my carved image and my molten image commanded them."*

That stubbornness is the reason God announced things ahead of time. If He had acted without telling them, they would have said, "My idol did it." God took that excuse away. Every fulfilled prophecy points to the LORD and no one else. God's foreknowledge isn't only a show of power. It is a mercy to hard hearts.

48:6 *You have heard; look at all of it; and you, will you not declare **it**? I have made you hear new things from now, and hidden things, and you have not known them.*

"You have heard; look at all of it." God asks them to admit what they have seen. Then He tells them that from now on He will reveal "new things," hidden things they didn't know. The fall of Babylon and the return home were new. Beyond that lay even greater new things: the coming of the Servant and the salvation of the nations, which the rest of Isaiah unfolds.

48:7 *Now they have been created, and not from then; and before today you had not heard them, lest you should say, "Look, I knew them."*

These new things "have been created" now, brought into being at God's chosen time. No one could say, "I knew that already." God reveals some things only when the time is right, so that no one can boast in his own wisdom. Our part is to listen and receive, not to pretend we figured it out ourselves.

48:8 *Neither have you heard, nor have you known, nor from then has your ear been opened; for I knew **that** you would surely act treacherously, and "a transgressor from **the** womb" you have been called.*

"A transgressor from the womb you have been called." God is honest about His people. He knew they would act treacherously, and from the start they did. Their ears were closed. This is a picture of the human heart, not only Israel's. David said, "In sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). We all need a grace we didn't earn.

48:9 *For the sake of My name I will lengthen My anger, and **for** My praise I will restrain **it** for you, so as not to cut you off.*

So why didn't God just wipe them out? "For the sake of My name I will lengthen My anger." God's patience with Israel was rooted in His own character and His reputation among the nations. He had made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He would keep them. God's mercy toward us rests on who He is, not on who we are.

48:10 *Look, I have refined you, and not with silver; I have chosen you in a furnace of affliction.*

"I have chosen you in a furnace of affliction." Silver is refined in fire to burn off the impurities. God says, "I have refined you, and not with silver." Many take that to mean He didn't turn the heat up as high as silver requires, or Israel would have been consumed. The exile was a furnace, but a measured one.

God still uses hard seasons this way in the lives of His people. Peter says the testing of our faith is more precious than gold "tested by fire," so that it "may be found for praise and honor and glory" when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7). For those of us in Christ, the furnace is there to purify us, not to pay us back.

48:11 *For My own sake, for My own sake I will act; for how should **it** be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.*

"For My own sake, for My own sake." The doubling is deliberate. God won't let His name be dragged through the mud. "My glory I will not give to another" (compare 42:8). If God abandoned Israel, the nations would say Babylon's gods were stronger. So God acts to save, and His glory is shown. Our salvation and His glory go hand in hand.

48:12 *Listen to Me, Jacob, and Israel, My called one: I **am** He; I **am** first; indeed, I **am** last.*

"Listen to Me, Jacob." God calls them by name. "I am He; I am first; indeed, I am last." This is the title from 44:6 again, and the title Jesus claims in Revelation 1:17. The One who was there at the beginning will be there at the end. Whatever comes in between is in His hands.

New Testament links: Revelation 1:17 (alluded to); Revelation 2:8 (alluded to)

48:13 *Indeed, My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; I call to them; they stand together.*

God's hand laid the foundations of the earth, and His right hand spread out the sky. When He calls the heavens and the earth, they stand to attention, like servants waiting for orders. If creation itself answers when God calls, how much more should His people answer when He calls them?

48:14 *Gather together, all of you, and listen. Who among them has declared these **things**? The LORD loves him; he will do His pleasure on Babylon, and his arm **will be on** the Chaldeans.*

God gathers everyone to listen. Which of the idols ever foretold this? Of the one He has chosen to carry out His will on Babylon, God says, "The LORD loves him." In context this is Cyrus, the one whose "arm will be on the Chaldeans." It is striking that God says this of a pagan king. It shows God's favor resting on the man He chose for the task.

48:15 *I, I have spoken; indeed, I have called him; I have brought him, and he will make his way successful.*

"I, I have spoken." God called Cyrus, brought him and made his ways succeed. Cyrus's victories were God's doing, not luck or military skill alone. History isn't a string of accidents. It is God carrying out His word.

48:16 *Draw near to Me; listen to this: from **the** beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time it came to be, I **was** there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit.*

"And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and His Spirit." Suddenly a new speaker appears. Someone says the Lord GOD has sent Him, and God's Spirit is named right alongside. Bible teachers differ on

who is speaking. Some say Isaiah. I believe it is the Servant, the Messiah, stepping forward just before chapter 49, where He speaks again in the first person.

If that is right, this verse gives us a glimpse of the Father who sends, the Son who is sent and the Spirit. It fits what Jesus said about Himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me" (Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah 61:1).

48:17 *Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I **am** the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who makes you tread in the way **that** you should go.*

God calls Himself Israel's Redeemer and teacher. He "teaches you to profit" and "makes you tread in the way that you should go." God's commands are the instructions of a loving teacher who knows the road ahead. Following Him is how life works best.

48:18 *Oh that you had paid attention to My commandments! And your peace would have been like the river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea;*

"Oh that you had paid attention to My commandments!" You can hear the ache in God's voice. If Israel had obeyed, their peace (the Hebrew word "shalom") would have flowed like a river, never running dry. Their righteousness would have rolled in like the waves of the sea, one after another.

Obedience doesn't earn God's love. But disobedience costs us the peace He wanted us to have. Is there an area where you are missing the river because you haven't listened?

48:19 *and your offspring would have been like the sand, and the descendants of your inward parts like its grains; his name would not be cut off and would not be destroyed from before Me.*

Their children would have been as many as the sand, the very promise God gave Abraham (Genesis 22:17). Their name would never have been cut off. Instead, the exile had shrunk the nation. Yet God's promise to Abraham wasn't cancelled. It will still be kept, but Israel had to walk a harder road to get there.

48:20 *Go out from Babylon; flee from **the** Chaldeans; with a voice of a shout of joy declare, make this heard; send it out to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob."*

"Go out from Babylon." Isaiah speaks as if the day has already come. Flee from the Chaldeans and shout the news to the ends of the earth: "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob." This happened when the exiles left Babylon after Cyrus's decree in 538 B.C.

The same call rings out in Revelation 18:4: "Come out of her, My people." God's people are always called to come out from the world's Babylon, its pride and its sin, and not to share in her judgment.

New Testament links: Revelation 18:4 (alluded to)

48:21 *And they did not thirst **when** He led them through the waste places; He made water flow from a rock for them; and He split a rock, and waters gushed out.*

As the exiles head home, Isaiah reminds them of the first exodus. In the wilderness, God split the rock and water gushed out (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11). They didn't die of thirst. The God who provided then will provide on the road home from Babylon. Paul says that rock was a picture of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

48:22 ***There is*** *no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked.*

"There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked." This short line closes the section. It comes again at 57:21, and the book itself closes on a similar warning (66:24). Many see it dividing chapters 40 to 66 into three parts of nine chapters each.

The return from Babylon was good news, but not for everyone. Those who keep rebelling against God won't find peace, no matter where they live. Real peace comes only by being made right with God, and that is what the Servant in the next chapters comes to bring.

Chapter 48 Summary

God rebukes Israel for using His name without truth or righteousness. Knowing how stubborn they were, He announced events beforehand so they couldn't credit idols, and now He reveals new things. For His own name's sake He holds back His wrath and refines them in the furnace of affliction. He grieves that they didn't obey, which would have given them peace like a river. He calls them out of Babylon with joy, and warns that there is no peace for the wicked.

Chapter 48 Study Questions

1. Have you ever known something was coming and still been surprised when it arrived?
2. What was wrong with the way Israel used God's name? (48:1-2)
3. Why did God declare events long before they happened? (48:3-5)
4. Why does God hold back His wrath from Israel? (48:9-11)
5. What does it mean to be refined in "a furnace of affliction"? (48:10)
6. Who do you think speaks in 48:16, and why? (48:16)
7. What would Israel have had if they had obeyed? (48:18-19)
8. What "furnace" has God used in your life, and what did He burn away?
9. What would it look like for you to "go out from Babylon" this week?

Chapter 49: A Light to the Nations

Scripture: The Second Servant Song and the Restoration of Zion

49:1-7 Listen to Me, coastlands, and pay attention, peoples, from far away: the LORD called Me from ***the*** womb; from the inward parts of My mother He made mention of My name. And He made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He hid Me; and He made Me into a polished arrow; in His quiver He concealed Me. And He said to Me, "You ***are*** My servant, Israel, in whom I will glorify Myself." And I, I said, "I have labored for emptiness; I have spent My strength for formlessness and vanity; truly My justice ***is*** with the LORD, and My reward with My God." And now says the LORD, who formed Me from ***the*** womb ***to be*** His servant, to bring back Jacob to Him, and ***that*** Israel might be gathered to Him (and I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and My God has been My strength); and He said, "It is too light for You to be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved ones of Israel; and I will give You for a light of ***the*** nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth." Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to ***the One*** despised of soul, to ***the One*** abhorred by ***the*** nation, to a servant of rulers: Kings will see and arise, princes, and they will bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, and He has chosen You.

49:8-13 Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; and I will watch over You and give You for a covenant of ***the*** people, to raise up the land, to make ***them*** inherit the desolate inheritances, saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who ***are*** in the darkness, "Show yourselves." They will graze along the roads, and on all bare heights ***will be*** their pasture. They will not hunger, and they will not thirst, and burning heat and sun will not strike them; for He who has compassion on them will guide them, and to springs of water He will lead them. And I will make all My mountains into a road, and My highways will be raised up. Look, these will come from far away, and look, these from the north and from the sea, and these from the land of Sinim. Shout for joy, heavens, and rejoice, earth, and break forth ***into*** a shout of joy, mountains; for the LORD has comforted His people, and He will have compassion on His afflicted.

49:14-21 And Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me." Will a woman forget her nursing child, from having compassion on the son of her womb? Even these will forget, and I, I will not forget you. Look, I have engraved you on ***My*** palms; your walls ***are*** before Me continually. Your sons have hurried; those who tear you down and those who lay you waste will go out from you. Lift up your eyes all around and see: all of them have gathered together; they have come to you. ***As*** I live, declares the LORD, you will surely put on all of them like the ornament, and you will tie them on like the bride. For your waste places and your desolate places and the land of your destruction, for now you will be too cramped for inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. Yet the sons of your bereavement will say in your ears, "The place is too cramped for me; make room for me, so that I may dwell." And you will say in your heart, "Who has fathered these for me, and I ***was*** bereaved and barren, an exile and thrust away? And these, who has brought ***them*** up? Look, I, I was left alone; these, where ***were*** they?"

49:22-26 Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and to peoples I will raise My standard; and they will bring your sons in ***the*** bosom, and your daughters will be carried on ***the*** shoulder. And kings will be your foster fathers, and their princesses your nursing mothers; ***with*** faces ***to the*** earth they will bow down to you, and they will lick up the dust of your feet; and you will know that I ***am*** the LORD; those who wait for Me will not be ashamed. Will booty be taken from a mighty man, or will the captives of a righteous ***one*** escape? For thus says the LORD: Even the captives of a mighty man will be taken, and the booty of a ruthless ***one*** will escape; and with the one who contends with you, I, I will contend, and your sons I, I will save. And I will make those who oppress you eat their own flesh, and they will become drunk ***with*** their own blood as ***with*** the sweet wine; and all flesh will know that I ***am*** the LORD, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty ***One*** of Jacob.

Chapter 49 Preview

Chapter 49 begins the second of the three parts of Isaiah's great message of comfort. Cyrus and Babylon fade from view, and the Servant of the LORD steps forward and speaks for Himself. He was called before birth, hidden like an arrow in God's quiver and sent not only to bring Israel back but to be a light to the nations.

The second half of the chapter answers Zion's complaint, "The LORD has forsaken me." God says a mother may forget her nursing child, but He will never forget Zion. Her children will come home from every direction, and the nations themselves will carry them.

Chapter 49 Study

49:1 *Listen to Me, coastlands, and pay attention, peoples, from far away: the LORD called Me from* ***the*** *womb; from the inward parts of My mother He made mention of My name.*

The Servant calls to the "coastlands" and to "peoples, from far away," the distant nations. That alone tells us His mission is worldwide. Then He tells His story: "The LORD called Me from the womb." Before He was born, God had already named Him.

This is the second of the four Servant Songs in Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). I believe the Servant in these songs is Jesus Christ. His calling came before His birth in a unique way. The angel told Joseph, "you will call His name Jesus," and told why: "He Himself will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus didn't stumble into His mission partway through life. He came into the world for it.

Notice too that He is born of a mother. The eternal Son of God became a real human being, carried in a real womb. That is how God chose to come to us.

New Testament links: Galatians 1:15 (alluded to)

49:2 *And He made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He hid Me; and He made Me into a polished arrow; in His quiver He concealed Me.*

"He made My mouth like a sharp sword." The Servant's weapon is His word. Hebrews 4:12 says God's word is "sharper than any two-edged sword." In Revelation, John sees a sharp two-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth (Revelation 1:16), and when He returns, He strikes down the nations with it (Revelation 19:15).

"In His quiver He concealed Me." An arrow is kept hidden in the quiver until the right moment, then it flies straight to the target. For thirty years Jesus lived quietly in Nazareth. Then, at the Father's chosen time, He was revealed. God's timing for His Son was exact, and God's timing for you isn't careless either. Seasons of hiddenness aren't wasted.

New Testament links: Revelation 1:16 (alluded to); Revelation 2:12 (alluded to); Revelation 19:15 (alluded to)

49:3 *And He said to Me, "You **are** My servant, Israel, in whom I will glorify Myself."*

"You are My servant, Israel." This verse puzzles many readers. If the Servant is called "Israel," isn't He just the nation? But look at verses 5 and 6. This Servant's job is to bring Israel back to God. The nation can't be sent to restore itself. So the Servant is an individual who bears the name Israel.

Here is how I read it. Israel was called to be God's servant and to show His glory to the world, and Israel failed. Jesus is the true Israel, the one Israelite who did perfectly what the nation was called to do. Matthew sees the same pattern when he applies Hosea's "Out of Egypt I called My Son" to the child Jesus (Matthew 2:15). In Him, God says, "I will glorify Myself." Jesus prayed near the end of His life, "I glorified You on the earth; I finished the work which You have given Me that I should do it" (John 17:4).

49:4 *And I, I said, "I have labored for emptiness; I have spent My strength for formlessness and vanity; truly My justice **is** with the LORD, and My reward with My God."*

"I have labored for emptiness." This is a surprising line. The Servant sounds discouraged. He has worked hard and seems to have little to show for it. Think of Jesus' ministry. He was rejected in His hometown. Many disciples walked away (John 6:66). His own nation as a whole didn't receive Him (John 1:11). At the cross, even the Twelve fled.

But the Servant doesn't stop there. "Truly My justice is with the LORD." He leaves the results with God. He trusts the Father to reward Him. Jesus did exactly that. "Father, into Your hands I will commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). And the Father answered by raising Him from the dead.

If you have served God and feel it has been for nothing, this verse is for you. The results belong to God. Your faithfulness is never wasted in His sight.

49:5 *And now says the LORD, who formed Me from **the** womb **to be** His servant, to bring back Jacob to Him, and **that** Israel might be gathered to Him (and I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and My God has been My strength);*

The Servant explains His calling. God formed Him from the womb "to bring back Jacob to Him," so that Israel might be gathered to God. Notice again that the Servant is distinct from Israel. He brings Israel back.

In the middle of the verse the Servant says, "I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and My God has been My strength." People may despise Him, but the Father honors Him. The Servant doesn't lean on human approval. He draws His strength from God.

Jesus' ministry began with "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). His first followers were Jews. And I believe the full gathering of Israel to God is still ahead, when the nation turns to the One it pierced (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26). The Servant's mission to Israel has begun, but it isn't finished.

49:6 *and He said, "It is too light for You to be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved ones of Israel; and I will give You for a light of **the** nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth."*

"It is too light for You to be My servant." Bringing back Israel was a great task. But God says it is not enough for His Servant. The Servant will also be "a light of the nations," so that God's salvation reaches "to the end of the earth."

This is one of the clearest Old Testament promises that the Gentiles (everyone who isn't Jewish) would be saved. When the baby Jesus was brought to the temple, old Simeon held Him and called Him "a light for revelation of the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). Later Paul and Barnabas quoted this very verse to explain why they were preaching to Gentiles (Acts 13:47). The followers of the Servant carry His light.

If you aren't Jewish and you know Jesus, you are part of the fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6. God had you in mind some seven hundred years before Christ was born. That should humble us and move us to share that light with others.

New Testament links: Acts 13:47 (quoted); Luke 2:32 (alluded to)

49:7 *Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to **the One** despised of soul, to **the One** abhorred by **the** nation, to a servant of rulers: Kings will see and arise, princes, and they will bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, and He has chosen You.*

God speaks to the Servant with three hard descriptions: "despised," "abhorred by the nation" and "a servant of rulers." He would be hated by His own people and treated as a servant by those in power. Jesus was despised by the religious leaders and handed over to Pilate, a Roman governor.

But then everything turns around. "Kings will see and arise, princes, and they will bow down." The despised One will be honored by the very rulers who looked down on Him. This is the pattern

of the gospel: humiliation first, then glory. Paul says Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross, and "Therefore God also highly exalted Him" (Philippians 2:8-9).

Why will this happen? "Because of the LORD who is faithful." God keeps His word to His Servant. When Christ returns, every king on earth will bow before Him (Revelation 19:16).

49:8 *Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; and I will watch over You and give You for a covenant of **the** people, to raise up the land, to make **them** inherit the desolate inheritances,*

"In a time of favor I have answered You." God promises to answer and help His Servant and to make Him "a covenant of the people." The Servant doesn't just bring a covenant. He is the covenant. At the Last Supper, Jesus said the cup was "the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20).

Paul quotes this verse in 2 Corinthians 6:2 and adds, "Look, now is a well-accepted time; look, now is a day of salvation." The favorable time is now. The Servant will also restore the land and give the desolate inheritances back to their owners.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 6:2 (quoted)

49:9 *saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who **are** in the darkness, "Show yourselves." They will graze along the roads, and on all bare heights **will be** their pasture.*

The Servant tells the prisoners, "Come out," and those in darkness, "Show yourselves." The first picture is exiles walking out of Babylon. The deeper picture is sinners set free by Christ. Jesus read from Isaiah 61 that He came "to proclaim release to captives" (Luke 4:18). The people on the road home are pictured as sheep who find pasture along the way, even on bare hills.

49:10 *They will not hunger, and they will not thirst, and burning heat and sun will not strike them; for He who has compassion on them will guide them, and to springs of water He will lead them.*

They won't hunger or thirst, and the sun's heat won't strike them, because the One who has compassion on them leads them to springs of water. Revelation 7:16-17 quotes this verse about the great multitude "coming out of the great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14). The Lamb will be their shepherd and guide them to springs of the water of life. Isaiah's promise for the road home reaches all the way to heaven.

New Testament links: Revelation 7:16-17 (alluded to)

49:11 *And I will make all My mountains into a road, and My highways will be raised up.*

God turns His mountains into roads and raises up His highways. Mountains were the hardest obstacles for a traveler. God removes them or makes them a path. This echoes the highway of 40:3-4. When God brings His people home, nothing in the way will stop them. What mountain stands between you and where God is leading you? He can make it a road.

49:12 *Look, these will come from far away, and look, these from the north and from the sea, and these from the land of Sinim.*

People come from far away, from the north and the west, and "from the land of Sinim." Many scholars think Sinim is Syene, today called Aswan, in southern Egypt, and the Great Isaiah Scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls reads Syene here. The point is that God's people will come home from every direction. I believe that gathering will be complete when Christ returns and sends out His angels to gather His elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31).

49:13 *Shout for joy, heavens, and rejoice, earth, and break forth **into** a shout of joy, mountains; for the LORD has comforted His people, and He will have compassion on His afflicted.*

The Servant Song ends in praise. The heavens, earth and mountains are told to shout for joy, "For the LORD has comforted His people." Remember how this part of Isaiah began: "Comfort, comfort My people" (40:1). The comfort God promised comes through the Servant. When God shows compassion on His afflicted ones, all creation has reason to sing.

49:14 *And Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me."*

"The LORD has forsaken me." After all that joy, Zion speaks, and what she says is sad. Zion is Jerusalem, standing for God's people. She feels abandoned and forgotten. Many believers have felt the same in hard times. Even Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). God doesn't scold Zion for her feelings. He answers her with love.

49:15 *Will a woman forget her nursing child, from having compassion on the son of her womb? Even these will forget, and I, I will not forget you.*

"Will a woman forget her nursing child?" A mother's love is one of the strongest bonds on earth. It is almost unthinkable that she could forget her baby. Yet sadly, it happens. But God says, "I will not forget you."

God's love is deeper than a mother's love. If you have been forgotten or abandoned by someone who should have loved you, hear this verse. Your heavenly Father has never forgotten you for one moment.

49:16 *Look, I have engraved you on **My** palms; your walls **are** before Me continually.*

"I have engraved you on My palms." In that culture people sometimes wrote a name or mark on the hand as a reminder. God says Zion's name is carved into His palms, always before His eyes. Her walls are "before Me continually."

Many believers think here of the nail prints in Jesus' hands, which He showed Thomas after He rose (John 20:27). The verse itself is about God's love for Zion, so I would call that an application rather than the main meaning. But it is a true one. The Son of God bears in His hands the marks of His love for His people.

49:17 *Your sons have hurried; those who tear you down and those who lay you waste will go out from you.*

"Your sons have hurried." Those who will rebuild Zion are on their way, and those who tore her down are leaving. The exiles who returned under Cyrus, and later under Ezra and Nehemiah, began rebuilding Jerusalem. The destroyers' day is ending, and the builders' day is beginning.

49:18 *Lift up your eyes all around and see: all of them have gathered together; they have come to you. **As** I live, declares the LORD, you will surely put on all of them like the ornament, and you will tie them on like the bride.*

God tells Zion to look up and see her children gathering from everywhere. He swears by His own life, "As I live." She will wear them like jewels, like a bride putting on her wedding ornaments. Children who were lost are now her beauty. To God's city, the return of His people is glory, not a burden.

49:19 *For your waste places and your desolate places and the land of your destruction, for now you will be too cramped for inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away.*

The ruined land that once lay empty will soon be too small for all its people. Those who "swallowed" Zion, her enemies, will be far away. God turns desolation into crowding. That is how He works. Where there was loss, He brings fullness. He specializes in turning empty places into places too full to hold His blessing.

49:20 *Yet the sons of your bereavement will say in your ears, "The place is too cramped for me; make room for me, so that I may dwell."*

The children Zion thought she had lost will say, "The place is too cramped for me; make room for me." Imagine a mother who has mourned her children suddenly hearing them argue over room in the house. Her grief becomes joy. This pictures the return of many Jews to the land. I believe its complete fulfillment comes in the Millennium, when Israel is fully restored under Christ.

49:21 *And you will say in your heart, "Who has fathered these for me, and I **was** bereaved and barren, an exile and thrust away? And these, who has brought **them** up? Look, I, I was left alone; these, where **were** they?"*

Zion is amazed. She says to herself, "Who has fathered these for me?" She was childless, an exile and a wanderer, left alone. Where did all these children come from? The answer is God. Zion didn't produce her own restoration. It came as a gift. That is grace. God's people often look back and ask, "How did all this happen?" and the only answer is, "The LORD did it."

49:22 *Thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and to peoples I will raise My standard; and they will bring your sons in **the** bosom, and your daughters will be carried on **the** shoulder.*

The Lord GOD lifts His hand and raises His "standard," a flag or banner, to the nations. Like soldiers rallying to a flag, the nations respond. They bring Zion's sons in their arms and carry her

daughters on their shoulders. The Gentile nations that once scattered Israel will help bring her children home. God can turn enemies into helpers.

49:23 *And kings will be your foster fathers, and their princesses your nursing mothers; **with** faces **to the** earth they will bow down to you, and they will lick up the dust of your feet; and you will know that I **am** the LORD; those who wait for Me will not be ashamed.*

Kings and queens will care for Zion's children like guardians and nurses. They will bow before her with faces to the ground. I believe this points to the Millennium, when Christ reigns from Jerusalem and the nations honor the city of the great King (Zechariah 14:16). Then comes a promise for all of us: "Those who wait for Me will not be ashamed." Waiting on God is never wasted.

49:24 *Will booty be taken from a mighty man, or will the captives of a righteous **one** escape?*

Zion asks an honest question. Can prey be taken from a mighty warrior? Can captives be rescued from a tyrant? In other words, Babylon is strong. How could we ever get free? It seemed impossible. When we are held by something stronger than we are, we ask the same thing. Can I ever be free of this?

49:25 *For thus says the LORD: Even the captives of a mighty man will be taken, and the booty of a ruthless **one** will escape; and with the one who contends with you, I, I will contend, and your sons I, I will save.*

God answers, "Even the captives of a mighty man will be taken, and the booty of a ruthless one will escape." Why? "with the one who contends with you, I, I will contend." God fights for His people. Jesus spoke of tying up the strong man and plundering his house (Matthew 12:29), describing His own victory over Satan. No captor is stronger than our Redeemer.

49:26 *And I will make those who oppress you eat their own flesh, and they will become drunk **with** their own blood as **with** the sweet wine; and all flesh will know that I **am** the LORD, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty **One** of Jacob.*

This last verse is grim. Israel's oppressors will turn on each other and destroy themselves. It is a picture of God's judgment on those who persecute His people. Then the purpose is stated: "all flesh will know" that the LORD is Israel's Savior and Redeemer, "the Mighty One of Jacob." God's rescue of Israel will be so clear that the whole world will recognize who did it.

New Testament links: Revelation 16:6 (alluded to)

Chapter 49 Summary

The Servant of the LORD speaks for Himself in chapter 49. God called Him before He was born and gave Him a bigger job than restoring Israel: He is to be a light to the nations, so that God's salvation reaches the end of the earth. When Zion complains that the LORD has forsaken her, God answers that a mother may forget her nursing child, but He will never forget Zion. Her children will come home, and every nation will know that the LORD is her Savior.

Chapter 49 Study Questions

1. Has there been a time when you felt your work or service for God was in vain?
2. How does the Servant describe His calling and preparation? (49:1-2)
3. Why is the Servant called "Israel," and how is He different from the nation? (49:3-5)
4. What larger mission does God give the Servant? (49:6)
5. How do Luke 2:32 and Acts 13:47 use Isaiah 49:6? (49:6)
6. How does God answer Zion when she says she has been forsaken? (49:14-16)
7. Who helps bring Zion's children home? (49:22-23)
8. How does God's promise that He won't forget you speak to your life today?
9. Who in your life needs to see the light of Christ, and how could you share it?

Chapter 50: The Obedient Servant

Scripture: Israel's Sin and the Servant's Obedience

50:1-3 Thus says the LORD: Where ***is*** this, the document of the divorce of your mother, ***by*** which I sent her away? Or which of My creditors ***is it*** to whom I sold you? Look, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away. Why did I come, and ***there was*** no man? ***Why*** did I call, and ***there was*** none answering? Is My hand really too short for ransom? Or ***is there*** no strength in Me to deliver? Look, by My rebuke I dry up ***the*** sea; I make rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because ***there is*** no water, and they die of thirst. I clothe ***the*** heavens ***with*** blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.

50:4-9 The Lord GOD has given Me a tongue of disciples, to know ***how*** to sustain the weary ***with*** a word. He awakens morning ***by*** morning; He awakens My ear to hear like the disciples. The Lord GOD has opened My ear, and I, I was not rebellious; I did not turn away backward. I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pluck ***them*** bare; I did not hide My face from humiliations and spitting. And the Lord GOD helps Me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set My face like the flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. He who justifies Me ***is*** near; who will contend with Me? Let us stand up together. Who ***is*** the master of My judgment? Let him draw near to Me. Look, the Lord GOD helps Me; who ***is*** he ***who*** will condemn Me? Look, all of them will wear out like the garment; ***the*** moth will eat them.

50:10-11 Who among you fears the LORD, listens to the voice of His servant? He who has walked ***in*** darkness and has no brightness, let him trust in the name of the LORD and lean on his God. Look, all of you who kindle a fire, who gird on firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the firebrands ***that*** you have kindled. From My hand this will be yours: you will lie down in pain.

Chapter 50 Preview

Chapter 50 opens with God answering a charge. Has He divorced Israel or sold her children to pay a debt? No. Israel was sent away because of her own sins, and God's arm is still strong enough to save.

Then the Servant speaks again, in the third Servant Song. He listens to God every morning. He doesn't turn back, even when He is beaten, His beard is pulled out and He is spit on. He sets His face like flint, sure that God will vindicate Him. Then Isaiah sets out a choice: trust the LORD in the dark, or walk by your own fire.

Chapter 50 Study

50:1 *Thus says the LORD: Where **is** this, the document of the divorce of your mother, **by** which I sent her away? Or which of My creditors **is it** to whom I sold you? Look, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.*

Israel seems to have accused God of abandoning them. So God asks where "the document of the divorce of your mother" is. Under the Law of Moses, a man who divorced his wife gave her a

written certificate (Deuteronomy 24:1). There is no such paper for Zion. God never formally put her away. Nor did He sell His children to a creditor, as a poor man might.

"For your iniquities you were sold." The exile was real, but it was the result of Israel's sin, not God's unfaithfulness. And because there was no divorce, the relationship could be restored. That is good news. The separation wasn't final.

50:2 *Why did I come, and **there was** no man? **Why** did I call, and **there was** none answering? Is My hand really too short for ransom? Or **is there** no strength in Me to deliver? Look, by My rebuke I dry up **the** sea; I make rivers a wilderness; their fish stink because **there is** no water, and they die of thirst.*

"Why did I come, and there was no man?" God came to Israel through His prophets, and no one answered. The fault wasn't on God's side. "Is My hand really too short for ransom?" Of course not. God reminds them of the Exodus: He dries up the sea with a word and turns rivers into desert. The God who did that is strong enough to bring them home.

If God is so strong, why didn't He bring them back sooner? The problem was never God's power; it was Israel's unwillingness to answer when He called.

50:3 *I clothe **the** heavens **with** blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.*

God dresses the sky in black, like a mourner in sackcloth. This recalls the plague of darkness over Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23). It may also look ahead. When Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered the land for three hours (Matthew 27:45). And before Christ returns, the sun will go dark (Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:12). The Creator rules over the heavens themselves.

New Testament links: Revelation 6:12 (alluded to)

50:4 *The Lord GOD has given Me a tongue of disciples, to know **how** to sustain the weary **with** a word. He awakens morning **by** morning; He awakens My ear to hear like the disciples.*

Now the Servant speaks. This is the third Servant Song (50:4-11), and I believe the speaker is Jesus Christ.

"A tongue of disciples." A disciple is a learner. The Servant has learned from God how to speak so that He can "sustain the weary with a word." Think of how Jesus spoke to tired, broken people: "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). His words lifted people up.

"He awakens morning by morning." Before the Servant speaks to people, He listens to God. Every morning He is woken to hear. Mark 1:35 tells us Jesus rose early, while it was still dark, and went to a lonely place to pray. If the Son of God needed that daily time with the Father, how much more do we? Our words will only help weary people if we have first heard from God ourselves.

50:5 *The Lord GOD has opened My ear, and I, I was not rebellious; I did not turn away backward.*

"The Lord GOD has opened My ear." The Servant heard God's will, and He obeyed it. "I, I was not rebellious; I did not turn away backward." This is where the Servant is different from Israel. Israel's ears were closed (48:8). The Servant's ear is open.

What God asked of Him was hard. It led to suffering and to the cross. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He didn't turn back. Hebrews 5:8 says He "learned obedience from the things which He suffered." That obedience is what makes our salvation possible. Where Adam and Israel failed, Christ obeyed all the way.

50:6 *I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pluck **them** bare; I did not hide My face from humiliations and spitting.*

"I gave My back to those who strike." Here, about seven hundred years before the cross, Isaiah describes what happened to Jesus. He was beaten and whipped (Matthew 27:26). They spat in His face and struck Him (Matthew 26:67; 27:30; Mark 14:65). The Gospels don't mention His beard, but Isaiah tells us that was part of the shame He gave Himself to.

Notice the word "gave." No one took the Servant's life from Him. He offered His back. Jesus said, "No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down from Myself" (John 10:18). He could have called on more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53), but He didn't.

"I did not hide My face from humiliations and spitting." In that culture, spitting in a man's face was the worst kind of contempt. Jesus took that shame for us. When we feel the sting of being mocked for His name, we can remember that He went there first.

New Testament links: Matthew 26:67 (alluded to); Mark 14:65 (alluded to); Luke 22:63-64 (alluded to)

50:7 *And the Lord GOD helps Me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set My face like the flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.*

"I have set My face like the flint." Flint is a very hard stone. To set your face like flint means to be unshakable, determined to go forward no matter what. Luke 9:51 says that when the time for His death drew near, Jesus "set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." He knew what waited for Him there, and He went anyway.

Where did that resolve come from? "And the Lord GOD helps Me." The Servant's strength came from trust, not stubbornness. He knew God was with Him and that in the end He wouldn't be put to shame. The cross looked like disgrace, but the empty tomb showed that God hadn't abandoned Him.

50:8 *He who justifies Me **is** near; who will contend with Me? Let us stand up together. Who **is** the master of My judgment? Let him draw near to Me.*

"He who justifies Me is near." To justify here means to clear someone's name, to prove him right. The Servant was falsely accused and condemned. But God would declare Him in the right, and He did, by raising Jesus from the dead (Romans 1:4).

So the Servant can say, "who will contend with Me? ... Who is the master of My judgment?" He challenges anyone to bring a charge. No one can. Paul uses this same language for believers in Romans 8:33: "Who will bring a charge against the elect of God? God is the One who justifies." Because the Servant is vindicated, everyone who belongs to Him is vindicated too.

New Testament links: Romans 8:33 (alluded to)

50:9 *Look, the Lord GOD helps Me; who **is** he **who** will condemn Me? Look, all of them will wear out like the garment; **the** moth will eat them.*

"Look, the Lord GOD helps Me; who is he who will condemn Me?" The Servant ends with confidence. His accusers will wear out like an old garment eaten by moths. Their charges won't last. God's verdict is the only one that stands.

Paul echoes this in Romans 8:34: "Who is the one who condemns? Christ is the One who died, and rather also was raised, who is also at the right hand of God." For the believer, every accusation, whether from people, from our own conscience or from Satan, "the accuser of our brothers" (Revelation 12:10), falls silent before Christ. There is "no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

50:10 *Who among you fears the LORD, listens to the voice of His servant? He who has walked **in** darkness and has no brightness, let him trust in the name of the LORD and lean on his God.*

Now the Servant Song turns to the reader. Who among you fears the LORD and obeys His Servant's voice? Even such a person may have "walked in darkness" and have "no brightness." Faith doesn't always mean feeling sure or seeing clearly. Sometimes faithful people walk through dark seasons.

What should they do? "Let him trust in the name of the LORD and lean on his God." Lean on Him. That is exactly what the Servant did in verses 7 to 9. If you are in a dark place right now, you aren't disqualified. Keep trusting. The light will come.

50:11 *Look, all of you who kindle a fire, who gird on firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the firebrands **that** you have kindled. From My hand this will be yours: you will lie down in pain.*

The other path is to make your own light. Some people light their own fires and walk by the sparks they have set. They refuse to wait on God and trust in their own wisdom and plans instead. God warns that this path ends badly: "You will lie down in pain."

Here is the choice. In the dark, you can trust the Servant's God, or you can strike your own match. Our own fires may look bright for a while, but they can't light the way home. Only the Lord can. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. The one following Me will certainly not walk in the darkness" (John 8:12).

Chapter 50 Summary

God says He never divorced Israel or sold her children. Israel was sent away for her sins, and His arm is still strong enough to save. The Servant then speaks: He listens to God morning by morning and doesn't turn back. He gives His back to those who strike Him and doesn't hide His face from spitting, fulfilled in the sufferings of Jesus. He sets His face like flint, trusting God to vindicate Him. Those in darkness are called to trust the LORD rather than walk by their own fires.

Chapter 50 Study Questions

1. Who is someone whose words have encouraged you when you were weary?
2. Why was Israel sent away, according to God? (50:1)
3. What does God say about the strength of His hand? (50:2-3)
4. What does the Servant do "morning by morning," and why? (50:4-5)
5. How was 50:6 fulfilled in the life of Jesus? (50:6; Matthew 26:67)
6. What does it mean that the Servant "set My face like the flint"? (50:7; Luke 9:51)
7. How does Paul use the language of 50:8-9 in Romans 8:33-34? (50:8-9)
8. What does God tell the person who fears Him but walks in darkness? (50:10-11)
9. What would it look like for you to listen to God "morning by morning" this week?

Chapter 51: Comfort for Zion

Scripture: Listen, Awake, and Rouse Yourself

51:1-3 Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek the LORD: look to the rock ***from which*** you were hewn, and to the hollow of the pit ***from which*** you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah ***who*** gave birth to you; for ***as*** one I called him, and I blessed him and multiplied him. For the LORD has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and He has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert plain like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of song.

51:4-8 Pay attention to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, My nation; for law will go out from Me, and My justice I will set at rest for a light of peoples. My righteousness ***is*** near; My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge peoples; the coastlands will wait for Me, and for My arm they will hope. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look to the earth beneath; for ***the*** heavens will vanish like the smoke, and the earth will wear out like the garment, and its inhabitants will die like gnats; and My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be shattered. Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, a people ***with*** My law in their heart: do not fear the reproach of men, and do not be dismayed at their reviling words. For like the garment ***the*** moth will eat them, and like the wool ***the*** clothes moth will eat them; and My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation to a generation of generations.

51:9-11 Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of the LORD; awake as ***in the*** days of antiquity, generations of ages. ***Are*** You not the one who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the monster? ***Are*** You not the one who dried up ***the*** sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of ***the*** sea a way for ***the*** redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come ***to*** Zion with a shout of joy, and everlasting gladness ***will be*** on their head; they will obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing will flee.

51:12-16 I, I ***am*** He who comforts you. Who ***are*** you, that you are afraid of man ***who*** dies, and of the son of mankind ***who*** is made ***as*** grass? And you have forgotten the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth; and you are in dread continually all the day because of the rage of the oppressor, when he has prepared to destroy. And where ***is*** the rage of the oppressor? The one bowed down will hasten to be set free, and he will not die ***and go*** to the pit, and his bread will not be lacking. And I ***am*** the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea, and its waves roar; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name. And I have put My words in your mouth, and with the shadow of My hand I have covered you, to plant ***the*** heavens and to found ***the*** earth, and to say to Zion, "You ***are*** My people."

51:17-23 Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, arise, Jerusalem, who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of His rage; the bowl of the cup of staggering you have drunk, you have drained. ***There is*** none leading her from all the sons ***whom*** she has borne, and ***there is*** none taking hold of her hand from all the sons ***whom*** she has brought up. These two ***things*** have befallen you (who will show sympathy to you?): the devastation and the destruction, and the famine and the sword; ***by*** whom will I comfort you? Your sons have fainted; they have lain down at the head of all

the streets like an antelope ***in*** a net, those full of the rage of the LORD, the rebuke of your God. Therefore hear this now, afflicted ***one***, and drunk ***one***, and not from wine. Thus says your Lord, the LORD, and your God, ***who*** contends ***for*** His people: Look, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of the cup of My rage; you will not drink it again anymore. And I will put it into the hand of those who torment you, who have said to your soul, "Bow down, so that we may pass over"; and you made your back like the earth and like the street for those who pass over.

Chapter 51 Preview

Chapter 51 is a chapter of wake-up calls. Three times God calls His people to listen to Him, and then the cry turns around: first the people ask God's arm to awake, and then God tells Jerusalem to rouse herself from the stupor of His judgment.

The faithful few who are still seeking the LORD are told to look back at Abraham, look up at the passing sky, and look ahead to a Zion made like Eden. The God who split the sea is the God who will bring His people home.

Chapter 51 Study

51:1 *Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek the LORD: look to the rock **from which** you were hewn, and to the hollow of the pit **from which** you were dug.*

God speaks here to a smaller group inside Israel: those who pursue righteousness and seek the LORD. This is the remnant, the faithful few who still trust God when the nation as a whole has drifted.

"Look to the rock from which you were hewn." Like a stone cut from a quarry, Israel came from somewhere. The rock and the quarry are Abraham and Sarah, as the next verse explains. When we feel small and forgotten, it helps to remember where God started with us.

51:2 *Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah **who** gave birth to you; for **as** one I called him, and I blessed him and multiplied him.*

Abraham was one man, old and childless, when God called him out of Ur (Genesis 12:1-3). Sarah was barren for most of her life. Yet from those two God built a nation. The point is simple: if God could do that with one couple, He can certainly restore a scattered, discouraged people.

The New Testament carries this further. Paul says that those who believe are Abraham's children too, the "sons of Abraham" by faith (Galatians 3:7). The faith of one man became a family that now reaches every nation.

51:3 *For the LORD has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and He has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert plain like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of song.*

Zion is the hill in Jerusalem where the temple stood, and Isaiah uses the name for the city and its people. Here God promises to comfort her and turn her ruins into something like Eden. That is a picture of paradise restored.

I read this as a real promise. Jerusalem's ruins were rebuilt after the return from Babylon, but nothing in history has yet made her wilderness like the garden of the LORD. That waits for Christ's reign on earth, when creation itself is renewed (Isaiah 35:1-2), and it reaches its fullness in the river and the tree of life in Revelation 22:1-2.

51:4 *Pay attention to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, My nation; for law will go out from Me, and My justice I will set at rest for a light of peoples.*

The second "listen" is to God's own people. He promises that a law and His justice will go out from Him as "a light of peoples." This is the same hope we read in Isaiah 2:3, where the law goes forth from Zion and the nations come to learn God's ways.

The Servant was given "a light of the nations" in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. God's plan was never for Israel only. Through Israel's Messiah, His light would reach everyone.

51:5 *My righteousness **is** near; My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge peoples; the coastlands will wait for Me, and for My arm they will hope.*

Notice the timing words: "is near" and "has gone out." God's rescue was already on its way. The "coastlands" are the far-off lands across the sea, the edges of the known world. Even they wait for His arm.

The "arm of the LORD" is a picture of God's power going into action, the way a man rolls up his sleeve and reaches out to do a job. Keep this phrase in mind. It shows up again in 51:9, 52:10 and 53:1, and in chapter 53 we learn who that arm is.

51:6 *Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look to the earth beneath; for **the** heavens will vanish like the smoke, and the earth will wear out like the garment, and its inhabitants will die like gnats; and My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be shattered.*

God tells His people to look up at the sky and down at the earth. Both feel permanent. Both will pass away. The sky will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like an old coat.

This isn't poetry for poetry's sake. Peter says the heavens will pass away and the earth will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10), and John sees a new heaven and a new earth after the first ones pass away (Revelation 21:1). Jesus said that heaven and earth will pass away, but "My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). The only things that last are God's salvation and His righteousness, so that is where we should put our weight.

51:7 *Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, a people **with** My law in their heart: do not fear the reproach of men, and do not be dismayed at their reviling words.*

The third "listen" goes to people who already have God's law in their hearts. They know the truth, and that is exactly why they are mocked. God's word to them is plain: don't be afraid of what people say about you.

Why would God need to say that to faithful people? Because faithful people still feel the sting of insults. Jesus said the same thing to His followers in Matthew 5:11-12.

51:8 *For like the garment **the** moth will eat them, and like the wool **the** clothes moth will eat them; and My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation to a generation of generations.*

Here is why we don't need to fear our critics. They are like wool clothing in a closet full of moths. Given time, they wear away to nothing. God's righteousness, on the other hand, will be forever.

The contrast with verse 6 is deliberate. The universe wears out like a garment, and so do the people who mock God's people. Only God's salvation goes on "to a generation of generations."

51:9 *Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of the LORD; awake as **in the** days of antiquity, generations of ages. **Are** You not the one who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the monster?*

Now the voice changes. The faithful cry out to God: wake up, arm of the LORD! God doesn't sleep (Psalm 121:4), but this is how people pray when it feels as though He has been quiet for too long.

"Are You not the one who cut Rahab in pieces?" Rahab here isn't the woman of Jericho. It is a poetic name for Egypt, the proud sea monster (Psalm 87:4; Isaiah 30:7). The dragon pictures the same enemy. The people are reminding God, and themselves, of what He did at the Exodus.

51:10 ***Are** You not the one who dried up **the** sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of **the** sea a way for **the** redeemed to pass over?*

This verse makes the Exodus plain. God dried up the Red Sea and turned the deep water into a road so the people He had redeemed could walk across on dry land (Exodus 14:21-22). To redeem means to buy back or set free by paying a price.

When we pray, it is good to remember what God has already done. If He opened the sea once, He can open a way again.

51:11 *And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come **to** Zion with a shout of joy, and everlasting gladness **will be** on their head; they will obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing will flee.*

These words are almost exactly the same as Isaiah 35:10. The ransomed of the LORD will come home to Zion singing, with joy on their heads like a crown, and sorrow and sighing will run away.

The return from Babylon was a first, partial answer. But "everlasting gladness" and sorrow fleeing away point further, to the day when God wipes away every tear and there is no more mourning (Revelation 21:4). I believe Israel will see this fully when Christ returns and reigns.

51:12 *I, I **am** He who comforts you. Who **are** you, that you are afraid of man **who** dies, and of the son of mankind **who** is made **as** grass?*

God answers the prayer of verse 9 with a strong word of comfort: "I, I am He who comforts you." Then He asks a pointed question. Why are you afraid of a man who will die, who is no more lasting than grass?

Isaiah used the grass picture back in 40:6-8. People wither. God's word stands forever. Fear of man shrinks when we see how small man really is next to God.

51:13 *And you have forgotten the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth; and you are in dread continually all the day because of the rage of the oppressor, when he has prepared to destroy. And where **is** the rage of the oppressor?*

The real problem isn't the oppressor. The real problem is that God's people have forgotten their Maker, the One who stretched out the heavens. When we forget how big God is, our enemies start to look huge.

"And where is the rage of the oppressor?" For the exiles, the oppressor was Babylon. God asks the question as though the oppressor is already gone. Babylon fell to Cyrus of Persia in 539 B.C., and its fury came to nothing, just as God said.

51:14 *The one bowed down will hasten to be set free, and he will not die **and go** to the pit, and his bread will not be lacking.*

The exile is pictured as a prisoner bent low in a dungeon. God promises that he will soon be set free, that he won't die there, and that he will have bread. For the Jews in Babylon this came true when Cyrus allowed them to go home (Ezra 1:1-4).

For any of us who feel bound and forgotten, this is God's heart. He doesn't leave His people to die in the pit.

51:15 *And I **am** the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea, and its waves roar; the LORD of armies **is** His name.*

God gives His credentials. He is the One who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar. He split the sea in verse 10, and He rules its storms too. "The LORD of armies is His name." He is the commander of all the forces of heaven.

51:16 *And I have put My words in your mouth, and with the shadow of My hand I have covered you, to plant **the** heavens and to found **the** earth, and to say to Zion, "You **are** My people."*

God has put His words in the mouth of His people and hidden them in the shadow of His hand. The same God who founded the heavens and the earth says to Zion, "You are My people."

Isaiah used very similar words of the Servant in 49:2. Israel was meant to carry God's word to the world, and the Servant would do it perfectly. Belonging to God isn't something we earn. He says it over us.

51:17 *Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, arise, Jerusalem, who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of His rage; the bowl of the cup of staggering you have drunk, you have drained.*

Now God calls Jerusalem to wake up. She lies on the ground like someone who has drunk too much, but what she drank was the cup of God's anger. She drained it to the bottom.

The cup of wrath is a common picture in the prophets (Jeremiah 25:15). Remember it when you read the Gospels. In the garden, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39). He drank the cup of God's anger so that those who trust Him never have to.

51:18 ***There is*** *none leading her from all the sons* ***whom*** *she has borne, and* ***there is*** *none taking hold of her hand from all the sons* ***whom*** *she has brought up.*

Jerusalem staggers, and none of her children can help her up. She raised many sons, but none of them can guide her or hold her hand. Judgment has left the city without leaders or strength.

It is a sad picture of a city that once trusted in its own people and plans. In the end, only God could lift her.

51:19 *These two* ***things*** *have befallen you (who will show sympathy to you?): the devastation and the destruction, and the famine and the sword;* ***by*** *whom will I comfort you?*

"These two things" seem to be pairs: devastation and destruction on the land, famine and sword on the people. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the city suffered all of it.

God asks, "By whom will I comfort you?" I take this as the tender question of a Father who grieves even over the judgment He has had to bring.

51:20 *Your sons have fainted; they have lain down at the head of all* ***the*** *streets like an antelope* ***in*** *a net, those full of the rage of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.*

Jerusalem's sons lie helpless at every street corner, like an antelope caught in a hunter's net. The harder it struggles, the more tangled it gets. They are "full of the rage of the LORD."

This is what sin does when it runs its course. It traps us, and we can't free ourselves.

51:21 *Therefore hear this now, afflicted* ***one****, and drunk* ***one****, and not from wine.*

God now speaks to the afflicted ones who are drunk, but not with wine. Their stagger comes from suffering, not from drinking. The word "Therefore" tells us something good is coming. God has seen enough of their pain.

51:22 *Thus says your Lord, the LORD, and your God, **who** contends **for** His people: Look, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of the cup of My rage; you will not drink it again anymore.*

God calls Himself the One "who contends for His people." He is their defender in court. He reaches out and takes the cup of His anger out of Jerusalem's hand and promises, "You will not drink it again anymore."

That last promise is very strong. Jerusalem was judged again in A.D. 70 by Rome, so I believe "you will not drink it again anymore" looks ahead to the day when Israel turns to her Messiah and is restored for good. Paul says that day is coming (Romans 11:26-27).

51:23 *And I will put it into the hand of those who torment you, who have said to your soul, "Bow down, so that we may pass over"; and you made your back like the earth and like the street for those who pass over.*

The cup doesn't just disappear. God puts it into the hands of those who tormented His people. These enemies had made Israel lie down so they could walk on her back like a street.

God keeps His promise to Abraham: "the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). Revelation 14:10 pictures the same cup of wrath handed to those who follow the beast. God sees how His people are treated, and He will settle it.

Chapter 51 Summary

God calls the faithful remnant to listen, to remember Abraham and Sarah, and to trust that He will comfort Zion and make her like Eden. Heaven and earth will wear out, but His salvation lasts forever, so His people don't need to fear the insults of men. The people pray for the arm of the LORD to wake up as at the Red Sea, and God answers by telling Jerusalem to wake up. He takes the cup of His anger from her hand and gives it to her tormentors.

Chapter 51 Study Questions

1. When you feel discouraged, what memories of God's faithfulness help you most?
2. Why does God tell His people to look back at Abraham and Sarah? (51:1-2)
3. What does God promise to do for Zion's ruins? (51:3)
4. What will pass away, and what will last forever? (51:6-8)
5. What event from Israel's past do the people remember in their prayer? (51:9-10)
6. Why does God say His people shouldn't fear man? (51:12-13)
7. What happens to the cup of God's anger at the end of the chapter? (51:17-23)
8. How does knowing Jesus drank the cup of God's anger change the way you think about His death?

9. Whose opinion of you do you fear most, and how could this chapter help you with that fear?

Chapter 52: Your God Reigns

Scripture: Zion Redeemed and the Servant Exalted

52:1-6 Awake, awake, put on your strength, Zion; put on the garments of your beauty, Jerusalem, the city of holiness; for the uncircumcised and the unclean will not again come into you anymore. Shake yourself from the dust; arise, sit, Jerusalem; loosen the fetters of your neck, captive one, daughter of Zion. For thus says the LORD: You were sold for nothing, and not with money will you be redeemed. For thus says the Lord GOD: My people went down to Egypt at the first to sojourn there, and Assyria oppressed it without cause. And now, what ***is there*** for Me here, declares the LORD, that My people have been taken for nothing? Its rulers wail, declares the LORD, and continually all the day My name is reviled. Therefore My people will know My name; therefore in that day ***they will know*** that I ***am*** He who speaks: here I ***am***.

52:7-12 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who makes peace heard, who brings good news of good, who makes salvation heard, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." The voice of your watchmen! They lift up a voice; together they shout for joy; for eye to eye they will see when the LORD returns ***to*** Zion. Break forth, shout for joy together, waste places of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared the arm of His holiness before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, go out from there; do not touch ***the*** unclean; go out from her midst; purify yourselves, bearers of the vessels of the LORD. For you will not go out in haste, and you will not go in flight; for the LORD ***is*** going before you, and the God of Israel ***is*** your rear guard.

52:13-15 Look, My servant will act wisely; He will be high and lifted up, and exalted exceedingly. Just as many were appalled at You (so His appearance ***was*** a disfigurement beyond ***that of*** a man, and His form beyond the sons of mankind), so He will sprinkle many nations; kings will shut their mouth because of Him; for what had not been recounted to them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.

Chapter 52 Preview

Jerusalem has been lying in the dust in chains. Now God tells her to get up, shake off the dust, and put on her beautiful clothes. A messenger runs over the mountains with the best news Zion could hear: "Your God reigns."

Then, at the end of the chapter, the spotlight turns to God's Servant. He will be lifted up high, yet first He will be disfigured beyond recognition. These last three verses open the greatest prophecy in Isaiah, which continues straight through chapter 53.

Chapter 52 Study

52:1 *Awake, awake, put on your strength, Zion; put on the garments of your beauty, Jerusalem, the city of holiness; for the uncircumcised and the unclean will not again come into you anymore.*

The call of 51:17 comes again, louder: "Awake, awake." In chapter 51 the people asked God's arm to wake up. Now God tells Zion to wake up and dress for a celebration. Her strength and her "garments of your beauty" are like a bride's wedding clothes.

"The uncircumcised and the unclean will not again come into you." Jerusalem was invaded again after the return from Babylon, by Greeks and later Romans. So I read this as looking ahead to the day when the city is holy for good, under the reign of Christ, and finally to the New Jerusalem, where "there will by no means enter into it anything that defiles" (Revelation 21:27).

New Testament links: Revelation 21:27 (alluded to); Revelation 21:2 (alluded to)

52:2 *Shake yourself from the dust; arise, sit, Jerusalem; loosen the fetters of your neck, captive one, daughter of Zion.*

Jerusalem is pictured as a captive woman sitting in the dust with a chain around her neck. God tells her to shake off the dust, stand up, and take off the chain herself. He has already unlocked it.

That is how God's freedom works. He does the rescuing, and then He calls us to stand up and walk in it.

52:3 *For thus says the LORD: You were sold for nothing, and not with money will you be redeemed.*

God didn't sell His people for profit. He received nothing when He handed them over to their enemies. So He owes nothing to get them back. They will be redeemed "not with money."

Peter used the same idea for us. We weren't redeemed with silver or gold but "with the precious blood," the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). The price of our redemption wasn't money. It was Christ Himself.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 1:18 (alluded to)

52:4 *For thus says the Lord GOD: My people went down to Egypt at the first to sojourn there, and Assyria oppressed it without cause.*

God reviews Israel's history of being oppressed. First they went down to Egypt as guests in Jacob's day, and Egypt made them slaves. Later Assyria, the great empire to the north, crushed them "without cause." Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria in 722 B.C. and carried many of its people away.

52:5 *And now, what **is there** for Me here, declares the LORD, that My people have been taken for nothing? Its rulers wail, declares the LORD, and continually all the day My name is reviled.*

"What is there for Me here?" God looks at His people taken away to Babylon and asks why He should stand by. Their captors howl in triumph and mock the God of Israel every day.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 2:24, telling his readers that God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles "because of you." It is a sobering thought. When God's people live badly, or when they are defeated because of their sin, the world blames God. Our lives carry His reputation.

New Testament links: Romans 2:24 (quoted)

52:6 *Therefore My people will know My name; therefore in that day* ***they will know*** *that I* ***am*** *He who speaks: here I* ***am****.*

God's answer to the mockery is to show who He is. "My people will know My name." In the day He rescues them, they will hear Him say, "Here I am."

That is the voice of a God who shows up. People who once felt abandoned will see that He was there all along.

52:7 *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who makes peace heard, who brings good news of good, who makes salvation heard, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

Picture a runner coming over the hills toward Jerusalem. The city watchmen can see his feet on the mountain road before they can hear his words. The news he carries is peace, happiness, salvation, and one great sentence: "Your God reigns."

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:15 to describe preachers of the gospel and their "beautiful" feet. The first runners brought word that the exile was over. The greater news is that Jesus has paid for sin and that God's kingdom is coming. Every believer who shares that news has lovely feet.

New Testament links: Romans 10:15 (quoted); Ephesians 6:15 (alluded to)

52:8 *The voice of your watchmen! They lift up a voice; together they shout for joy; for eye to eye they will see when the LORD returns* ***to*** *Zion.*

The watchmen on Jerusalem's walls hear the runner and start shouting together. They will see it, for "eye to eye they will see when the LORD returns to Zion."

I believe this has a near meaning and a far one. The exiles saw God bring His people home. But the fullest moment is still ahead, when the Lord Jesus returns and every eye sees Him (Revelation 1:7).

52:9 *Break forth, shout for joy together, waste places of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem.*

Even the ruins of Jerusalem are told to break into song. The broken walls and burned houses have reason to sing, because God has comforted His people and redeemed the city.

The verbs are past tense even though the event was still in the future. Prophets often speak this way. When God promises something, it is as good as done.

52:10 *The LORD has bared the arm of His holiness before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.*

God's arm appears again (51:5, 9). Now God rolls back His sleeve and bares His arm in front of every nation, so that the whole earth sees His salvation.

When the old man Simeon held the baby Jesus in the temple, he thanked God that his eyes had seen "Your salvation," prepared before all peoples as a light to the Gentiles (Luke 2:30-32). God's bared arm has a name and a face. Isaiah 53:1 will ask who has believed it.

New Testament links: Luke 2:30 (alluded to)

52:11 *Depart, depart, go out from there; do not touch **the** unclean; go out from her midst; purify yourselves, bearers of the vessels of the LORD.*

The exiles are told to leave Babylon and not take anything unclean with them. "Bearers of the vessels of the LORD" refers to the priests and Levites carrying the temple articles home. That really happened. Cyrus gave back the gold and silver vessels Nebuchadnezzar had taken (Ezra 1:7-11).

Paul applies this to the church in 2 Corinthians 6:17: "Come out from the midst of them and be separate." God still calls His people to walk out of the world's ways and keep themselves clean.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 6:17 (quoted); Revelation 18:4 (alluded to)

52:12 *For you will not go out in haste, and you will not go in flight; for the LORD **is** going before you, and the God of Israel **is** your rear guard.*

The first Exodus happened in a rush. Israel ate the Passover with their sandals on, ready to run (Exodus 12:11). This new exodus will be different. They won't have to flee. God will walk in front of them and guard them from behind as their "rear guard."

That is exactly what the pillar of cloud did at the Red Sea, when it moved from the front of Israel to stand behind them (Exodus 14:19). God surrounds His people on every side.

52:13 *Look, My servant will act wisely; He will be high and lifted up, and exalted exceedingly.*

Now Isaiah begins the fourth and last of the Servant Songs, which runs from 52:13 to 53:12. "Look" tells us to stop and look closely. The Servant is the same one we met in 42:1, 49:1-7 and 50:4-9. In some chapters God calls the nation of Israel His servant, but this Servant is one Person who suffers for the sins of God's people (53:8), and I believe with the New Testament that He is Jesus Christ.

The verse begins at the end of the story. The Servant "will act wisely," which means He will succeed in everything God sent Him to do. Then He will be "high and lifted up, and exalted exceedingly." Those words are striking, because Isaiah used the same Hebrew words for the LORD Himself on His throne in 6:1 ("high and lifted up") and again in 57:15 ("the High and Lifted-Up One"). Only God is lifted that high, and here the Servant shares that place.

The New Testament tells us how it happened. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, then raised from the dead, then exalted to the right hand of the Father. Paul says God "highly exalted Him and granted to Him a name, the one above every name" (Philippians 2:9). Before Isaiah shows us the Servant's suffering, God wants us to know how it ends. The cross is the road to the throne.

New Testament links: Philippians 2:9 (alluded to)

52:14 *Just as many were appalled at You (so His appearance **was** a disfigurement beyond **that of** a man, and His form beyond the sons of mankind),*

Here is the shock. Many people were astonished at Israel when they saw her in ruins. In the same way, they will be appalled at the Servant. His appearance was "a disfigurement beyond that of a man," and His form "beyond the sons of mankind." A disfigurement is a face or body ruined. He will be beaten so badly that He hardly looks human.

This is exactly what happened to Jesus. Before the cross He was struck in the face and beaten (Matthew 26:67). He was scourged with a Roman whip (John 19:1). Soldiers pressed a crown of thorns onto His head and hit Him on the head with a reed (Matthew 27:29-30). By the time He was nailed to the cross, His face and back would have been torn and bloody.

It is hard to read this slowly, but we should. The One who would be lifted highest in verse 13 is the same One who was brought lowest in verse 14. He didn't just die for us. He let Himself be ruined for us. When we are tempted to think our sin is small, this verse tells us what it cost.

52:15 *so He will sprinkle many nations; kings will shut their mouth because of Him; for what had not been recounted to them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.*

"So He will sprinkle many nations." In the Law, sprinkling was a priest's work. The priest sprinkled blood on the altar and on the mercy seat to make atonement, and sprinkled water and blood to cleanse the unclean (Leviticus 14:7; 16:14). To make atonement means to cover sin and make peace between God and man. The Servant will do priestly work, and not only for Israel. He will cleanse "many nations." Hebrews 12:24 speaks of "the blood of sprinkling" of Jesus, and Peter says believers are chosen "for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). Some translations read "startle" here instead of "sprinkle," but I follow the SLB, which fits the priestly picture of the next chapter.

The world's kings will shut their mouths in front of Him. Kings are used to speaking and being obeyed, but this Servant leaves them speechless. They will see and understand what no one had ever told them.

Paul quoted the end of this verse in Romans 15:21 to explain why he preached where Christ wasn't yet known. That is still happening. Every time the gospel reaches a people group for the first time, this verse comes true again. And one day every king on earth will be silent before Him.

New Testament links: Romans 15:21 (quoted)

Chapter 52 Summary

God calls Jerusalem to wake up, shake off the dust, and put on her beautiful clothes, because her redemption is coming without money. A messenger runs across the mountains with good news: "Your God reigns." God's people are told to leave the unclean things behind, with the LORD going before them and guarding them from behind. Then the spotlight turns to the Servant, who will be lifted up high after first being disfigured beyond recognition, and who will leave kings speechless.

Chapter 52 Study Questions

1. What is the best piece of news anyone has ever brought you?

2. What does God tell Jerusalem to do in the first two verses? (52:1-2)

3. How will God redeem His people, and how does Peter use that idea? (52:3)

4. What message does the runner bring to Zion? (52:7)

5. How is this new exodus different from the first one? (52:11-12)

6. What two opposite things are said about the Servant? (52:13-14)

7. What does it mean that the Servant will "sprinkle many nations"? (52:15)

8. Whose feet have been "beautiful" to you because they brought you the gospel?

9. How does knowing the end of Jesus' story (52:13) help you face hard seasons in your own life?

Chapter 53: The Suffering Servant

Scripture: He Was Pierced for Our Transgressions

53:1-3 Who has believed our report? And the arm of the LORD, to whom has it been revealed? And He grew up like the sapling before Him, and like the root from dry ground; ***there was*** no form to Him and no splendor, that we should look at Him, and no appearance, that we should desire Him. He ***was*** despised and rejected by men, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness; and like a hiding of ***the*** face from Him, He ***was*** despised, and we did not value Him.

53:4-6 Surely our sicknesses He Himself bore, and our pains, He carried them; and we, we considered Him stricken, struck by God, and afflicted. And He ***was*** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace ***was*** on Him, and by His wound ***there*** was healing for us. All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.

53:7-9 He was oppressed, and He ***was*** afflicted, and He did not open His mouth; like the lamb ***that*** is brought to the slaughter, and like a ewe ***that*** before her shearers is mute, and He did not open His mouth. From oppression and from judgment He was taken away; and His generation, who will consider ***it***? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people a wound ***was*** His. And ***one*** assigned His grave with wicked ***men***, and with a rich ***man*** in His deaths, although He had done no violence, and no deceit ***was*** in His mouth.

53:10-12 And the LORD was pleased to crush Him; He made ***Him*** sick. If His soul makes a guilt offering, He will see offspring, He will prolong days, and the pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. From the labor of His soul He will see; He will be satisfied. By His knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many, and their iniquities He Himself will bear. Therefore I will apportion to Him ***a share*** among the many, and with mighty ***ones*** He will apportion plunder, because He poured out His soul to death, and with transgressors He was numbered; and He Himself bore the sin of many, and for the transgressors He will intercede.

Chapter 53 Preview

If you only read one chapter of Isaiah, read this one. Written about seven hundred years before Jesus was born, it describes a Servant of God who is rejected, beaten, pierced, silent before His accusers, killed, buried with the rich, and then alive again to see His offspring.

The heart of the chapter is one word: substitution. He suffers, and we are healed. He carries the sin, and we go free. This is the gospel, told in advance.

Chapter 53 Study

53:1 *Who has believed our report? And the arm of the LORD, to whom has it been revealed?*

The chapter opens with a sad question. Who has believed what we have heard? The "arm of the LORD" that Isaiah has been pointing to since chapter 40 (40:10; 51:9; 52:10) has been revealed, and hardly anyone recognizes it.

John quotes this exact verse to explain why so many people saw Jesus' miracles and still didn't believe (John 12:37-38). Paul quotes it too (Romans 10:16). In the very next verses John also quotes Isaiah 6:10, and he says Isaiah wrote these things "when he saw His glory, and he spoke concerning Him" (John 12:41). John credits both chapter 6 and chapter 53 to the same man, Isaiah.

"The arm of the LORD, to whom has it been revealed?" God's arm, His saving power, turns out to be a Person. Jesus is the arm of the LORD. And the question still stands over every reader. The facts are in front of us. Have we believed the report?

One more thing helps here. The Great Isaiah Scroll, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, contains this chapter and was copied before Jesus was born. No one can say these words were written after the cross to fit the story. They were waiting there all along.

New Testament links: John 12:38 (quoted); Romans 10:16 (quoted)

53:2 *And He grew up like the sapling before Him, and like the root from dry ground; **there was** no form to Him and no splendor, that we should look at Him, and no appearance, that we should desire Him.*

"Before Him" means before the LORD. The Servant grew up under God's watchful eye, like a small green shoot pushing up out of dry, cracked ground. Nobody expects much from a shoot in the desert.

That is how Jesus came. Isaiah had already said a shoot would come from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), the family of David, which by then was like a tree cut down. Jesus was born to a poor couple, laid in a feeding trough, and raised in Nazareth, a small town people looked down on (John 1:46).

"There was no form to Him and no splendor." There was nothing about His looks that made people stop and stare. He didn't come with a royal look or a crowd-pleasing face. People were drawn to Him by His words and His works, and many weren't drawn at all. God often works through what the world overlooks. That should encourage anyone who feels ordinary.

53:3 *He **was** despised and rejected by men, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness; and like a hiding of **the** face from Him, He **was** despised, and we did not value Him.*

The Servant was "despised and rejected by men." People looked down on Him and walked away from Him. John says it plainly: He came to His own, and His own "did not receive Him" (John 1:11). The religious leaders hated Him, His hometown rejected Him, and at the end His closest friends ran.

"A man of pains and acquainted with sickness." This is one of the tenderest titles in the Bible. Jesus knew pain and sorrow from the inside. He wept at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35). He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). In Gethsemane He said His soul was "very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38).

People hid their faces from Him, the way we turn away from someone whose suffering is too hard to look at. "We did not value Him." Notice the word "we." Isaiah speaks for his people, and in a sense for all of us. We didn't think He was worth much. If you have ever felt rejected or overlooked, know this: your Savior has been there, and He understands.

53:4 *Surely our sicknesses He Himself bore, and our pains, He carried them; and we, we considered Him stricken, struck by God, and afflicted.*

"Surely our sicknesses He Himself bore, and our pains, He carried them." Here is the turn of the whole chapter. The sicknesses and pains were ours. He carried them. The words "He" and "our" sit side by side to make the point unmistakable.

Matthew says Jesus' healing ministry was a fulfillment of this verse. When He healed the sick and cast out demons in Capernaum, Matthew quotes it: He "Himself took our infirmities and bore the diseases" (Matthew 8:17). Jesus' compassion for hurting bodies was a preview of the bigger burden He would carry to the cross.

Yet the onlookers got it backwards. "We considered Him stricken, struck by God." When people saw Jesus on the cross, they assumed God was punishing Him for His own wrongs. The crowd mocked Him for it (Matthew 27:41-43). They were half right. God was striking Him. But it wasn't for His sins. It was for ours, as the next verse says.

New Testament links: Matthew 8:17 (quoted); 1 Peter 2:24 (alluded to)

53:5 *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us.*

This verse is the center of the chapter, and maybe the center of the Old Testament. Read it slowly. Every line has a "He" and an "our."

"He was pierced for our transgressions." Transgressions are the times we cross God's line on purpose. Jesus was pierced by nails in His hands and feet, and by a soldier's spear in His side (John 19:34). Zechariah 12:10 also speaks of the day when Israel will "look to Me, to Him whom they have pierced."

He was "crushed for our iniquities." Iniquity is the bent, twisted sin inside us. The weight of it fell on Him until He was crushed.

"The chastening of our peace was on Him." The word "peace" is the Hebrew shalom, meaning wholeness and well-being. The chastening that brings us peace with God landed on Jesus instead of us (Romans 5:1).

"And by His wound there was healing for us." The Hebrew word for "wound" here means a stripe or welt, the mark a whip leaves. Peter quotes this line: "by whose wound you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). In Peter's letter the healing is about sin, since the same verse says He "bore our sins in His body on the tree." I believe the main healing here is the healing of our broken relationship with God. Jesus did heal bodies, and one day every believer will have a resurrection body with no sickness at all (Revelation 21:4). But the deepest wound we had was sin, and His wound healed that.

This is what Bible teachers call substitution. He took our place. It isn't a theory added later. It is right here in the text, seven centuries before the cross.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:24 (quoted); 1 Corinthians 15:3 (alluded to)

53:6 *All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.*

Here is the bad news and the good news in one verse. The bad news comes first: "All of us like the sheep have gone astray." Not some of us. All of us. Sheep don't wander off out of hatred. They just keep their heads down, nibbling the next patch of grass, until they are lost. That is a fair picture of us.

"Each to his own way we have turned." That is the heart of sin. It isn't only breaking rules. It is choosing my way over God's way. Romans 3:23 says the same: all have sinned.

Then the good news. "The LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us." The verse starts with "all" and ends with "all." Every one of us went astray, and the sin of every one of us was laid on the Servant. The picture is like the Day of Atonement, when the high priest laid both hands on a goat's head and confessed Israel's sins over it (Leviticus 16:21).

Paul puts it this way: God "made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Peter adds that "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have "returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). The lost sheep are brought home because the Shepherd became the sacrifice.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:25 (alluded to); 1 Corinthians 15:3 (alluded to)

53:7 *He was oppressed, and He **was** afflicted, and He did not open His mouth; like the lamb **that** is brought to the slaughter, and like a ewe **that** before her shearers is mute, and He did not open His mouth.*

The Servant was oppressed and afflicted, yet He didn't open His mouth. Most people protest when they are treated unfairly. He stayed silent.

We see this at Jesus' trials. When the chief priests accused Him before Pilate, He gave no answer to even a single charge, and Pilate was amazed (Matthew 27:12-14). Before Herod, He answered nothing at all (Luke 23:9). He wasn't silent because He had no defense. He was silent because He had come to die.

"Like the lamb that is brought to the slaughter." Lambs were the animals of Passover and the daily sacrifices. John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). A lamb doesn't fight the one who leads it.

In Acts 8:26-35 an Ethiopian official was reading this very verse in his chariot. He asked Philip whether the prophet was speaking of himself or of someone else. Philip, "having begun from this Scripture, preached Jesus as the gospel to him." That is still the right answer to the Ethiopian's question.

New Testament links: Acts 8:32-33 (quoted); Matthew 26:63 (alluded to); Mark 14:61 (alluded to); John 1:29 (alluded to); Revelation 5:6 (alluded to); Matthew 27:12-14 (alluded to)

53:8 *From oppression and from judgment He was taken away; and His generation, who will consider **it**? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people a wound **was** His.*

"From oppression and from judgment He was taken away." The Servant was removed by a legal process that was really an act of injustice. Jesus was arrested at night, tried before a council that brought false witnesses (Mark 14:55-56), and condemned by a governor who said he found no guilt in Him (John 18:38).

"And His generation, who will consider it?" He was "cut off from the land of the living," which means He was killed, and killed young, with no children to carry on His name. No one in His day stopped to think about what was really happening.

"For the transgression of My people a wound was His." Here God draws a clear line. The blow was due to "My people." The Servant took it. This helps answer a question some readers raise, namely whether the Servant in this chapter is just the nation of Israel. I don't believe it can be. The Servant suffers for the transgression of God's people, so He can't be those same people. He is the innocent One who stands in for them.

The Ethiopian official in Acts 8 was reading this verse too, right after verse 7. Acts 8:33 gives it as "who will describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth."

New Testament links: Acts 8:32-33 (quoted)

53:9 *And **one** assigned His grave with wicked **men**, and with a rich **man** in His deaths, although He had done no violence, and no deceit **was** in His mouth.*

This verse was fulfilled down to the details. The Servant's grave was assigned "with wicked men." Jesus was crucified between two criminals (Luke 23:32-33), and crucified criminals were often denied an honorable burial.

"And with a rich man in His deaths." That isn't what happened to crucified criminals. But Joseph of Arimathea, "a rich man" and a secret disciple, asked Pilate for the body and laid Jesus in his own new tomb cut in the rock (Matthew 27:57-60). The two halves of this verse look like they contradict each other, and both came true.

"Although He had done no violence, and no deceit was in His mouth." The Servant was innocent. Peter quotes this line: He "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Only a sinless One could be a substitute. A guilty man would have to die for his own sins.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:22 (quoted); Matthew 27:57-60 (alluded to)

53:10 *And the LORD was pleased to crush Him; He made **Him** sick. If His soul makes a guilt offering, He will see offspring, He will prolong days, and the pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.*

This may be the hardest verse in the chapter. "And the LORD was pleased to crush Him." How could that please God?

You might ask, "Did God enjoy His Son's pain?" No. The pleasure is in the plan and what it would accomplish. The cross wasn't an accident or a tragedy that went wrong. Peter said Jesus was "delivered up by the determined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). The Father was pleased to save sinners, and the cross was the only way.

"If His soul makes a guilt offering." A guilt offering in the Law (Leviticus 5:14-6:7) paid for a wrong and made things right, sometimes with extra paid back. The Servant offers His own life as that payment. Jesus said no one took His life from Him; He laid it down "from Myself" (John 10:18).

Then comes the surprise. After being crushed and killed and buried, the Servant "will see offspring" and "will prolong days." Dead men don't see their children or live longer. This is the resurrection, told seven centuries in advance. His offspring are the spiritual children born through His death, all who believe in Him. And "the pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand." The plan that looked like it ended at the tomb goes on succeeding in the hand of the living Christ.

53:11 *From the labor of His soul He will see; He will be satisfied. By His knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many, and their iniquities He Himself will bear.*

"From the labor of His soul He will see; He will be satisfied." After all the suffering, the Servant lives again, sees what His death accomplished, and is satisfied. Nothing more needs to be paid. On the cross Jesus said, "It has been finished" (John 19:30). Hebrews 12:2 says He endured the cross "for the joy lying before Him." We are part of that joy.

God now calls Him "the Righteous One, My servant." Only here in the song does God give Him this title. The Righteous One "will justify the many." To justify means to declare someone righteous, not guilty, in God's court. It is a legal word. We don't earn it; we're declared righteous because He bears our iniquities.

"By His knowledge" can mean by His own perfect knowledge of the Father's will, or by people coming to know Him. Bible teachers read it both ways, and both are true. I lean toward the second, because faith is knowing and trusting the Servant. Paul says that through the obedience of One, "the many will be constituted righteous" (Romans 5:19). That is this verse in New Testament words. Salvation is by faith in Jesus alone, because He alone carried the sin.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 2:24 (alluded to); Mark 10:45 (alluded to); Romans 5:19 (alluded to)

53:12 *Therefore I will apportion to Him **a share** among the many, and with mighty **ones** He will apportion plunder, because He poured out His soul to death, and with transgressors He was numbered; and He Himself bore the sin of many, and for the transgressors He will intercede.*

The song ends where it began, with the Servant exalted (52:13). God will "apportion to Him a share among the many," and "with mighty ones He will apportion plunder," like a victorious king after a war. The war was won at the cross and the empty tomb, and one day the spoils of that victory will be shared openly when He reigns over the earth.

The rest of the verse tells why He is rewarded, and it sums up the whole chapter. He "poured out His soul to death." He held nothing back.

"And with transgressors He was numbered." On the night before the cross, Jesus quoted this line and said it had to be fulfilled in Him (Luke 22:37). Hours later He hung between two thieves.

"And He Himself bore the sin of many." The word "many" doesn't set a limit; it means a great multitude, the same many who are justified in verse 11.

"And for the transgressors He will intercede." To intercede is to plead on someone's behalf. From the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). And He hasn't stopped. Hebrews 7:25 says He is "always living to intercede" for those who come to God through Him. The One who was numbered with sinners now prays for sinners. If you belong to Him, He is praying for you today.

New Testament links: Luke 22:37 (quoted); Mark 15:27-28 (quoted); Luke 23:32-33 (fulfilled); Matthew 27:38 (fulfilled); John 19:18 (fulfilled); Luke 23:34 (alluded to)

Chapter 53 Summary

Few believed the report, but the arm of the LORD was revealed in the Servant. He grew up like a shoot in dry ground, plain in looks and rejected by men. He carried our sicknesses and pains, was pierced for our transgressions, and was crushed for our iniquities, while we went astray like sheep. Silent as a lamb, He was condemned, killed, and buried with a rich man. Yet God was pleased with His guilt offering. He lives, sees His offspring, justifies many, and intercedes for transgressors.

Isaiah 53 in the New Testament

53:1 is quoted in John 12:38 and Romans 10:16 about Israel's unbelief.

53:4 is quoted in Matthew 8:17 about Jesus' healings.

53:5-6 are echoed in 1 Peter 2:24-25: "By whose wound you were healed."

53:7-8 is the passage the Ethiopian official was reading when Philip told him about Jesus (Acts 8:32-35).

53:9 is quoted in 1 Peter 2:22: no deceit was found in His mouth.

53:12 is quoted by Jesus Himself in Luke 22:37: "And He was counted with lawless ones."

Chapter 53 Study Questions

1. What is the most costly thing anyone has ever done for you?

2. How did people view the Servant when He came, and why? (53:2-3)

3. What did people think was happening to the Servant, and what was really happening? (53:4-5)

4. What does verse 6 say about all of us, and what did the LORD do about it? (53:6)

5. How did Jesus fulfill the picture of the silent lamb? (53:7)

6. What two details about the Servant's burial came true in Jesus' death? (53:9)

7. What signs of the resurrection can you find in verses 10 through 12? (53:10-12)

8. Which "He" and "our" line in verse 5 means the most to you, and why?

9. Who in your life needs to hear the answer Philip gave the Ethiopian official, and how could you share it?

Chapter 54: The Barren Woman

Scripture: The LORD's Everlasting Kindness to Zion

54:1-3 Shout for joy, barren ***woman who*** has not given birth; break forth ***into*** a shout of joy and cry aloud, ***you who*** have not been in labor; for many ***are*** the sons of the desolate ***woman***, more than the sons of the married ***woman***, says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not hold back; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your pegs. For right and left you will spread out, and your offspring will possess nations, and they will make desolated cities inhabited.

54:4-8 Do not be afraid, for you will not be put to shame; and do not be humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; for the shame of your youth you will forget, and the reproach of your widowhood you will not remember again. For your Husband ***is*** your Maker; the LORD of armies ***is*** His name; and your Redeemer ***is*** the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of all the earth. For like a wife abandoned and grieved of spirit the LORD has called you, and a wife of youth when she is rejected, says your God. For a small moment I abandoned you, and with great compassion I will gather you. In a flood of wrath I hid My face ***for*** a moment from you, and with everlasting steadfast love I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD.

54:9-10 For this ***is*** the waters of Noah to Me: as I swore that the waters of Noah would not pass over the earth again, so I have sworn not to be angry with you and not to rebuke you. For the mountains will be removed, and the hills will shake, and My steadfast love will not be removed from you, and the covenant of My peace will not shake, says the One who has compassion on you, the LORD.

54:11-17 Afflicted ***one***, storm-tossed, not comforted, look, I am setting your stones in antimony, and I will found you with sapphires. And I will make your battlements ***of*** ruby, and your gates ***of*** stones of beryl, and all your border ***of*** stones of delight. And all your sons ***will be*** taught by the LORD, and great ***will be*** the peace of your sons. In righteousness you will be established; be far from oppression, for you will not be afraid, and from terror, for it will not come near you. Look, anyone may surely stir up strife, ***it is*** not from Me; whoever stirs up strife with you will fall because of you. Look, I Myself created a craftsman who blows on a fire of charcoal and brings out a weapon for his work; and I Myself created a destroyer to ruin. Every weapon ***that*** is formed against you will not succeed, and every tongue ***that*** rises against you in judgment you will condemn. This ***is*** the inheritance of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness ***is*** from Me, declares the LORD.

Chapter 54 Preview

Right after the Servant dies for the sins of many in chapter 53, Isaiah bursts into song. The Servant's death bears fruit. Zion, pictured as a barren woman and an abandoned wife, is told to sing and to make her tent bigger, because her children are coming.

God speaks as a husband taking back His wife. His anger lasted a moment, but His kindness lasts forever. He swears a covenant of peace as sure as His promise to Noah, and He promises that no weapon formed against His people will prosper.

Chapter 54 Study

54:1 *Shout for joy, barren **woman who** has not given birth; break forth **into** a shout of joy and cry aloud, **you who** have not been in labor; for many **are** the sons of the desolate **woman**, more than the sons of the married **woman**, says the LORD.*

The order matters. Chapter 53 ends with the Servant seeing His offspring, and chapter 54 opens with a childless woman told to sing. The barren one is Zion, Jerusalem and her people, who had been left empty by exile. God says her children will outnumber those of a married woman.

Paul quotes this verse in Galatians 4:27 when he writes about "the Jerusalem above," the mother of all who believe. I believe the verse is first about Israel, whom God will restore, and that Paul rightly shows it also takes in the great family born through the Servant's death, Jew and Gentile together.

New Testament links: Galatians 4:27 (quoted)

54:2 *Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not hold back; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your pegs.*

A family that is about to grow needs more room. So Zion is told to stretch out her tent curtains, make the ropes longer, and drive the stakes in deeper. "Do not hold back."

The picture comes from Israel's tent-dwelling days. It is also a good word for our faith. When God promises to bless, we should make room for it and expect Him to do more than we planned.

54:3 *For right and left you will spread out, and your offspring will possess nations, and they will make desolated cities inhabited.*

Zion's family will spread out to the right and to the left, which means north and south, in every direction. Her descendants will take over lands of other nations and fill cities that had been left empty.

I read this as part of Israel's coming restoration. It began when the exiles came back and resettled Judah's towns. It will be complete when Christ reigns and Israel lives in the land in peace.

54:4 *Do not be afraid, for you will not be put to shame; and do not be humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; for the shame of your youth you will forget, and the reproach of your widowhood you will not remember again.*

God tells Zion not to fear. Two kinds of shame are named. "The shame of your youth" probably looks back to Israel's early unfaithfulness and slavery in Egypt. "The reproach of your widowhood" points to the exile, when the nation felt like a widow with no husband to defend her.

God says she will forget both. That is what grace does. It doesn't just cover our shame. In time it lets us stop living under it.

54:5 *For your Husband **is** your Maker; the LORD of armies **is** His name; and your Redeemer **is** the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of all the earth.*

Here is why she can stop being ashamed: "your Husband is your Maker." The God who made her is also the One who loves her and has bound Himself to her. He is the LORD of armies, her Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, and "the God of all the earth."

The Bible often calls God's relationship with His people a marriage (Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 2:19-20). The New Testament carries it on with Christ as the Bridegroom and His people as the bride (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7).

54:6 *For like a wife abandoned and grieved of spirit the LORD has called you, and a wife of youth when she is rejected, says your God.*

Zion is like a young wife who was sent away and left heartbroken. But the LORD has called her back. The "wife of youth" is the woman a man married when they were both young, the love of his early years.

God hasn't traded Israel for someone else. He calls her back as His first love. Paul says the same: "God did not reject His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:2).

54:7 *For a small moment I abandoned you, and with great compassion I will gather you.*

"For a small moment I abandoned you." The exile in Babylon lasted about seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10). To the people it felt endless. To God it was a brief moment compared with the "great compassion" that would follow.

Our hard seasons can feel the same way. Paul calls our troubles "the momentary lightness of our affliction" next to the eternal glory to come (2 Corinthians 4:17). That isn't because the pain is small, but because what God has planned is so much bigger.

54:8 *In a flood of wrath I hid My face **for** a moment from you, and with everlasting steadfast love I will have compassion on you, says your Redeemer, the LORD.*

Look at the contrast. On one side: "a flood of wrath" and "a moment." On the other: "everlasting steadfast love." The Hebrew word behind it is hesed, the word for God's faithful, covenant love, the love that keeps its promises.

God's anger at sin is real, and Israel felt it. But it isn't the last word. His compassion is.

54:9 *For this **is** the waters of Noah to Me: as I swore that the waters of Noah would not pass over the earth again, so I have sworn not to be angry with you and not to rebuke you.*

God points back to Noah. After the flood He swore that water would never again destroy the earth, and He put the rainbow in the sky as a sign (Genesis 9:11-16). Every rainbow since has proved that promise true.

Now God swears in the same way that He won't stay angry with Zion. If you want to know whether He will keep this promise, look at the sky after rain.

54:10 *For the mountains will be removed, and the hills will shake, and My steadfast love will not be removed from you, and the covenant of My peace will not shake, says the One who has compassion on you, the LORD.*

Mountains are the most solid things we know. God says even they may be moved and the hills may shake, but His steadfast love won't move away from His people. He calls it "the covenant of My peace."

Ezekiel also speaks of this covenant of peace, when God will set His sanctuary among Israel forever (Ezekiel 37:26). I believe it will be kept with the nation of Israel when they turn to their Messiah. For any believer, this verse is a solid place to stand. God's love is more stable than the ground under your feet.

54:11 *Afflicted **one**, storm-tossed, not comforted, look, I am setting your stones in antimony, and I will found you with sapphires.*

God speaks tenderly to Zion: "Afflicted one, storm-tossed, not comforted." That describes a city battered by enemies and a people tossed from place to place.

Then He promises to rebuild her with jewels. Antimony was a dark mineral women used to line their eyes, so the stones would be set in a dark, beautiful mortar. Her foundations will be sapphires.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:19 (alluded to)

54:12 *And I will make your battlements **of** ruby, and your gates **of** stones of beryl, and all your border **of** stones of delight.*

Even the battlements, the notches along the top of the wall, will be rubies. The gates will be crystal, and the whole wall precious stones.

John saw something very much like this in the New Jerusalem, with walls of jasper, foundations of every kind of precious stone, and gates of pearl (Revelation 21:18-21). I believe Isaiah's restored Zion in the kingdom points ahead to that final city. God's plans for His people aren't small. He builds with jewels.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:19 (alluded to)

54:13 *And all your sons **will be** taught by the LORD, and great **will be** the peace of your sons.*

"All your sons will be taught by the LORD." Jesus quoted this verse in John 6:45: "And they will all be taught of God." He used it to say that everyone who truly learns from the Father comes to Him.

In the restored Zion no one will need a go-between to know God. Jeremiah 31:34 says the same of the new covenant. When God Himself is the teacher, the result is great peace for His children.

New Testament links: John 6:45 (quoted)

54:14 *In righteousness you will be established; be far from oppression, for you will not be afraid, and from terror, for it will not come near you.*

Zion will be "established" in righteousness. Her security will rest on God's justice, not on armies or treaties. Oppression and terror won't come near her.

This has never fully been true of Jerusalem in history. It will be when Christ rules from Zion and nations no longer learn war (Isaiah 2:4).

54:15 *Look, anyone may surely stir up strife, **it is** not from Me; whoever stirs up strife with you will fall because of you.*

God makes a careful statement. If anyone attacks Zion, "it is not from Me." In the past God sent Assyria and Babylon to discipline His people (Isaiah 10:5). In this coming day, any attack will be without His approval, and the attacker will fall.

That is a real comfort. When God's discipline is over, He becomes His people's defender.

54:16 *Look, I Myself created a craftsman who blows on a fire of charcoal and brings out a weapon for his work; and I Myself created a destroyer to ruin.*

God reminds Zion who is in charge of weapons. He created the blacksmith who blows on the coals and hammers out a sword. He also created the destroyer. Nothing that can be used against His people exists outside His control.

Then why does God allow destroyers at all? The Bible doesn't answer every part of that, but it does tell us that no destroyer works outside His reach or beyond His limits.

54:17 *Every weapon **that** is formed against you will not succeed, and every tongue **that** rises against you in judgment you will condemn. This **is** the inheritance of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness **is** from Me, declares the LORD.*

"Every weapon that is formed against you will not succeed." Believers love to quote this promise, but it doesn't mean God's people will never be attacked. Verse 15 already said attacks will come. It means no attack will finally succeed.

The promise covers accusing tongues too. God's people will win in court. "This is the inheritance of the servants of the LORD." Notice the plural, "servants." After the one Servant in chapter 53, we

now read of many servants, those who belong to Him. Their vindication comes "from Me." Paul says it this way: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Chapter 54 Summary

After the Servant's death in chapter 53, Zion is called to sing like a barren woman about to have more children than she can count. She must enlarge her tent. God, her Maker and husband, calls her back after a brief time of anger and promises everlasting kindness, sworn as surely as His promise to Noah. He will rebuild her with precious stones, teach her children Himself, and guard her so that no weapon formed against her will prosper.

Chapter 54 Study Questions

1. When has something you thought was over in your life turned out to have a new beginning?

2. Why is it significant that this chapter comes right after chapter 53? (54:1)

3. What does God tell Zion to do with her tent, and why? (54:2-3)

4. What does God call Himself in relation to His people? (54:5-6)

5. How long does God's anger last compared with His compassion? (54:7-8)

6. What does God compare His covenant of peace to? (54:9-10)

7. What does "Every weapon that is formed against you will not succeed" promise, and what does it not promise? (54:15-17)

8. What "shame of your youth" do you need to let God help you forget?

9. Where do you need to "enlarge the place of your tent" and make room for what God wants to do?

Chapter 55: Come to the Waters

Scripture: The Free Offer of God's Grace

55:1-5 Oh, everyone ***who is*** thirsty, come to the waters; and ***you*** who have no money, come, buy grain and eat; and come, buy grain without money and without price, wine and milk. Why do you weigh out money for ***what is*** not bread, and your toil for ***what is*** not for satisfaction? Listen carefully to Me, and eat ***what is*** good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come to Me; listen, and let your soul live; and I will make for you an everlasting covenant, the faithful ***acts of*** steadfast love of David. Look, I have made him a witness to peoples, a leader and commander of peoples. Look, a nation ***that*** you do not know you will call, and a nation ***that*** has not known you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you.

55:6-9 Seek the LORD while He lets Himself be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked ***man*** forsake his way, and the man of wickedness his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly forgive. For My thoughts ***are*** not your thoughts, and your ways ***are*** not My ways, declares the LORD. For ***as*** the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

55:10-13 For just as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens, and do not return there unless they have watered the earth, and made it bring forth and made it sprout, and given seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so My word that goes out from My mouth will be; it will not return to Me empty, unless it has done what I desired, and has prospered ***in that for*** which I sent it. For in joy you will go out, and in peace you will be led; the mountains and the hills will break forth before you ***into*** a shout of joy, and all the trees of the field will clap ***the*** palm. Instead of the thornbush a cypress will grow up, and instead of the nettle a myrtle will grow up; and it will be for the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign ***that*** will not be cut off.

Chapter 55 Preview

Chapter 53 showed the price of salvation. Chapter 54 showed its fruit for Zion. Now chapter 55 throws the doors open to everyone. God calls out like a street vendor in the market, but His food and drink cost nothing.

He invites the thirsty, the broke, and the wicked to come, listen, and live. His ways are higher than ours, and His word never comes back empty. God's people go out in joy while the mountains sing and the trees clap.

Chapter 55 Study

55:1 *Oh, everyone **who is** thirsty, come to the waters; and **you** who have no money, come, buy grain and eat; and come, buy grain without money and without price, wine and milk.*

"Oh, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters." God sounds like a man calling out in a busy marketplace. But what He sells is free. Water, wine, and milk were the basic drinks of life and of celebration. The only qualification is to be thirsty.

Here is the strange part: "you who have no money, come, buy grain and eat." How do you buy without money? You buy with a price someone else has paid. Chapter 53 told us who paid it. Salvation is free to us because it cost the Servant everything.

Jesus stood up at a feast in Jerusalem and said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). The Bible ends with the same invitation: "and the one who wishes, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). From Isaiah to Revelation the offer hasn't changed. If you are thirsty, come.

New Testament links: John 7:37 (alluded to); Revelation 21:6 (alluded to); Revelation 22:17 (alluded to)

55:2 *Why do you weigh out money for **what is** not bread, and your toil for **what is** not for satisfaction? Listen carefully to Me, and eat **what is** good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

God asks a question that every generation needs to hear. Why spend money on what isn't bread? Why work for what doesn't satisfy? People chase money, pleasure, approval, and success, and they come away hungry.

The answer is to "listen carefully to Me." God feeds the soul through His word. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. The one coming to Me will certainly not hunger" (John 6:35). "Let your soul delight itself in fatness" means to enjoy the rich food of His presence. Many of us are tired because we keep buying what can't fill us.

55:3 *Incline your ear and come to Me; listen, and let your soul live; and I will make for you an everlasting covenant, the faithful **acts of** steadfast love of David.*

Coming to God means leaning in to listen. "Listen, and let your soul live." The life He offers is more than breathing. It is life with Him.

"I will make for you an everlasting covenant." A covenant is a binding promise. This one is tied to "the faithful acts of steadfast love of David." In 2 Samuel 7:12-16 God promised David that his throne and kingdom would last forever through his offspring.

Paul preached that God kept this promise by raising Jesus from the dead. In Acts 13:34 he quotes this verse: "I will give you the holy things of David, the sure things." A king who stays dead can't reign forever. A risen King can. Jesus, the Son of David, is alive, and through Him the promise to David reaches anyone who comes and listens.

New Testament links: Acts 13:34 (quoted)

55:4 *Look, I have made him a witness to peoples, a leader and commander of peoples.*

"Him" is David. God made David a witness and a leader to the nations around him. But David died, and these words point beyond him to the greater Son of David.

Jesus is called "the faithful witness" and "the ruler of the kings of the earth" in Revelation 1:5. He is the true leader and commander of the peoples. The old prophets often spoke of the coming Messiah as "David" (Ezekiel 34:23-24), because He would be David's heir and fulfill everything David's reign only pictured.

55:5 *Look, a nation **that** you do not know you will call, and a nation **that** has not known you will run to you, because of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you.*

Now God speaks to Israel. They will call nations they didn't know, and those nations will run to them. Why? Not because Israel is impressive, but because of "the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel," who has glorified her.

This has been happening since Pentecost, as people from every nation have come to the God of Israel through Israel's Messiah. It will be seen in its fullness in the kingdom, when the nations stream to Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3; Zechariah 8:23).

55:6 *Seek the LORD while He lets Himself be found; call on Him while He is near.*

"Seek the LORD while He lets Himself be found." This is an urgent verse. The offer is free, but it isn't open forever. There is a time when He is near and can be found, and there will be a time when the door is shut.

Paul says that now is "a day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Jesus told a parable about virgins who weren't ready when the bridegroom came, and the door was closed (Matthew 25:10). For each of us the time ends at death or at Christ's return, whichever comes first. If you have been putting it off, don't wait. Call on Him while He is near.

55:7 *Let the wicked **man** forsake his way, and the man of wickedness his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly forgive.*

This verse tells us what seeking God looks like. The wicked person must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Repentance starts on the inside, with how we think, and works its way out to how we live. To repent means to turn around: to stop going our way and go God's way.

Then come two of the most hopeful lines in Isaiah. God "may have compassion," and He "will abundantly forgive." Not a small pardon. Not a grudging one. Free and full pardon.

You might ask, "Does that include me, after what I have done?" The verse is written to "the wicked." That is exactly who it is for. No one has gone so far that God's pardon can't cover them. The thief on the cross is proof (Luke 23:42-43).

55:8 *For My thoughts **are** not your thoughts, and your ways **are** not My ways, declares the LORD.*

God's thoughts and ways aren't like ours. In context this explains verse 7. People aren't this forgiving. We hold grudges. We want people to earn their way back. God pardons abundantly because He doesn't think the way we do.

This verse is often used to explain things we can't understand, and that use isn't wrong. But first of all it is a statement about grace.

55:9 *For **as** the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

God shows the size of the difference. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are His ways above ours. Psalm 103:11 uses the same picture: "His steadfast love is strong toward those who fear Him."

We should be humble about our opinions of God. When His ways seem strange to us, the problem is our height, not His.

55:10 *For just as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens, and do not return there unless they have watered the earth, and made it bring forth and made it sprout, and given seed to the sower and bread to the eater,*

God gives a picture from farming. Rain and snow come down from the sky, and they don't go back up until they have done their work. They water the ground, make the plants sprout, and give the farmer seed for next year and bread for his table.

Israel was a farming people who knew that without rain there was no food. Every rainy day was a sermon about God's faithfulness.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 9:10 (alluded to)

55:11 *so My word that goes out from My mouth will be; it will not return to Me empty, unless it has done what I desired, and has prospered **in that for** which I sent it.*

"So My word that goes out from My mouth will be; it will not return to Me empty." God's word works the same way as rain. It doesn't come back empty. It does what He sends it to do.

This is a great comfort for anyone who teaches the Bible, raises children, or shares the gospel with a friend. We don't always see results. But God's word is never wasted. Some seed takes years to sprout. Hebrews 4:12 says the word of God is "living and active."

It is also a warning. God's word always accomplishes something. To those who receive it, it brings life. To those who reject it, it becomes a witness against them (John 12:48). Either way, it doesn't return empty.

55:12 *For in joy you will go out, and in peace you will be led; the mountains and the hills will break forth before you **into** a shout of joy, and all the trees of the field will clap **the** palm.*

This is a new exodus. God says to His people, "in joy you will go out, and in peace you will be led." For the exiles this meant leaving Babylon and going home.

"All the trees of the field will clap the palm." This is figurative language. Trees don't have palms. But Isaiah means that creation itself will celebrate when God redeems His people. Paul says creation is groaning, waiting for that day (Romans 8:19-22). When Christ returns and reigns, the whole earth will seem to sing.

55:13 *Instead of the thornbush a cypress will grow up, and instead of the nettle a myrtle will grow up; and it will be for the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign **that** will not be cut off.*

After the fall, God told Adam that the ground would grow "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18). Here the curse is reversed. Thorn bushes give way to cypress trees and nettles to myrtles, evergreens that stay green all year.

I read this as a promise of the renewed earth in Christ's kingdom, when the effects of the curse are rolled back. The changed land "will be for the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign" that He keeps His word. Every redeemed life is a small version of that sign: thorns replaced with something green and alive.

Chapter 55 Summary

God invites everyone who is thirsty to come and receive food and drink without money, because the Servant has paid the price. He asks why people spend themselves on what doesn't satisfy, and He promises an everlasting covenant based on His faithful acts of steadfast love to David, kept in the risen Christ. Everyone is urged to seek the LORD while He may be found, because He pardons abundantly. His ways are higher than ours, and His word never returns empty. His people will go out with joy as creation sings.

Chapter 55 Study Questions

1. What have you chased in life that didn't satisfy?

2. Who is invited to come in the opening verse, and what does it cost? (55:1)

3. What question does God ask in verse 2, and what does He tell people to do instead? (55:2)

4. How does Paul connect "the faithful acts of steadfast love of David" to Jesus? (55:3; Acts 13:34)

5. Why is there urgency in the call to seek the LORD? (55:6)

6. What must the wicked do, and what does God promise in return? (55:7)

7. How is God's word like the rain and snow? (55:10-11)

8. How does knowing God "will abundantly forgive" change the way you approach Him after you sin?

9. Who do you know who is thirsty, and how could you invite them to come to the waters?

Chapter 56: A House of Prayer

Scripture: Outsiders Welcomed, Shepherds Asleep

56:1-2 Thus says the LORD: Keep justice and do righteousness, for My salvation ***is*** near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. How blessed ***is*** the man ***who*** does this, and the son of man ***who*** takes hold of it, keeping ***the*** Sabbath from profaning it, and keeping his hand from doing any evil.

56:3-8 And let not the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, saying, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Look, I ***am*** a dry tree." For thus says the LORD to the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what I delight in, and take hold of My covenant: And I will give to them in My house and within My walls a monument and a name better than sons and than daughters; an everlasting name I will give to him, which will not be cut off. And the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps ***the*** Sabbath from profaning it, and those who take hold of My covenant, and I will bring them to My holy mountain, and I will make them rejoice in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices ***will be*** for acceptance on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. Declares the Lord GOD, who gathers the banished of Israel: Yet I will gather ***others*** to him, to his gathered ones.

56:9-12 All ***you*** animals of the field, come to devour, all ***you*** animals in the forest. His watchmen ***are*** blind; all of them do not know; all of them ***are*** mute dogs; they are not able to bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. And the dogs ***are*** strong of appetite; they do not know satisfaction; and they ***are*** shepherds ***who*** do not know ***how*** to understand; all of them have turned to their own way, each to his unjust gain, to the last one. "Come, let me take wine, and let us drink our fill of strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great, abundant exceedingly."

Chapter 56 Preview

The invitation of chapter 55 was for "everyone who is thirsty." Chapter 56 shows how wide that door really is. Foreigners and eunuchs, people who had been kept at the edges of Israel's worship, are welcomed into God's house with a name better than sons and daughters.

Then the tone turns sharp. Israel's own leaders, the watchmen and shepherds who should have guarded the flock, are blind, lazy, and greedy. Isaiah calls the wild beasts to come and eat.

Chapter 56 Study

56:1 *Thus says the LORD: Keep justice and do righteousness, for My salvation **is** near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.*

This verse starts a new turn in Isaiah's message. God's people are told to keep justice and do what is right, because His salvation "is near to come."

Notice the order. We don't do right to earn salvation. We do right because salvation is coming, and we want to be found ready. John the Baptist preached the same way: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matthew 3:2).

56:2 *How blessed **is** the man **who** does this, and the son of man **who** takes hold of it, keeping **the** Sabbath from profaning it, and keeping his hand from doing any evil.*

God blesses the person who holds on to doing right. Two examples are given: keeping the Sabbath holy and keeping one's hand from evil.

The Sabbath was the seventh day, Saturday, set apart for rest and worship under the Law of Moses (Exodus 20:8-11). It was the sign of God's covenant with Israel (Exodus 31:13). Keeping it showed that a person belonged to the LORD. Christians differ on how the Sabbath command applies to us today (Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16-17). But all of us can learn from the heart of it: setting apart time for God shows whom we belong to.

56:3 *And let not the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, saying, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Look, I **am** a dry tree."*

Two kinds of people were afraid they had no place among God's people. The foreigner, a Gentile who had turned to the LORD, feared God would separate him from Israel. The eunuch, a man who had been castrated (often to serve in a king's court), feared he was "a dry tree," with no children and no future.

Their fear had a reason. The Law kept certain foreigners and eunuchs out of the assembly of the LORD (Deuteronomy 23:1-3). God now tells both: don't say that.

56:4 *For thus says the LORD to the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what I delight in, and take hold of My covenant:*

God speaks to the eunuchs first. What He looks for in them is what He looks for in anyone. Do they keep His Sabbaths, choose what pleases Him, and hold fast His covenant?

The barrier was outward. God is looking at the heart. A man who could never have children could still be fully faithful to the LORD.

56:5 *And I will give to them in My house and within My walls a monument and a name better than sons and than daughters; an everlasting name I will give to him, which will not be cut off.*

The eunuch's great sorrow was that his name would die with him. God answers that sorrow directly. He will give him a memorial and a name inside His own house, "better than sons and than daughters," an everlasting name that "will not be cut off."

In Acts 8:26-39, a eunuch from Ethiopia, returning from worship in Jerusalem, was reading the scroll of Isaiah, just a few chapters before this one. Philip told him about Jesus, and he was baptized on the spot. We can see this verse coming true in Acts 8.

56:6 *And the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps **the** Sabbath from profaning it, and those who take hold of My covenant,*

Now God turns to the foreigners. He describes them warmly: they join themselves to the LORD, minister to Him, love His name, become His servants, keep the Sabbath, and hold fast His covenant.

This isn't a second-class membership. Foreigners who come to God this way are His servants just as Israelites are. That has always been God's plan, all the way back to His promise that through Abraham "all the families of the earth" would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

56:7 *and I will bring them to My holy mountain, and I will make them rejoice in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices **will be** for acceptance on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.*

God will bring these foreigners to His holy mountain and make them joyful in His house. Their offerings will be accepted on His altar.

"For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." Jesus quoted this when He drove the money changers out of the temple (Mark 11:17). The temple's outer court was the place where Gentiles could pray, and it had been turned into a market. Jesus was defending the foreigners' right to meet with God.

What about the sacrifices? Christ's one sacrifice took away sin for good (Hebrews 10:12-14), and nothing needs to be added to it. Bible teachers disagree about verses like this one. Some see offerings in the Millennium as memorials pointing back to the cross, much like the temple Ezekiel describes (Ezekiel 40-48). Others think Isaiah used the worship language his readers knew to describe Gentiles worshiping God fully. I hold the first view loosely. What isn't in doubt is that all the peoples will worship in God's house with joy (Isaiah 2:2-3).

New Testament links: Mark 11:17 (quoted); Matthew 21:13 (quoted); Luke 19:46 (quoted)

56:8 *Declares the Lord GOD, who gathers the banished of Israel: Yet I will gather **others** to him, to his gathered ones.*

The Lord GOD is the One who gathers the scattered people of Israel. He says, "Yet I will gather others to him, to his gathered ones." These others are non-Israelites, added to those already gathered.

Jesus said, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold; those also I must bring" (John 10:16). God gathers Israel, and He gathers the nations along with her into one flock. That includes most of us reading this book.

56:9 *All **you** animals of the field, come to devour, all **you** animals in the forest.*

Suddenly the mood shifts. God calls the wild animals of the field and forest to come and eat. The beasts are a picture of enemy nations coming to devour Israel. The next verses explain why the flock is in danger: its guardians have failed.

56:10 *His watchmen **are** blind; all of them do not know; all of them **are** mute dogs; they are not able to bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.*

The watchmen are the prophets and leaders who were supposed to stand on the wall and warn of danger (Ezekiel 33:6-7). But they are blind. They know nothing.

"Mute dogs; they are not able to bark." A sheepdog that won't bark is useless. These leaders love to lie down and dream. When danger came, they were asleep. Leaders in the church today should read this verse with care.

56:11 *And the dogs **are** strong of appetite; they do not know satisfaction; and they **are** shepherds **who** do not know **how** to understand; all of them have turned to their own way, each to his unjust gain, to the last one.*

The dogs are "strong of appetite." They are always hungry for more and never satisfied. The shepherds have no understanding. Every one of them has turned to his own way, looking out for his own gain.

The phrase "have turned to their own way" echoes 53:6, where all of us like sheep turned to our own way. Here even the shepherds are lost. Jesus, by contrast, is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

56:12 *"Come, let me take wine, and let us drink our fill of strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great, abundant exceedingly."*

The leaders throw a party. "Come, let me take wine," they say, and drink until they are drunk. They are sure "tomorrow will be like this day, great, abundant exceedingly." They never expect a reckoning.

Jesus told of a rich man who said the same kind of thing, planning to eat, drink, and be merry. God said, "Fool! This night they are demanding your soul from you" (Luke 12:19-20). Assuming tomorrow will always be like today is one of the oldest traps there is.

Chapter 56 Summary

God calls His people to do justice because His salvation is near, and He blesses those who keep His covenant. Foreigners and eunuchs who had feared being shut out are welcomed into His house, given an everlasting name, and brought to His holy mountain, for His house will be a house of prayer for all peoples. Then God rebukes Israel's leaders: blind watchmen, silent dogs, and greedy shepherds who party as if tomorrow will never bring judgment.

Chapter 56 Study Questions

1. Have you ever felt like an outsider in a church or a group of believers? What was that like?

2. Why does God tell His people to do justice and righteousness? (56:1)

3. What were the foreigner and the eunuch afraid of? (56:3)

4. What does God promise the faithful eunuch? (56:4-5)

5. How did Jesus use verse 7 when He cleared the temple? (56:7; Mark 11:17)

6. Whom will God gather besides the scattered people of Israel? (56:8)

7. How does God describe Israel's watchmen and shepherds? (56:10-12)

8. Who are the "outsiders" in your community, and how could you welcome them into God's house?

9. In what ways are you tempted to assume "tomorrow will be like this day"?

Chapter 57: The High and Lofty One

Scripture: Idolatry Exposed, the Contrite Revived

57:1-2 The righteous ***man*** has perished, and ***there is*** no man laying ***it*** to heart; and men of steadfast love are gathered away, with no one understanding that from before the evil the righteous ***man*** is gathered away. He enters ***into*** peace; they rest on their beds, ***each*** one walking ***in*** his uprightness.

57:3-10 And you, draw near here, sons of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer, and she has played the prostitute. Against whom are you making sport? Against whom do you make wide a mouth ***and*** make long a tongue? Are you not children of transgression, offspring of deception, who inflame yourselves among the terebinths, under every luxuriant tree, who slaughter the children in the wadis, under the clefts of the cliffs? Among the smooth ***stones*** of the wadi ***is*** your portion; they, they ***are*** your lot; also to them you have poured out a drink offering; you have offered up a grain offering. Should I relent concerning these ***things***? On a high and lifted-up mountain you have set your bed; also there you have gone up to sacrifice a sacrifice. And behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your memorial; for ***away*** from Me you have uncovered ***yourself***, and you have gone up; you have made wide your bed, and you have cut ***a covenant*** for yourself with them; you have loved their bed; you have looked on a hand. And you journeyed to the king with oil, and you multiplied your perfumes; and you sent your envoys to far away, and you abased ***yourself*** to Sheol. With the greatness of your way you became weary; you did not say, "Hopeless!" You found the life of your hand; therefore you did not become weak.

57:11-13 And whom did you dread, and fear, that you lie, and you did not remember Me, ***and*** did not lay ***it*** to your heart? Have I not been silent, even from long ago, and you do not fear Me? I, I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, and they will not benefit you. When you cry out, let your collections ***of idols*** deliver you; and a wind will carry all of them away; a breath will take ***them***. And the one who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land and will possess My holy mountain.

57:14-19 And one will say, "Build up, build up, clear ***the*** way; lift up ***the*** obstacle from the way of My people." For thus says the High and Lifted-Up One, who dwells forever, and holy ***is*** His name: ***In*** a high and holy ***place*** I dwell, and with the contrite and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed. For I will not contend forever, and I will not be angry perpetually; for the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breaths ***that*** I, I have made. In the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, and I struck him; I hid ***My face*** and was angry; and he went on, turning away, in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and I will heal him; and I will lead him, and I will restore comforts to him and to his mourners, creating ***the*** fruit of ***the*** lips: Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the LORD, and I will heal him.

57:20-21 And the wicked ***are*** like the tossed sea, for it is not able to be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and mud. ***There is*** no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

Chapter 57 Preview

This chapter swings between two extremes. At one end, God exposes Israel's idol worship in some of the bluntest language in Isaiah: worship under every green tree, children sacrificed in the ravines, and spiritual adultery on the high hills.

At the other end, the high and exalted God, whose name is Holy, lives in heaven and also with the person who is crushed and humble in spirit. He promises peace to the far and the near, but no peace to the wicked.

Chapter 57 Study

57:1 *The righteous **man** has perished, and **there is** no man laying **it** to heart; and men of steadfast love are gathered away, with no one understanding that from before the evil the righteous **man** is gathered away.*

Godly people are dying, and nobody notices. No one stops to ask why. Isaiah gives the answer that the crowd missed: "from before the evil the righteous man is gathered away." God sometimes brings His people home before a coming disaster.

God told good King Josiah something like this. Because his heart was tender, he would be gathered to his grave in peace and wouldn't see the evil God was about to bring on Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:19-20).

57:2 *He enters **into** peace; they rest on their beds, **each** one walking **in** his uprightness.*

"He enters into peace." For the believer, death isn't the end of the story. They "rest on their beds," a gentle picture of the body lying in the grave while the person is at peace with God.

Paul said that to depart and be with Christ "is very much better" (Philippians 1:23). When a godly person dies young, it is a real loss for us. But for them, it is peace.

57:3 *And you, draw near here, sons of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer, and she has played the prostitute.*

Now God turns to the wicked and calls them into court. "Draw near here." He calls them children of a sorceress, an adulterer, and a prostitute. This is spiritual language. Their parents practiced witchcraft and were unfaithful to God, and the children followed in their steps.

The Bible often calls idolatry adultery, because worshiping other gods is like a wife running after other men (Jeremiah 3:8-9).

57:4 *Against whom are you making sport? Against whom do you make wide a mouth **and** make long a tongue? Are you not children of transgression, offspring of deception,*

These people mocked God and His true servants, opening their mouths wide and sticking out their tongues like rude children. God asks, "Against whom are you making sport?" They thought they were mocking the prophets. They were really mocking God.

God calls them "children of transgression, offspring of deception." Rebellion and lies ran in the family.

57:5 *who inflame yourselves among the terebinths, under every luxuriant tree, who slaughter the children in the wadis, under the clefts of the cliffs?*

Isaiah describes the worship of Canaanite fertility gods. People worked themselves up "among the terebinths, under every luxuriant tree," places where pagan worship often included sexual acts. Worse, they killed their own children in the valleys as offerings.

This really happened in Judah. King Ahaz burned his son as an offering (2 Kings 16:3), and so did King Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6). Jeremiah condemned the same horror in the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem (Jeremiah 7:31). Our own culture has its ways of sacrificing children to comfort and convenience. God sees, and He hates it.

57:6 *Among the smooth **stones** of the wadi **is** your portion; they, they **are** your lot; also to them you have poured out a drink offering; you have offered up a grain offering. Should I relent concerning these **things**?*

The smooth stones of the stream bed had become their gods. They poured drink offerings and grain offerings to them. God says, "they are your lot," meaning: you chose them, so they are all you get.

"Should I relent concerning these things?" God asks if He should simply overlook it. The answer is no. A holy God can't shrug at idolatry.

57:7 *On a high and lifted-up mountain you have set your bed; also there you have gone up to sacrifice a sacrifice.*

The people set up their "bed" on high mountains, the hilltop shrines where idols were worshiped (2 Kings 17:10-11). God uses the picture of an unfaithful wife who makes her bed in public. They went up there to offer sacrifice to gods that weren't God.

57:8 *And behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your memorial; for **away** from Me you have uncovered **yourself**, and you have gone up; you have made wide your bed, and you have cut **a covenant** for yourself with them; you have loved their bed; you have looked on a hand.*

Behind the door and doorpost, where God told Israel to write His commandments (Deuteronomy 6:9), they put up a pagan sign instead. They left God and made agreements with false gods, loving their "bed."

The language is strong on purpose. God wants Israel to feel how ugly their unfaithfulness is to Him. Sin is more than rule-breaking; it's a broken relationship.

57:9 *And you journeyed to the king with oil, and you multiplied your perfumes; and you sent your envoys to far away, and you abased **yourself** to Sheol.*

"The king" may be a foreign king whose help they sought with gifts of oil and perfume. It may also be the god Molech, whose name is close to the Hebrew word for king. Molech was the god associated with child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21). Bible teachers read it both ways, and the point is the same. Israel went to great lengths, sending envoys "to far away," even down to Sheol, the place of the dead, to find help anywhere but from God.

57:10 *With the greatness of your way you became weary; you did not say, "Hopeless!" You found the life of your hand; therefore you did not become weak.*

They wore themselves out chasing idols and alliances, but they never said, "Hopeless!" They always found a little more strength to keep going the wrong way.

That is a picture of a heart that won't give up its sin. People will exhaust themselves rather than admit their path isn't working. The better thing is to stop and turn back to the Lord.

57:11 *And whom did you dread, and fear, that you lie, and you did not remember Me, **and** did not lay **it** to your heart? Have I not been silent, even from long ago, and you do not fear Me?*

God asks a searching question. Who were you so afraid of that you lied and forgot Me? Fear of people drove them to false gods and false friends.

"Have I not been silent, even from long ago, and you do not fear Me?" God had held back judgment, and the people took His patience as permission. Peter warns about the same mistake in 2 Peter 3:9. God's patience is meant to lead us to repentance, not to make us careless.

57:12 *I, I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, and they will not benefit you.*

God says He will "declare your righteousness." That is irony. He will lay out what they call righteousness, all their religious busyness, and it will be exposed as worthless. Their deeds "will not benefit you." Good-looking religion can't save anyone.

57:13 *When you cry out, let your collections **of idols** deliver you; and a wind will carry all of them away; a breath will take **them**. And the one who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land and will possess My holy mountain.*

When trouble comes, let your collection of idols save you. God's answer is plain: a puff of wind will blow them all away.

"And the one who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land." Here is the turn. The one who trusts in God, rather than idols, will inherit the land and possess God's holy mountain. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). I believe this will be fulfilled when Christ reigns over the earth with His people.

57:14 *And one will say, "Build up, build up, clear **the** way; lift up **the** obstacle from the way of My people."*

A voice calls out to build up the road and clear every obstacle out of the way of God's people. This echoes Isaiah 40:3 and 62:10. God is preparing a road home.

Spiritually, the biggest obstacles are pride and sin. The next verse shows what kind of heart God travels toward.

57:15 *For thus says the High and Lifted-Up One, who dwells forever, and holy **is** His name: **In** a high and holy **place** I dwell, and with the contrite and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed.*

This verse tells us who God is. He is "the High and Lifted-Up One." He "dwells forever," and "holy is His name." In Hebrew, these are the same two words Isaiah used for the Lord on His throne in 6:1 and for the Servant in 52:13: "high and lifted up."

"In a high and holy place I dwell, and with the contrite and lowly of spirit." God has two addresses. One is the highest place in the universe. The other is the broken heart. "Contrite" means crushed, broken over sin. "Lowly" means humble.

Why would the holy God choose to live with crushed people? Because they're the ones who know they need Him. The proud have no room for God. David prayed, "A broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). James says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

And God doesn't just visit the lowly. He comes to "revive" them, to bring them back to life. If you feel crushed today, you are exactly the kind of person God loves to dwell with.

57:16 *For I will not contend forever, and I will not be angry perpetually; for the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breaths **that** I, I have made.*

God won't fight with His people forever or stay angry always. If He did, the human spirit would simply faint and die before Him. He made us, and He knows how frail we are (Psalm 103:14). His discipline always has a limit and a purpose.

57:17 *In the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, and I struck him; I hid **My face** and was angry; and he went on, turning away, in the way of his heart.*

God explains His anger. Israel's sin was "the iniquity of his unjust gain." So He struck them and hid His face. Even then, the people kept "turning away, in the way of his heart." Punishment alone didn't change them.

That is an honest picture of us. Discipline can show us our sin, but it can't give us a new heart. Only God's grace can do that, as the next verse shows.

57:18 *I have seen his ways, and I will heal him; and I will lead him, and I will restore comforts to him and to his mourners,*

"I have seen his ways, and I will heal him." This is pure grace. God looked at Israel's stubborn ways, all of them, and decided to heal anyway. He will lead them and bring comfort to them and to those who mourn among them.

Healing came not because Israel finally got it right, but because God chose to show mercy. That is how He saves all of us.

57:19 *creating **the** fruit of **the** lips: Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the LORD, and I will heal him.*

God is "creating the fruit of the lips." Healed people praise Him, and even that praise is His gift.

"Peace, peace, to the far and to the near." Repeating a word in Hebrew makes it stronger: full and complete peace. Paul applies this verse to the gospel in Ephesians 2:17. Christ "preached the gospel, peace to you, the ones far off," the Gentiles, "and to the ones near," the Jews. Through the cross both have access to the Father. Whether you grew up near to God or far from Him, this peace is offered to you.

New Testament links: Ephesians 2:13 (alluded to); Ephesians 2:17 (alluded to)

57:20 *And the wicked **are** like the tossed sea, for it is not able to be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and mud.*

The wicked are compared to the sea in a storm. It can't be quiet. Its waves keep churning up trash and mud from the bottom.

That is what a heart without God looks like. It is restless, and what it stirs up is dirty. Many people today know this restlessness and try to quiet it with noise, busyness, or pleasure.

New Testament links: Jude 1:13 (alluded to)

57:21 ***There is*** *no peace, says my God, for the wicked.*

"There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." Isaiah used nearly the same words to close chapters 40 through 48 (48:22), and he will use the same idea again at the end of the book (66:24). God offers peace to the far and the near in verse 19. But those who refuse to turn from their wickedness shut themselves out of it.

The offer and the warning sit side by side. Peace is free, but it must be received.

Chapter 57 Summary

The righteous are taken away from coming evil and enter peace, while no one notices. God then exposes Israel's idolatry: fertility worship under green trees, children sacrificed in the valleys, and spiritual adultery on the high places. Idols can't save, but whoever takes refuge in God will

inherit the land. The high and holy God dwells with the contrite and lowly to revive them. He sees Israel's stubborn ways and chooses to heal anyway, offering peace to the far and the near, but no peace to the wicked.

Chapter 57 Study Questions

1. Where do you go, or what do you do, when you feel restless inside?
2. What does Isaiah say really happens when a righteous person dies? (57:1-2)
3. What kinds of idol worship does God expose in this chapter? (57:5-8)
4. Why did the people forget God and turn to lies? (57:11)
5. What happens to those who trust in idols, and to those who take refuge in God? (57:13)
6. Where does the high and exalted God choose to dwell? (57:15)
7. How does Paul use verse 19 in Ephesians 2:17? (57:19)
8. What would it look like for you to come to God "contrite" and "lowly of spirit" this week?
9. Is there an "idol" you have kept chasing even though it wears you out? What would it take to stop?

Chapter 58: The True Fast

Scripture: Religion God Accepts

58:1-5 Call out with ***the*** throat; do not hold back; like the trumpet raise your voice, and declare to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins. And they seek Me day ***by*** day, and they delight in the knowledge of My ways, like a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the judgment of its God; they ask Me ***for*** judgments of righteousness; they delight in the nearness of God. "Why have we fasted, and You have not seen? ***Why*** have we afflicted our soul, and You do not know?" Look, on the day of your fast you find pleasure, and you oppress all your laborers. Look, for strife and contention you fast, and to strike with a fist of wickedness; you do not fast as ***you do*** this day to make your voice heard on high. Is it like this, the fast that I choose, a day for a man to afflict his soul? ***Is it*** to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes ***as his bed***? Will you call this a fast and a day of acceptance to the LORD?

58:6-9 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to unfasten the bindings of the yoke-bar, and to let the crushed go free, and ***that*** you tear apart every yoke-bar? Is it not to break your bread for the hungry, and ***that*** you bring the afflicted homeless ***into your*** house; when you see the naked, and you cover him, and you do not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will spring up quickly; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say, "Here I ***am***." If you remove from your midst the yoke-bar, the stretching out of ***the*** finger, and the speaking of wickedness,

58:10-12 and you offer your soul to the hungry and satisfy the soul of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom ***will be*** like the noonday. And the LORD will lead you continually, and He will satisfy your soul in scorched places, and He will strengthen your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of waters whose waters do not fail. And ***those*** from you will rebuild the ancient ruins; the foundations of generation and generation you will raise up; and you will be called One Who Walls Up a Breach, One Who Restores Paths for Dwelling.

58:13-14 If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, ***from*** doing your pleasures on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy ***day*** of the LORD honorable, and honor it, ***turning*** from doing your own ways, from finding your own pleasure, and speaking a word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the high places of the earth, and I will feed you ***with*** the inheritance of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Chapter 58 Preview

Israel's religion looked good from the outside. The people sought God daily, fasted, and bowed their heads. Yet God wasn't answering, and they wanted to know why.

God tells Isaiah to shout the answer like a trumpet. They fasted while they mistreated their workers and fought with each other. The fast God wants is to set the oppressed free, feed the hungry, and shelter the poor. When His people live that way, their light breaks out like the dawn and God answers, "Here I am."

Chapter 58 Study

58:1 *Call out with **the** throat; do not hold back; like the trumpet raise your voice, and declare to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins.*

God tells Isaiah not to hold back. He is to raise his voice like a trumpet, the shofar, a ram's horn blown to warn of danger or call people together. His message is to tell God's people their sins.

This isn't a message for outsiders. It is for "My people," "the house of Jacob." Sometimes the people who most need a wake-up call are the ones sitting in church.

58:2 *And they seek Me day **by** day, and they delight in the knowledge of My ways, like a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the judgment of its God; they ask Me **for** judgments of righteousness; they delight in the nearness of God.*

Here is the surprise. These people seem very spiritual. They seek God every day, enjoy learning His ways, ask Him for right decisions, and delight in being near Him. They act like a nation that does what is right.

The key word is "like." They act "like a nation that has done righteousness." It is a performance. It is possible to enjoy religion and still be far from God.

58:3 *"Why have we fasted, and You have not seen? **Why** have we afflicted our soul, and You do not know?" Look, on the day of your fast you find pleasure, and you oppress all your laborers.*

The people complain to God. We fasted, and You didn't notice. We humbled ourselves, and You paid no attention. To fast is to go without food for a time in order to seek God, often in grief or repentance.

God answers right away. On the very day of their fast, they did whatever they wanted and drove their workers hard. They skipped meals but kept squeezing their employees. Their fasting didn't touch the way they treated people.

58:4 *Look, for strife and contention you fast, and to strike with a fist of wickedness; you do not fast as **you do** this day to make your voice heard on high.*

Their fasts ended in arguing and fighting, even fistfights. God says plainly that fasting like this won't get their voice heard in heaven.

It is a hard truth. Religious acts done with a hateful heart don't reach God. Jesus said that if you are offering a gift and remember your brother has something against you, go and make it right first (Matthew 5:23-24).

58:5 *Is it like this, the fast that I choose, a day for a man to afflict his soul?* ***Is it*** *to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes* ***as his bed****? Will you call this a fast and a day of acceptance to the LORD?*

God describes their fast with a touch of sadness. Is this what I want? A day for a man to droop his head like a reed bent in the wind, and to lie on sackcloth and ashes?

Sackcloth was rough cloth worn in mourning, and ashes were a sign of grief. These things aren't wrong in themselves. But without a changed heart, they are only a costume. God asks, "Will you call this a fast?"

58:6 *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to unfasten the bindings of the yoke-bar, and to let the crushed go free, and* ***that*** *you tear apart every yoke-bar?*

Now God tells them the fast He chooses. Loosen the bonds of wickedness. Undo the straps of the yoke. Let the oppressed go free. Break every yoke. A yoke was the wooden bar laid across the neck of an animal, or a slave, to make it pull a load.

In Luke 4:18, when Jesus read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue at Nazareth, He also read the words "to send away the oppressed in release," which come from this verse. Setting people free was at the heart of Jesus' own mission.

58:7 *Is it not to break your bread for the hungry, and* ***that*** *you bring the afflicted homeless* ***into your*** *house; when you see the naked, and you cover him, and you do not hide yourself from your own flesh?*

The fast God wants also looks like dividing your bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your home, and covering the naked. "Your own flesh" means your own relatives and your own people. Don't hide from them when they need you.

Jesus said the same in Matthew 25:35-36. "I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat." James calls caring for orphans and widows "religion pure and undefiled" (James 1:27). The question isn't whether we skip meals, but whether our faith feeds anyone.

58:8 *Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will spring up quickly; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

"Then your light will break forth like the dawn." When God's people live this way, everything changes. Their light breaks out like the sunrise. Their healing comes quickly.

"The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard." This echoes 52:12, where God went before His people and behind them on the way home from Babylon. Their righteousness goes in front of them, and God's glory protects them from behind.

58:9 *Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say, "Here I **am**." If you remove from your midst the yoke-bar, the stretching out of **the** finger, and the speaking of wickedness,*

"Then you will call, and the LORD will answer." This is the answer to the complaint of verse 3. God wasn't ignoring their prayers out of cruelty. Their sin was in the way. When they turn, He will answer, "Here I am."

There is a condition. They must remove "the yoke-bar" from their midst, along with "the stretching out of the finger," which means accusing and looking down on others, and "the speaking of wickedness." Many of us want God to answer when we call, but we keep pointing fingers. This verse asks us to put the finger down.

58:10 *and you offer your soul to the hungry and satisfy the soul of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your gloom **will be** like the noonday.*

God repeats the call with a deeper word. Not just give food to the hungry, but "offer your soul to the hungry." Real compassion costs us something of ourselves, our time and our attention, not just our leftovers.

Then the light rises in the darkness, and gloom becomes like noon. People who pour themselves out for others often find their own darkness lifting.

58:11 *And the LORD will lead you continually, and He will satisfy your soul in scorched places, and He will strengthen your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of waters whose waters do not fail.*

God promises to guide His people continually, to satisfy them in dry places, and to strengthen their bones. They will be "like a watered garden" and "like a spring of waters whose waters do not fail."

The person who pours out is never left empty. Jesus said that from the one who believes in Him, "rivers of living water will flow" (John 7:38). God's people become a spring for others because God Himself is their source.

58:12 *And **those** from you will rebuild the ancient ruins; the foundations of generation and generation you will raise up; and you will be called One Who Walls Up a Breach, One Who Restores Paths for Dwelling.*

Those who live this way will rebuild ancient ruins. For Isaiah's readers, that meant Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, which would lie in ruins after Babylon. The returning exiles did begin to rebuild them, as Nehemiah and Ezra record.

"One Who Walls Up a Breach." A breach is a broken gap in a city wall. God's people will be known as wall-menders and street-restorers. That is a good name for any believer: someone who repairs what has been broken.

58:13 *If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, **from** doing your pleasures on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy **day** of the LORD honorable, and honor it, **turning** from doing your own ways, from finding your own pleasure, and speaking a word,*

Last, God speaks about the Sabbath, a sign of Israel's covenant with God (Exodus 31:13). He asks His people to turn back their foot "from doing your pleasures on My holy day," to call the Sabbath "a delight," and to honor it by not going their own way or speaking their own words.

Christians differ on how the Sabbath command applies to us under the new covenant (Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16-17). But the heart of this verse speaks to all of us. God wants a people who delight in Him, not a people who keep rules grudgingly. Jesus said "the Sabbath was made for the sake of man" (Mark 2:27). Setting aside time for God is meant to be a joy, not a burden.

58:14 *then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the high places of the earth, and I will feed you **with** the inheritance of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

"Then you will take delight in the LORD." Those who make God's day a delight will find their delight in God Himself. He will make them "ride on the high places of the earth," a picture of victory and safety, and feed them with the inheritance promised to Jacob.

I believe this inheritance, the land and blessing promised to Jacob's family, will be fully given to Israel in Christ's kingdom. And it is sure, "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Chapter 58 Summary

God tells Isaiah to shout to His people about their sins. They seek God daily and fast, then complain that He doesn't notice. But on fast days they oppress their workers and fight. The fast God chooses is to break yokes, free the oppressed, feed the hungry, and shelter the homeless. Then their light will break out like the dawn, God will answer their prayers, and they will be like a watered garden, rebuilding the ruins. Those who delight in His holy day will delight in the LORD.

Chapter 58 Study Questions

1. Have you ever done something religious while your heart was somewhere else?

2. How did Israel's religion look from the outside? (58:2)

3. What was wrong with the way they fasted? (58:3-5)

4. What kind of fast does God choose? (58:6-7)

5. What does God promise when His people live this way? (58:8-9)

6. What does it mean to "offer your soul to the hungry," and what happens when we do? (58:10-11)

7. What is "One Who Walls Up a Breach," and what ruins will God's people rebuild? (58:12)

8. Is there someone you have been pointing the finger at that God may want you to help instead?

9. What is one practical way you could "break your bread for the hungry" this month?

Chapter 59: The Redeemer Will Come

Scripture: Sin, Confession, and the Warrior Redeemer

59:1-8 Look, the hand of the LORD is not too short to save, and His ear is not too heavy to hear. But your iniquities have been separating between you and your God, and your sins have hidden ***His*** face from you so that ***He does*** not hear. For your palms are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken falsehood; your tongue mutters injustice. ***There is*** no one calling in righteousness, and ***there is*** no one pleading ***his case*** in faithfulness; trusting in emptiness and speaking worthlessness, conceiving trouble and bringing forth wickedness. They have hatched eggs of a viper, and they weave webs of a spider; the one who eats of their eggs will die, and the crushed ***egg*** is hatched ***into*** an adder. Their webs will not become clothing, and they will not cover themselves with their works; their works ***are*** works of wickedness, and the deed of violence ***is*** in their palms. Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts ***are*** thoughts of wickedness; devastation and destruction ***are*** in their highways. A way of peace they do not know, and ***there is*** no justice in their tracks; they have made their paths crooked for themselves; everyone who treads on it does not know peace.

59:9-15 Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we wait for light, and look, darkness; for brightness, ***and*** in gloom we walk. We grope for ***the*** wall like the blind, and like ***those who have*** no eyes we grope; we have stumbled at noonday as ***in*** the twilight, among the robust like the dead. We growl like the bears, all of us, and like the doves we moan and moan; we wait for justice, and ***there is*** none; for salvation, ***and*** it is far from us. For our transgressions are many before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions ***are*** with us, and our iniquities, we know them: transgressing and denying the LORD, and turning back from after our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from ***the*** heart words of falsehood. And justice is driven back, and righteousness stands far off; for truth has stumbled in the public square, and uprightness is not able to enter. And the truth was lacking, and the one turning aside from evil ***was*** plundered. And the LORD saw, and it was evil in His eyes that ***there was*** no justice.

59:16-21 And He saw that ***there was*** no man, and He was appalled that ***there was*** no one to intercede; and His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness, it upheld Him. And He put on righteousness like the body armor, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance ***for*** clothing, and He wrapped Himself in zeal like the robe. According to ***their*** deeds, accordingly He will repay: rage to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the coastlands He will repay recompense. And they will fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; for He will come like a pent-up river ***which*** the wind of the LORD drives on. And a Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob, declares the LORD. And as for Me, this ***is*** My covenant with them, says the LORD: My Spirit that ***is*** on you, and My words that I have put in your mouth, will not depart from your mouth, and from the mouth of your offspring, and from the mouth of the offspring of your offspring, says the LORD, from now and until forever.

Chapter 59 Preview

Why does it feel like God isn't listening? Chapter 59 answers that question honestly. The problem isn't God's arm or God's ear. The problem is sin, which has built a wall between the people and their God.

The chapter moves in three steps. First Isaiah describes the people's sin. Then the people confess it in their own words. Then God, seeing that no one can fix it, puts on His armor and comes Himself as the Redeemer to Zion. Paul quotes this promise in Romans 11 about Israel's future salvation.

Chapter 59 Study

59:1 *Look, the hand of the LORD is not too short to save, and His ear is not too heavy to hear.*

The people blamed God. Isaiah answers: the LORD's hand isn't too short to save, and His ear isn't too dull to hear. God hasn't lost His strength or His hearing.

This is the same question God asked in 50:2: "Is My hand really too short for ransom?" If our prayers seem to hit the ceiling, the first thing to check isn't God's ability.

59:2 *But your iniquities have been separating between you and your God, and your sins have hidden **His** face from you so that **He does** not hear.*

"But your iniquities have been separating between you and your God." Here is the real problem. Sin is a wall. It hides God's face, and He doesn't hear. I want to be careful here. Isaiah is speaking to a nation living in open sin. Not every unanswered prayer means we are hiding sin. Job was righteous and still waited, and Paul prayed three times and heard, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). But when sin is the wall, the answer is to confess it and turn back to God.

This is true of every person. Romans 3:23 says all have sinned, and Romans 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death." Separation from God is the deepest result of sin. The good news, which this chapter will reach, is that God Himself breaks through the wall. In Christ the barrier is torn down (Ephesians 2:14).

59:3 *For your palms are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken falsehood; your tongue mutters injustice.*

Isaiah gets specific. Hands are stained with blood. Fingers are dirty with iniquity. Lips speak lies. Tongues mutter wickedness.

He moves from hands to fingers to lips to tongue, as if checking each part of the body. Sin isn't only in one corner of our lives. It touches all of us.

59:4 ***There is*** *no one calling in righteousness, and* ***there is*** *no one pleading* ***his case*** *in faithfulness; trusting in emptiness and speaking worthlessness, conceiving trouble and bringing forth wickedness.*

The courts were broken. No one brought a lawsuit honestly, and no one argued a case truthfully. People were "trusting in emptiness," in empty arguments, and they told lies.

"Conceiving trouble and bringing forth wickedness." Sin is pictured like a pregnancy. It starts as an idea in the heart and is born as an action. James 1:15 uses the same picture: lust conceives and gives birth to sin.

59:5 *They have hatched eggs of a viper, and they weave webs of a spider; the one who eats of their eggs will die, and the crushed* ***egg*** *is hatched* ***into*** *an adder.*

Two images show how dangerous these people's plans are. They hatch adders' eggs, so anyone who eats them dies, and if you crush one, a snake comes out. They weave spider webs, which trap whatever flies into them.

Either way, getting involved with their schemes is deadly.

59:6 *Their webs will not become clothing, and they will not cover themselves with their works; their works* ***are*** *works of wickedness, and the deed of violence* ***is*** *in their palms.*

A spider web looks like fabric, but you can't make clothes out of it. In the same way, their works can't cover them. Their deeds are iniquity, and their hands are full of violence.

We often try to cover our sin with our own good works, like Adam and Eve with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). It never works. Only God can clothe us, and He does it with His righteousness.

59:7 *Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts* ***are*** *thoughts of wickedness; devastation and destruction* ***are*** *in their highways.*

"Their feet run to evil." They are eager to sin, and they hurry to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are full of iniquity, and they leave ruin behind them on the highways.

Paul quotes verses 7 and 8 in Romans 3:15-17 as part of his proof that "there is not a righteous one, not even one" (Romans 3:10). Isaiah is describing Israel in his day, and Paul shows it describes the whole human race.

New Testament links: Romans 3:15-17 (quoted)

59:8 *A way of peace they do not know, and* ***there is*** *no justice in their tracks; they have made their paths crooked for themselves; everyone who treads on it does not know peace.*

They don't know the way of peace. There is no justice in their tracks. They have made their paths crooked, and everyone who walks on them loses peace too.

Sin never stays private. Our crooked paths become the roads other people have to walk.

New Testament links: Romans 3:15-17 (quoted)

59:9 *Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we wait for light, and look, darkness; for brightness, **and** in gloom we walk.*

Now the voice changes from "they" to "we." The people begin to confess. Justice is far from us. Righteousness doesn't catch up with us. We hope for light, but there is only darkness.

This is a good turn. Real change begins when we stop saying "they" and start saying "we." Daniel prayed this way for his people in Daniel 9:5: "we have sinned."

59:10 *We grope for **the** wall like the blind, and like **those who have** no eyes we grope; we have stumbled at noonday as **in** the twilight, among the robust like the dead.*

The people describe themselves as blind men feeling their way along a wall. They stumble at noon as if it were twilight. Among the strong, they are like the dead.

This is what life without God's light is like. You can be in broad daylight and still not see. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. The one following Me will certainly not walk in the darkness" (John 8:12).

59:11 *We growl like the bears, all of us, and like the doves we moan and moan; we wait for justice, and **there is** none; for salvation, **and** it is far from us.*

They growl like hungry bears and moan like doves. They hope for justice and for salvation, but both seem far away.

There is real honesty in this verse. The people are frustrated and sad, and they say so to God instead of pretending things are fine. Lament, an honest cry of grief to God, is a real part of faith.

59:12 *For our transgressions are many before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions **are** with us, and our iniquities, we know them:*

Now comes the clearest confession in the chapter. Our transgressions are many. Our sins testify against us. We know our iniquities.

That is what confession is: agreeing with God about our sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins" (1 John 1:9). We can't be healed of what we refuse to admit.

59:13 *transgressing and denying the LORD, and turning back from after our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from **the** heart words of falsehood.*

The confession goes deeper. They have transgressed and denied the LORD, turned away from God, spoken oppression and revolt, and spoken lies that started in the heart.

Notice where it starts: denying the LORD. All the other sins come from turning away from Him. When God is pushed out of the center, everything else goes crooked.

59:14 *And justice is driven back, and righteousness stands far off; for truth has stumbled in the public square, and uprightness is not able to enter.*

Justice has been pushed back. Righteousness stands at a distance. Truth has stumbled and fallen in the street, and uprightness can't get in.

The street is the public square, where the city gathered and did business. Picture truth lying on the ground there while people step over it. Many of us know what it is like to live in a culture like that.

59:15 *And the truth was lacking, and the one turning aside from evil **was** plundered. And the LORD saw, and it was evil in His eyes that **there was** no justice.*

"The truth was lacking." It is so bad that anyone who turns away from evil becomes a target. Doing right gets you robbed.

Then comes the turning point. The LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. God isn't blind to injustice. He sees it, and He doesn't like it.

59:16 *And He saw that **there was** no man, and He was appalled that **there was** no one to intercede; and His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness, it upheld Him.*

"He saw that there was no man." God looked for someone to step in and set things right, and there was no one. No one could intercede, standing between the guilty people and the judgment they deserved. God "was appalled," a strong word to show how complete the failure was.

"And His own arm brought salvation." Here is the arm of the LORD again (51:9; 52:10; 53:1). When no human could save, God saved by His own arm. We have already learned who that arm is. In chapter 53 the arm of the LORD was the Servant who bore our sins. There is "one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Isaiah 63:5 repeats this almost word for word, and there it describes the Lord coming in judgment. So I read this as both comings of Christ. At His first coming He brought salvation by the cross. At His second coming He will bring justice to the earth.

59:17 *And He put on righteousness like the body armor, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance **for** clothing, and He wrapped Himself in zeal like the robe.*

God dresses for battle. He puts on righteousness like a breastplate and salvation like a helmet. Over that He puts on garments of vengeance and wraps Himself in zeal like a cloak.

Paul borrows this armor for believers: "the breastplate of righteousness" and "the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:14, 17; also 1 Thessalonians 5:8). The armor we wear is God's own armor. He fights first, and then He clothes us in what He wore.

New Testament links: Ephesians 6:14 (alluded to); 1 Thessalonians 5:8 (alluded to); Ephesians 6:17 (alluded to)

59:18 *According to **their** deeds, accordingly He will repay: rage to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the coastlands He will repay recompense.*

The Lord repays according to what people have done: wrath to His enemies, payment to His foes, even to the faraway coastlands.

This looks ahead to Christ's return. John saw Him ride out of heaven on a white horse, judging and waging war in righteousness, His robe dipped in blood (Revelation 19:11-15). God's justice has been delayed for many centuries, but it hasn't been canceled.

59:19 *And they will fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; for He will come like a pent-up river **which** the wind of the LORD drives on.*

From the west to the sunrise, people will fear the name of the LORD. He will come "like a pent-up river which the wind of the LORD drives on." The word for wind is also the word for Spirit.

When Jesus returns, His coming will be as sudden and unstoppable as a flash flood. Every nation will see His glory (Matthew 24:27, 30).

59:20 *And a Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob, declares the LORD.*

"And a Redeemer will come to Zion." A redeemer was a family member who paid to rescue a relative from slavery or debt (Leviticus 25:47-49). God promises to come Himself as Israel's Redeemer. He comes "to those who turn from transgression in Jacob."

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 11:26 when he explains that "all Israel will be saved" and that "The One who delivers will come out of Zion." Paul's wording is a little different from Isaiah's. Isaiah says the Redeemer comes "to Zion," and Paul says "out of Zion." Both are true. He comes to Zion, and from Zion He will rule. I believe Paul is teaching what Isaiah teaches. God hasn't abandoned the nation of Israel. When Christ returns, Israel will turn to Him and be saved. Zechariah 12:10 says they will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him. The promise to Jacob's family will be kept.

New Testament links: Romans 11:26 (quoted)

59:21 *And as for Me, this **is** My covenant with them, says the LORD: My Spirit that **is** on you, and My words that I have put in your mouth, will not depart from your mouth, and from the mouth of your offspring, and from the mouth of the offspring of your offspring, says the LORD, from now and until forever.*

God ends with a covenant. His Spirit will be on His people, and His words will never leave their mouths, nor the mouths of their children and grandchildren, "from now and until forever."

Paul quotes the start of this verse together with 59:20 in Romans 11:27: "This is the covenant from Me to them." It is the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God writes His law on His people's hearts. I believe this will be fulfilled for the nation of Israel when they turn to the Messiah, and in the meantime every believer, Jew or Gentile, already shares in that Spirit and that word (Acts 2:38-39).

New Testament links: Romans 11:27 (quoted)

Chapter 59 Summary

The LORD's hand can save and His ear can hear, but Israel's sins have built a wall between them and God. Isaiah lists their violence, lies, and crooked paths, and Paul later uses these words to show all are guilty. The people confess their sin and admit that truth has fallen in the street. Seeing no one to intercede, God acts by His own arm, puts on righteousness and salvation as armor, and comes as the Redeemer to Zion, making a lasting covenant of His Spirit and His word.

Chapter 59 Study Questions

1. Have you ever felt that God wasn't hearing your prayers? What did you think was the reason?

2. What is the real reason God seems not to hear, according to Isaiah? (59:1-2)

3. How does Isaiah describe the sins of the people? (59:3-8)

4. How does Paul use verses 7 and 8 in Romans 3? (59:7-8)

5. What changes in the way the people speak beginning in verse 9, and why does it matter? (59:9-13)

6. What does God do when He sees there is no one to intercede? (59:16-17)

7. How does Paul use verses 20 and 21 to speak about Israel's future? (59:20-21; Romans 11:26-27)

8. Is there sin you need to confess so the wall between you and God can come down?

9. How does knowing God put on His armor first change the way you think about the armor of God in Ephesians 6?

Chapter 60: The Glory of Zion

Scripture: Zion's Coming Light and the Wealth of the Nations

60:1-3 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has dawned on you. For look, the darkness will cover ***the*** earth, and thick darkness the peoples; and on you the LORD will dawn, and His glory will appear over you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawning.

60:4-9 Lift up your eyes all around and see: all of them have gathered together; they have come to you; your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on ***the*** hip. Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will tremble and be enlarged, for the abundance of the sea will be turned to you; the wealth of nations will come to you. A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah; all of them will come from Sheba; they will carry gold and frankincense, and they will bring good news of the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; they will go up for acceptance on My altar, and I will beautify the house of My splendor. Who ***are*** these ***who*** fly like the cloud, and like the doves to their windows? For the coastlands will wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far away, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of the LORD your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you.

60:10-14 And sons of the foreigner will rebuild your walls, and their kings will minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, and in My favor I have had compassion on you. And your gates will be open continually; day and night they will not be shut, to bring to you the wealth of nations, and their kings being led. For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly laid waste. The glory of Lebanon will come to you, cypress, elm, and box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of My feet. And the sons of those who afflicted you will come to you bowing low, and all those who despised you will bow down at the soles of your feet; and they will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

60:15-18 Instead of your being forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting majesty, a joy of generation and generation. And you will suck the milk of nations, and you will suck the breast of kings; and you will know that I, the LORD, ***am*** your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of the bronze I will bring gold, and instead of the iron I will bring silver, and instead of the wood, bronze, and instead of the stones, iron; and I will make your overseers peace, and your oppressors righteousness. Violence will not be heard again in your land, devastation and destruction within your borders; and you will call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.

60:19-22 The sun will no longer be for you for light by day, and for brightness the moon will not give light to you; and the LORD will be for you an everlasting light, and your God your splendor. Your sun will no longer go down, and your moon will not be withdrawn; for the LORD will be for you an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be completed. And your people, all of them ***will be*** righteous; forever they will possess the land, the shoot of My planting, the work of

My hands, to beautify Myself. The small ***one*** will become a thousand, and the little ***one*** a mighty nation. I ***am*** the LORD; in its time I will hasten it.

Chapter 60 Preview

Chapter 59 ended with the Redeemer coming to Zion. Chapter 60 shows what Zion looks like after He comes. A dark world sees a light rising over Jerusalem, and the nations stream toward it, carrying her scattered children home and bringing their wealth with them.

Old enemies bow, violence ends, and the LORD Himself becomes the city's light. I believe this chapter describes Jerusalem during Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, with its last verses looking ahead to the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21.

Chapter 60 Study

60:1 *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has dawned on you.*

God speaks to Zion, the city of Jerusalem and the people who belong to it, and gives two commands: get up and shine. The reason isn't that Zion has found some light of its own. Her light "has come," and the glory of the LORD has risen on her like the sun at dawn.

"Your light has come." In 59:20 Isaiah promised that "a Redeemer will come to Zion." I take this light to be that Redeemer, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who called Himself "the light of the world" (John 8:12). Zion doesn't shine first and then get rewarded. She shines because He has come to her. The same is true for us. Our job is to rise and reflect a light that we didn't make.

New Testament links: Ephesians 5:14 (alluded to)

60:2 *For look, the darkness will cover **the** earth, and thick darkness the peoples; and on you the LORD will dawn, and His glory will appear over you.*

The contrast is sharp. Darkness covers the earth and "thick darkness" covers the peoples, yet light rises over Zion. I believe this fits the end of the age, when the world sinks into the darkness of the Tribulation (the seven years of judgment before Christ returns) and then the Lord appears in glory over His people. Light shines brightest against a black sky, and so will His coming.

60:3 *And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawning.*

Nations and kings are drawn to the light. They aren't forced at sword point here. They come because they see something they want. This picks up the promise of 2:2-4, where all the nations stream to the mountain of the LORD to learn His ways. The wise men who came from the east to the child Jesus (Matthew 2:1-2) were an early taste of it.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:24 (alluded to)

60:4 *Lift up your eyes all around and see: all of them have gathered together; they have come to you; your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on **the** hip.*

Zion is told to look around. Everyone is gathering, and many of them are her own children coming home from far away. The daughters are "carried on the hip," a tender picture of little ones being brought back. God is reversing the scattering of Israel. The same promise appears in 49:22, where the nations carry Zion's sons in their arms and her daughters on their shoulders.

60:5 *Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will tremble and be enlarged, for the abundance of the sea will be turned to you; the wealth of nations will come to you.*

Seeing her children come home, Zion becomes "radiant." Her heart thrills, which is the picture of a heart pounding with joy. Then come the gifts. "The abundance of the sea" means the trade and treasure of the seafaring nations, and "the wealth of nations" is turned toward Jerusalem. The nations that once plundered Israel now bring their best to her.

60:6 *A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah; all of them will come from Sheba; they will carry gold and frankincense, and they will bring good news of the praises of the LORD.*

Camel caravans fill the land, coming from Midian and Ephah in Arabia and from Sheba in the far south. They bring "gold and frankincense." Many readers think of the wise men, who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus (Matthew 2:11). That visit was a small preview. Here the whole caravan world comes, and what they carry isn't only treasure but "good news of the praises of the LORD." These Gentiles come as worshipers.

New Testament links: Matthew 2:11 (alluded to)

60:7 *All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; they will go up for acceptance on My altar, and I will beautify the house of My splendor.*

Kedar and Nebaioth were Arab tribes descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). Their flocks are offered on God's altar and are accepted. God is welcoming the descendants of Ishmael into His worship. That should make us stop and think. People we might count as outsiders are the ones God pictures at His altar.

"I will beautify the house of My splendor." The temple will be made beautiful. Good teachers differ on whether there will be animal offerings in the Millennium (Ezekiel 40-48 describes them). I read Isaiah's words plainly, as worship in Christ's kingdom, while holding that no offering ever adds to the finished sacrifice of Jesus (Hebrews 10:12).

60:8 *Who **are** these **who** fly like the cloud, and like the doves to their windows?*

Isaiah sees something on the horizon and asks who they are. They fly "like the cloud" and like doves heading back to their roosting holes. The next verse answers: it is the ships coming with Israel's sons. The picture is of sails filling the sky, so many and so fast that they look like a flock of birds racing home.

60:9 *For the coastlands will wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far away, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of the LORD your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified you.*

The "coastlands" are the distant lands across the sea, and "the ships of Tarshish" were the great merchant ships of the ancient world. They come "first," leading the way, and they carry Israel's sons along with silver and gold.

Why would the nations do this? The verse says plainly: "to the name of the LORD" and because the Holy One of Israel "has glorified you." The nations aren't honoring Israel for her own greatness. They honor the God who has kept His word to her.

60:10 *And sons of the foreigner will rebuild your walls, and their kings will minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, and in My favor I have had compassion on you.*

Foreigners rebuild Jerusalem's walls and their kings serve her. Then God explains Himself. "For in My wrath I struck you." The exile and the long years of trouble were real discipline for real sin. "And in My favor I have had compassion on you." His anger was for a moment, but His mercy lasts (54:7-8). God hasn't abandoned Israel, and Paul says the same in Romans 11:1-2.

60:11 *And your gates will be open continually; day and night they will not be shut, to bring to you the wealth of nations, and their kings being led.*

City gates in the ancient world were shut at night to keep enemies out. Zion's gates stand open "continually," day and night, because she has nothing left to fear. Revelation 21:25-26 uses this same picture for the New Jerusalem: its gates will never be closed, and the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:25-26 (alluded to)

60:12 *For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly laid waste.*

This is a hard verse, and we shouldn't soften it. In Christ's kingdom, a nation that refuses to serve will perish. The Millennium is a time of peace, but it is peace under a King who shepherds them "with a rod of iron" (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 19:15). Zechariah 14:16-19 says the same, describing nations that refuse to come up and worship and so receive no rain.

60:13 *The glory of Lebanon will come to you, cypress, elm, and box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of My feet.*

Lebanon was famous for its great forests. Solomon used its cedars to build the first temple (1 Kings 5:6). Now its finest trees, the juniper, the box tree and the cypress, are brought again to beautify God's sanctuary. God calls it "the place of My feet," the spot where He chooses to set His presence among people on earth.

60:14 *And the sons of those who afflicted you will come to you bowing low, and all those who despised you will bow down at the soles of your feet; and they will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*

The children of Israel's oppressors come bowing, and those who despised her bow at her feet. They now call her "the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel." Jesus echoes this verse when He promises the faithful church in Philadelphia that its enemies will "come and worship before your feet" (Revelation 3:9). God has a way of turning the tables for those who stay faithful to Him.

Some teachers read Revelation 3:9 as this promise passing from Zion to the church, but I believe Jesus borrows the picture for one faithful church while the promise itself still belongs to Israel, and it will be kept when the nations come to Jerusalem in His thousand-year kingdom.

New Testament links: Revelation 3:9 (alluded to)

60:15 *Instead of your being forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting majesty, a joy of generation and generation.*

Jerusalem has known long seasons of being "forsaken and hated," so empty that travelers went around her. God promises to turn that shame into "an everlasting majesty," a joy for every generation. Many people carry a past that feels like ruins. God specializes in making forsaken places into places of joy.

60:16 *And you will suck the milk of nations, and you will suck the breast of kings; and you will know that I, the LORD,* ***am*** *your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*

The picture is of a nursing child. Zion will draw nourishment from the nations and their kings the way a baby draws milk. Then comes the point of it all: "You will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior." Every blessing in this chapter is meant to lead to knowing God. He is named here as Savior, Redeemer and "the Mighty One of Jacob."

60:17 *Instead of the bronze I will bring gold, and instead of the iron I will bring silver, and instead of the wood, bronze, and instead of the stones, iron; and I will make your overseers peace, and your oppressors righteousness.*

Everything gets upgraded. Bronze becomes gold, iron becomes silver, wood becomes bronze, stones become iron. In Solomon's day silver was as common as stones in Jerusalem (1 Kings 10:27), but this is greater still.

"I will make your overseers peace." The government itself changes. Instead of corrupt officials, peace and righteousness are the overseers. That is what a city looks like when Christ is King.

60:18 *Violence will not be heard again in your land, devastation and destruction within your borders; and you will call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.*

No more violence. No more "devastation and destruction," a phrase that sums up everything an invading army brings. The walls are named "salvation" and the gates "praise." The city's

protection is God's saving work, and the way in is praise. When we come to God today, it is still through thanksgiving and praise (Psalm 100:4).

60:19 *The sun will no longer be for you for light by day, and for brightness the moon will not give light to you; and the LORD will be for you an everlasting light, and your God your splendor.*

The sun and moon are no longer needed for light, because the LORD Himself is Zion's "everlasting light." John saw the same thing in the New Jerusalem. The city needs no sun or moon, because the glory of God lights it and "its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23).

Here is how I read verses 19 and 20. Much of this chapter describes the Millennium, but these words reach past it to the eternal city that comes down after the final judgment. Isaiah often sees both mountains at once without showing the valley between them.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:23 (alluded to); Revelation 22:5 (alluded to)

60:20 *Your sun will no longer go down, and your moon will not be withdrawn; for the LORD will be for you an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be completed.*

Her sun never sets and her moon never wanes. The LORD is her light that never goes out, "and the days of your mourning will be completed." Revelation 21:4 promises the same: God will wipe away every tear, and there will be no more mourning. Whatever you are grieving today, it has an end date in God's plan.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:23 (alluded to)

60:21 *And your people, all of them **will be** righteous; forever they will possess the land, the shoot of My planting, the work of My hands, to beautify Myself.*

"And your people, all of them will be righteous." This isn't because Israel finally earned it. They are "the shoot of My planting, the work of My hands." God makes them righteous. Paul looks to this day when he writes that "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). And "forever they will possess the land," a promise God made first to Abraham (Genesis 17:8).

60:22 *The small **one** will become a thousand, and the little **one** a mighty nation. I **am** the LORD; in its time I will hasten it.*

The smallest family grows into a clan, and the weakest into a mighty nation. Then the LORD signs His name to it: "I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it."

"In its time." God has a set time, and when that time comes He will act quickly. We don't know the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36), and we shouldn't try to set dates. Our part is to trust that His timing is perfect and live ready.

Chapter 60 Summary

God calls Zion to rise and shine because her light has come. While darkness covers the earth, the glory of the LORD rises over Jerusalem, and the nations come to it, bringing Israel's children

home and carrying their wealth as gifts. Old enemies bow, violence ends, and peace and righteousness govern the city. I believe this is Jerusalem in Christ's millennial kingdom, and its closing promise of the LORD as an everlasting light looks ahead to the New Jerusalem.

The Nations in Chapter 60

Midian and Ephah (60:6): Midian was a people descended from Abraham through Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4), living in the deserts of Arabia. Ephah was one of Midian's sons.

Sheba (60:6): a kingdom in southern Arabia, famous for gold and spices. Its queen visited Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-2).

Kedar and Nebaioth (60:7): Arab tribes descended from Ishmael's sons (Genesis 25:13), known for their flocks.

Tarshish (60:9): a distant port reached by large trading ships, probably in the far west of the Mediterranean. Jonah tried to sail there (Jonah 1:3).

Chapter 60 Study Questions

1. When have you seen a small light make a big difference in a dark place?

2. Why does Zion "arise" and "shine," and whose light is it? (60:1-2)

3. What do the nations bring to Jerusalem, and why do they come? (60:5-9)

4. How does God explain both His anger and His compassion toward Israel? (60:10)

5. What do Zion's open gates tell us about life in Christ's kingdom? (60:11; Revelation 21:25-26)

6. What does God change into something better, and what does that show about His rule? (60:17-18)

7. How do verses 19-20 compare with John's description of the New Jerusalem? (60:19-20; Revelation 21:23)

8. Where in your life do you need to remember that God's light, not your own, is what makes you shine?

9. Verse 22 says God will hasten His promises "in its time." How can you practice trusting His timing this week?

Chapter 61: The Anointed One

Scripture: Good News to the Afflicted

61:1-3 The Spirit of the Lord GOD ***is*** on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to ***the*** humble; He has sent Me to bind up the broken of heart, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to ***those who are*** bound, release; to proclaim a year of favor of the LORD, and a day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all mourners; to grant to the mourners of Zion, to give to them a headdress instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning, a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; and they will be called terebinths of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to beautify Himself.

61:4-7 And they will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will raise up the former desolate places; and they will renew the cities of devastation, the desolate places of generation and generation. And strangers will stand and shepherd your flocks, and sons of the foreigner ***will be*** your farmers and your vinedressers. And you, you will be called priests of the LORD; ministers of our God, it will be said of you; you will eat the wealth of nations, and in their glory you will boast. Instead of your shame, ***you will have*** a double ***portion***; and ***instead of*** humiliation they will shout for joy ***over*** their portion; therefore in their land they will possess a double ***portion***; everlasting joy will be theirs.

61:8-11 For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery with injustice; and I will give their recompense in faithfulness, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them will recognize them, that they ***are*** offspring ***whom*** the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; let my soul exult in my God; for He has clothed me ***with*** garments of salvation; He has covered me ***with*** a robe of righteousness, like the bridegroom ***who*** acts as a priest ***with*** a headdress, and like the bride ***who*** adorns herself ***with*** her ornaments. For like the earth ***that*** brings forth its growth, and like a garden ***that*** makes the things sown in it spring up, so the Lord GOD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all the nations.

Chapter 61 Preview

Jesus Himself read this chapter aloud and said it was about Him. The Anointed One preaches good news to the poor, healing for the brokenhearted, and freedom for captives.

He also announces a day of vengeance. Jesus stopped reading before that line, and the reason He stopped tells us a great deal about His two comings. By the last verses Zion is rebuilt, honored as a nation of priests, and clothed in a robe of righteousness.

Chapter 61 Study

61:1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD **is** on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to **the** humble; He has sent Me to bind up the broken of heart, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to **those who are** bound, release;*

Someone new is speaking. The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Him, because the LORD "has anointed Me." To anoint means to pour oil on someone to set them apart for a task. The Hebrew word for "anointed one" gives us the word "Messiah," and its Greek form is "Christ." This speaker is the Messiah.

How do we know? Jesus told us. In Luke 4:16-21 He stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth, was handed "the scroll of the prophet Isaiah," and read this passage. Then He sat down and said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears." Luke calls it Isaiah's book, and Jesus says it is about Himself.

"To bring good news to the humble." Look at who He comes for. The poor and humble, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners. Jesus didn't come for people who think they have it together. He came for people who know they need Him. The same Spirit who came on Him at His baptism (Luke 3:22) empowered everything He did, and the Servant of 42:1 is promised the same: "I have put My Spirit on Him."

New Testament links: Luke 4:18-19 (quoted); Acts 10:38 (alluded to)

61:2 *to proclaim a year of favor of the LORD, and a day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all mourners;*

"To proclaim a year of favor of the LORD." This calls to mind the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25, when every fiftieth year debts were canceled, slaves were set free and land went back to its families. The Messiah announces a Jubilee for the soul.

Here is the key detail. When Jesus read this passage in Luke 4:18-19, He stopped in the middle of this verse. He read "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" and closed the scroll. He didn't read "and a day of vengeance of our God." You might ask, "Why would He stop there?" It's simple: the first part was being fulfilled that day, and the second part wasn't. His first coming brought the time of God's favor, the open door of salvation that is still open now (2 Corinthians 6:2). His second coming will bring the day of vengeance, when He returns to judge the nations (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8; Revelation 19:11-15).

One small word in Isaiah, "And," holds a gap of more than two thousand years. This is how I understand much of Old Testament prophecy. The prophets saw the Messiah's coming as one event, and the New Testament shows us it happens in two stages. Today is still the favorable year. That is good news, and it is also urgent.

New Testament links: Luke 4:18-19 (quoted)

61:3 *to grant to the mourners of Zion, to give to them a headdress instead of ashes, oil of joy instead of mourning, a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; and they will be called terebinths of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to beautify Himself.*

"A headdress instead of ashes." In Israel, mourners put ashes on their heads. The Messiah replaces the ashes with a headdress, the festive turban worn at a celebration. Mourning is traded for "oil of joy," and "a faint spirit," a heavy, worn-out spirit, is traded for "a mantle of praise."

Every exchange here moves in the same direction, from grief to joy. That is what Jesus does in a life. He doesn't just tell us to cheer up. He takes what we carry and gives us something better.

"Terebinths of righteousness." The people He restores become strong, deep-rooted trees, "the planting of the LORD." Like the righteous man of Psalm 1:3, they are planted by God, and they grow for one purpose: for the LORD "to beautify Himself."

61:4 *And they will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will raise up the former desolate places; and they will renew the cities of devastation, the desolate places of generation and generation.*

The restored people rebuild "the ancient ruins" and "the desolate places of generation and generation." Israel returned and rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, but Jerusalem has been torn down again since then. I believe the full fulfillment comes when Christ returns and Israel is restored in His kingdom. God's rebuilding reaches back through generations of ruin. No damage is too old for Him to repair.

61:5 *And strangers will stand and shepherd your flocks, and sons of the foreigner* ***will be*** *your farmers and your vinedressers.*

Strangers and foreigners take on the daily work of shepherding, farming and tending vineyards. This doesn't mean the nations are made slaves. It means Israel is freed to give herself to the work in the next verse. The nations who once took Israel's harvest (62:8) now help bring it in.

61:6 *And you, you will be called priests of the LORD; ministers of our God, it will be said of you; you will eat the wealth of nations, and in their glory you will boast.*

"You will be called priests of the LORD." At Mount Sinai God said Israel was meant to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Israel never fully lived up to that calling. Here God says it will finally happen. A priest stands between God and people, so Israel will serve as a nation of priests to the whole world.

Peter uses the same language for believers in Jesus, calling us "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), and Revelation 20:6 says believers will be "priests of God and of Christ" during the thousand years. The calling is shared, not taken away from Israel.

61:7 *Instead of your shame, **you will have** a double **portion**; and **instead of** humiliation they will shout for joy **over** their portion; therefore in their land they will possess a double **portion**; everlasting joy will be theirs.*

Shame and humiliation are replaced by "a double portion." In Israel the firstborn son received a double share of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). God treats His restored people like His firstborn (Exodus 4:22). Where they once received double for their sins (40:2), they now receive double in blessing. And their joy is "everlasting." It won't fade.

61:8 *For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery with injustice; and I will give their recompense in faithfulness, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.*

Why will God do all this? Because of His character. "I, the LORD, love justice." He hates "robbery with injustice." So He says, "I will give their recompense in faithfulness," which here means their just reward.

"An everlasting covenant." God promises a covenant that will never be broken. Jeremiah calls it the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and Jesus said His blood is "the new covenant" (Luke 22:20).

61:9 *And their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them will recognize them, that they **are** offspring **whom** the LORD has blessed.*

Israel's descendants will be famous among the nations, not for their sin or their suffering, but for God's blessing on them. All who see them will recognize "that they are offspring whom the LORD has blessed." God wants His people to be living proof of His goodness. That is true of the church too. Those around us should be able to see that the Lord has been good to us.

61:10 *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; let my soul exult in my God; for He has clothed me **with** garments of salvation; He has covered me **with** a robe of righteousness, like the bridegroom **who** acts as a priest **with** a headdress, and like the bride **who** adorns herself **with** her ornaments.*

The voice changes again. Now someone rejoices: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD." I take this as the redeemed people of Zion answering the Messiah's announcement. Some teachers hear the Messiah speaking here as well. Either way, the joy comes from what God has done.

"He has clothed me with garments of salvation." Notice who does the dressing. God clothes them. We can't weave a robe of righteousness for ourselves; our own righteous deeds are like a soiled garment (64:6). God gives us His righteousness through faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9). The picture of a bride adorned for her wedding points ahead to Revelation 19:7-8, where the bride of the Lamb is given fine linen, bright and clean.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:2 (alluded to)

61:11 *For like the earth **that** brings forth its growth, and like a garden **that** makes the things sown in it spring up, so the Lord GOD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all the nations.*

The chapter closes with a picture from the garden. Just as the earth naturally pushes up green shoots in spring, the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up "before all the nations." Spiritual growth is God's work. We plant and water, but He makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). One day the whole world will see the harvest.

Chapter 61 Summary

The Messiah announces His mission in the power of the Spirit: good news for the afflicted, healing for the brokenhearted, freedom for captives, and the favorable year of the LORD. Jesus read this passage in Nazareth and stopped before "a day of vengeance," because His first coming opened the time of favor and His second coming will bring judgment. The chapter closes with Israel rebuilt, honored as priests of the LORD, and dressed by God in garments of salvation.

Chapter 61 Study Questions

1. Think of a time someone brought you good news when you badly needed it. How did it change your day?

2. Who is speaking in verse 1, and how do we know? (61:1; Luke 4:16-21)

3. Who does the Anointed One come to help? (61:1-3)

4. Why did Jesus stop reading in the middle of verse 2, and what does that tell us about His two comings? (61:2; Luke 4:18-21)

5. What exchanges does the Messiah make in verse 3, and what is the purpose behind them? (61:3)

6. What does it mean for Israel to be called "priests of the LORD"? (61:6; Exodus 19:6)

7. Who clothes the people with garments of salvation, and why does that matter? (61:10)

8. Which of the exchanges in verse 3 do you most need God to make in your life right now?

9. Since we are still living in "a year of favor of the LORD," who is one person you could share the good news with this week?

Chapter 62: A New Name

Scripture: Zion's Vindication and New Name

62:1-5 For the sake of Zion I will not be silent, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like the brightness, and her salvation like a torch ***that*** burns. And nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will designate. And you will be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a turban of royalty in the palm of your God. It will no longer be said of you, "Forsaken," and of your land it will no longer be said, "Desolation"; for you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land will be married. For ***as*** a young man marries a virgin, ***so*** your sons will marry you; and ***with*** the joy of a bridegroom over a bride your God will rejoice over you.

62:6-9 On your walls, Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all the day and all the night continually they will not be silent. You who remind the LORD, ***let there be*** no rest for you, and do not give Him rest until He establishes, and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: I will not again give your grain ***as*** food to your enemies, and sons of the foreigner will not drink your new wine for which you have labored; for those who gather it will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who collect it will drink it in the courts of My holiness.

62:10-12 Pass through, pass through the gates; clear the way of the people; build up, build up the highway; rid ***it*** of stones; lift up a banner over the peoples. Look, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Look, your salvation is coming; look, His reward ***is*** with Him, and His recompense before Him." And they will call them the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

Chapter 62 Preview

Someone refuses to stay quiet about Jerusalem. He will keep speaking until her righteousness shines like a torch and the nations see it. Zion, once called "Forsaken" and her land "Desolation," receives new names from the mouth of God: "Hephzibah," meaning "my delight is in her," and "Married," which is Beulah in Hebrew.

Watchmen are posted on the city walls with orders to pray without rest, and God swears an oath that her harvest will never again be stolen. Finally a highway is opened, salvation arrives, and the city is called "Sought Out."

Chapter 62 Study

62:1 *For the sake of Zion I will not be silent, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like the brightness, and her salvation like a torch* ***that*** *burns.*

Who is refusing to keep silent? Bible teachers disagree here. Some hear Isaiah himself, praying for his city. I believe it is the Messiah, the Anointed One of chapter 61, still speaking. He has a

burden for Zion, and He won't stop until her righteousness "goes forth like the brightness," and her salvation "like a torch that burns." Either way, the verse shows us the heart of God toward Jerusalem. He hasn't given up on her, and He won't stay quiet about her.

62:2 *And nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will designate.*

When God's work in Zion is finished, the nations and their kings will see it. Her righteousness won't be hidden. Then she receives "a new name," chosen by the LORD Himself. In the Bible a name often tells who someone is (Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel). A new name means a new identity. Jesus makes the same promise to believers who overcome: a new name written on a white stone (Revelation 2:17).

New Testament links: Revelation 2:17 (alluded to)

62:3 *And you will be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a turban of royalty in the palm of your God.*

Zion becomes "a crown of beauty" and "a turban of royalty," held in God's own hand. A crown is usually worn on the head, but here God holds it in His hand, the way a king might hold up a treasured jewel to admire it. God doesn't just put up with His people. He treasures them and shows them off.

62:4 *It will no longer be said of you, "Forsaken," and of your land it will no longer be said, "Desolation"; for you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land will be married.*

The old names were "Forsaken" and "Desolation." Those names fit Jerusalem in her worst days. The new names are "Hephzibah" and "Married." In Hebrew, Hephzibah means "my delight is in her," and the word for "Married" is Beulah.

"For the LORD delights in you." That is a remarkable thing for God to say to a people who had broken His heart so many times. It tells us that God's love isn't based on our record. If you have ever felt forsaken, this verse is for you too. In Christ, God's verdict over you isn't "Forsaken." It is "Hephzibah": my delight is in her.

62:5 *For **as** a young man marries a virgin, **so** your sons will marry you; and **with** the joy of a bridegroom over a bride your God will rejoice over you.*

God uses the language of a wedding. A young man marries a young woman, and the land's own sons "marry" it, settling down and making it home. Then comes the heart of the verse. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, "your God will rejoice over you." Zephaniah 3:17 says the LORD "will rejoice over you with joy." God isn't a reluctant husband. He is a joyful one.

62:6 *On your walls, Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all the day and all the night continually they will not be silent. You who remind the LORD,* ***let there be*** *no rest for you,*

God posts watchmen on Jerusalem's walls. In the ancient world a watchman stood guard day and night and called out when he saw danger or news coming. These watchmen have a different job. They "remind the LORD," which means they pray, calling on God to keep His promises.

"Let there be no rest for you." Their prayer is constant. They don't pray once and give up. This is a good picture of what Jesus taught in Luke 18:1, about our need "always to pray and not to lose heart."

62:7 *and do not give Him rest until He establishes, and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

Not only should the watchmen have "no rest," they should "not give Him rest" either. That is bold language. God invites His people to keep pressing Him in prayer until He makes Jerusalem "a praise in the earth." God isn't annoyed by persistent prayer that asks Him to do what He has already promised. He welcomes it. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), and that is the same prayer.

62:8 *The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: I will not again give your grain* ***as*** *food to your enemies, and sons of the foreigner will not drink your new wine for which you have labored;*

God swears "by His right hand and by the arm of His strength," symbols of His power. Many times in Israel's history enemies swept in and ate the harvest Israel had worked for (Judges 6:3-6 is one example). God promises that will never happen again. Because God swears by Himself, there is no one greater to guarantee the oath (Hebrews 6:13). The promise is as sure as God is.

62:9 *for those who gather it will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who collect it will drink it in the courts of My holiness.*

Those who do the work will enjoy the harvest, and they will eat and drink it "in the courts of My holiness," as part of worship. In God's kingdom, work and worship go together. Daily labor is no longer wasted or stolen. It becomes an offering of praise. Isaiah repeats this promise in 65:21-22.

62:10 *Pass through, pass through the gates; clear the way of the people; build up, build up the highway; rid* ***it*** *of stones; lift up a banner over the peoples.*

The double commands give the verse a sense of urgency: "Pass through, pass through the gates," "build up, build up the highway." The gates are flung open, the road is built and cleared of stones, and a banner is raised over the nations so everyone knows which way to come. This picks up the highway of 40:3 and 57:14. God is making a way for His people to come home, and nothing is left in the road to trip them.

62:11 *Look, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Look, your salvation is coming; look, His reward **is** with Him, and His recompense before Him."*

God's announcement goes "to the end of the earth": "Look, your salvation is coming." Notice that salvation is a person here. "Look, His reward is with Him." Salvation isn't only a thing God gives. It is Someone who comes. Matthew 21:5 uses the words "Say to the daughter of Zion" when Jesus rides into Jerusalem. And at the end of the Bible Jesus promises that He is coming quickly and "My reward is with Me" (Revelation 22:12).

New Testament links: Matthew 21:5 (alluded to); Revelation 22:12 (alluded to)

62:12 *And they will call them the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.*

Here are more new names. God's people are called "the Holy People" and "the Redeemed of the LORD." Jerusalem is called "Sought Out" and "A City Not Forsaken."

"Sought Out." Jerusalem was once avoided and abandoned. Now she is sought after, by the nations and above all by God. I believe this will be fully true when Christ returns and reigns from Jerusalem. It is also a picture of every believer. We didn't find God by searching for Him. He came looking for us (Luke 19:10).

Chapter 62 Summary

The Messiah refuses to stay silent until Jerusalem's righteousness shines for all the nations to see. Zion trades the names "Forsaken" and "Desolation" for "Hephzibah" ("my delight is in her") and "Married" (Beulah), because God rejoices over her like a bridegroom. Watchmen are told to pray without rest, God swears the harvest will never again be stolen, and a highway is cleared for the people. Salvation comes as a Person, and Zion is called "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."

Chapter 62 Study Questions

1. Do you know what your name means? Has a nickname or new name ever changed how you saw yourself?

2. Who refuses to keep silent about Zion, and what is He waiting for? (62:1-2)

3. What are Zion's old names and new names, and what do they show about God's heart? (62:4)

4. How does God describe His joy over His people? (62:5)

5. What is the job of the watchmen on the walls? (62:6-7)

6. What does God swear about Israel's harvest, and why can the oath be trusted? (62:8-9; Hebrews 6:13)

7. How does verse 11 describe salvation, and where does Jesus echo it? (62:11; Revelation 22:12)

8. What prayer have you stopped praying, and what would it look like to give Him no rest about it?

9. Which of the new names in this chapter do you most need to hear God say over you this week?

Chapter 63: The Winepress

Scripture: The Warrior from Edom and a Prayer for Mercy

63:1-6 Who ***is*** this coming from Edom, ***with*** reddened garments from Bozrah, this ***one*** adorned in His clothing, stooping in the greatness of His strength? "I, speaking in righteousness, great to save." Why ***is there*** red on Your clothing, and Your garments like ***one who*** treads in a winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no man ***was*** with Me; and I trod them in My anger, and I trampled them in My rage, and their lifeblood spattered on My garments, and I have defiled all My clothing. For a day of vengeance ***was*** in My heart, and the year of My redemption had come. And I looked, and ***there was*** no one helping; and I was appalled, and ***there was*** no one upholding; and My own arm brought salvation to Me, and My rage, it upheld Me. And I trod down peoples in My anger, and I made them drunk in My rage, and I brought down their lifeblood to the earth."

63:7-10 I will make mention of the ***acts of*** steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His compassion, and according to the greatness of His ***acts of*** steadfast love. And He said, "Surely they ***are*** My people, sons ***who*** will not deal falsely." And He became a Savior to them. In all their distress He ***was*** distressed, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He Himself redeemed them; and He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. And they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; and He turned Himself to be an enemy to them; He Himself fought against them.

63:11-14 And His people remembered the days of old, ***the days of*** Moses: Where ***is*** He who brought them up from the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where ***is*** He who put in its midst His Holy Spirit, who caused the arm of His splendor to go at the right hand of Moses, who split the waters before them, to make for Himself an everlasting name, who led them through the deeps? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble. Like the livestock ***that*** goes down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So You led Your people, to make for Yourself a name of splendor.

63:15-19 Look down from heaven and see, from the lofty dwelling of Your holiness and Your splendor. Where ***are*** Your zeal and Your mighty deeds? The stirring of Your inward parts and Your compassion toward me have restrained themselves. For You ***are*** our Father, for Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; You, LORD, ***are*** our Father; our Redeemer from long ago ***is*** Your name. Why, LORD, do You make us go astray from Your ways, ***and*** harden our heart from fear of You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your inheritance. For a little while Your holy people possessed ***it***; our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary. We have become ***like those*** over whom You have not ruled from long ago, over whom Your name has not been called.

Chapter 63 Preview

A lone warrior comes marching from Edom with His clothes stained red. When asked why, He answers that He has trodden the winepress of God's wrath by Himself. This is the Lord returning in judgment, the same scene John saw in Revelation 19 when Christ rides out in a robe dipped in blood.

Then the mood changes. Isaiah remembers God's kindness in the days of Moses and Israel's rebellion that followed. The chapter ends with a heartfelt prayer from God's people, asking their Father to look down from heaven and act again.

Chapter 63 Study

63:1 *Who **is** this coming from Edom, **with** reddened garments from Bozrah, this **one** adorned in His clothing, stooping in the greatness of His strength? "I, speaking in righteousness, great to save."*

A watchman sees a figure coming from Edom. Edom was the nation south and east of the Dead Sea, descended from Jacob's brother Esau, and Bozrah was one of its chief cities. Edom was a long-time enemy of Israel, and in Isaiah it stands for the nations that set themselves against God and His people (34:5-6 also names Edom and Bozrah in a scene of judgment).

"Who is this coming from Edom, with reddened garments from Bozrah?" This is no tired soldier limping home. He comes "in the greatness of His strength," like a conqueror. His garments are red, and the next verse asks why. The watchman asks who He is.

"I, speaking in righteousness, great to save." The answer tells us everything. This is the LORD Himself. His judgment is righteous, and the very act that crushes His enemies saves His people. I believe this is the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming.

New Testament links: Revelation 19:13 (alluded to)

63:2 *Why **is there** red on Your clothing, and Your garments like **one who** treads in a winepress?*

The watchman asks a second question: why are Your clothes red? They look like the clothes of a man who has been treading grapes. In Isaiah's day grapes were crushed by people stomping on them in a stone trough, and the juice splashed up and stained their robes. The question sets up the answer, and the answer is sobering.

New Testament links: Revelation 19:13 (alluded to)

63:3 *"I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no man **was** with Me; and I trod them in My anger, and I trampled them in My rage, and their lifeblood spattered on My garments, and I have defiled all My clothing.*

"I have trodden the winepress alone." No one helped. No army stood with Him. He did this by Himself. The grapes He trampled were "the peoples," the nations in rebellion against God, and "their lifeblood spattered on My garments."

We need to be careful here. This isn't Christ's own blood shed on the cross. The verse says plainly that it is the blood of His enemies. At His first coming He shed His own blood to save. At His second coming He judges those who rejected that salvation.

John saw this exact scene. The rider on the white horse is "clothed with a garment dipped in blood," and He treads the wine press of God's fierce wrath (Revelation 19:13, 15). Revelation 14:19-20 also describes "the great winepress of the fury of God." Isaiah and John are looking at the same day, when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation and defeats the armies gathered against Him.

New Testament links: Revelation 14:19-20 (alluded to); Revelation 19:13 (alluded to); Revelation 19:15 (alluded to)

63:4 *For a day of vengeance **was** in My heart, and the year of My redemption had come.*

"A day of vengeance was in My heart." Remember 61:2. Jesus stopped reading just before "a day of vengeance of our God." Here is that day. What was left unread in Nazareth is fulfilled at His return.

"The year of My redemption had come." Notice that vengeance and redemption arrive together. The same coming that judges His enemies rescues His people. For the believer, the return of Christ isn't a day to dread. It is the day we are set free for good (Luke 21:28).

63:5 *And I looked, and **there was** no one helping; and I was appalled, and **there was** no one upholding; and My own arm brought salvation to Me, and My rage, it upheld Me.*

He looked for someone to help and found no one. So "My own arm brought salvation to Me." This repeats 59:16 almost word for word. No human army will defeat evil at the end of the age, and no human effort could ever save us from our sin. Salvation is God's work from start to finish. That is humbling, and it is also a great relief.

63:6 *And I trod down peoples in My anger, and I made them drunk in My rage, and I brought down their lifeblood to the earth."*

The warrior's report ends with the nations trodden down and made "drunk" with His wrath, meaning they stagger and fall under it (compare 51:17). Their lifeblood is poured out on the earth.

These are hard words. God's wrath is real, and Scripture doesn't hide it. But it is never cruel or out of control. It is the righteous response of a holy God to evil that has refused every offer of mercy. Revelation 19:21 describes the same end for the armies that follow the beast. Before that day comes, God's patience is still holding the door open (2 Peter 3:9).

63:7 *I will make mention of the **acts of** steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His compassion, and according to the greatness of His **acts of** steadfast love.*

Now the tone changes completely. From here through the end of chapter 64 is a long prayer. Isaiah speaks for the people, starting with praise: "I will make mention of the acts of steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD."

"Acts of steadfast love." This phrase translates the Hebrew word hesed, God's loyal, covenant love, the love that keeps its promises. Isaiah uses it twice in one verse and piles up "the great goodness" and "His compassion" around it. When we pray, it is good to start where Isaiah does, by remembering what God has already done.

63:8 *And He said, "Surely they **are** My people, sons **who** will not deal falsely." And He became a Savior to them.*

God said of Israel, "Surely they are My people, sons who will not deal falsely." He chose them, trusted them and hoped for faithfulness from them. "And He became a Savior to them." That is the order. God's choice and God's love came first. Their faithfulness was what He hoped would follow. Sadly, verse 10 shows what actually happened.

63:9 *In all their distress He **was** distressed, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He Himself redeemed them; and He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

"In all their distress He was distressed." When Israel suffered in Egypt and in the wilderness, God felt it. He wasn't a distant ruler watching from far away. He carried them "all the days of old," like a father carrying a child (Deuteronomy 1:31).

"The angel of His presence saved them." In the Exodus story God's own presence went with Israel (Exodus 33:14). Many Bible teachers, and I am one of them, see this angel as the LORD Himself appearing before Christ was born. Whatever we are going through, God isn't a stranger to suffering, and in Jesus He took on our suffering Himself (Hebrews 4:15).

63:10 *And they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; and He turned Himself to be an enemy to them; He Himself fought against them.*

"And they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit." After so much love, Israel turned away. The Holy Spirit isn't a force. He is a Person who can be grieved. Paul draws on this verse when he tells believers, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30).

The result was terrible: God "turned Himself to be an enemy to them." He fought against His own people through the judgments of the wilderness and later through Assyria and Babylon. God's discipline is real, and it comes from a love that won't let His people go on destroying themselves.

New Testament links: Ephesians 4:30 (alluded to)

63:11 *And His people remembered the days of old,* ***the days of*** *Moses: Where* ***is*** *He who brought them up from the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where* ***is*** *He who put in its midst His Holy Spirit,*

In their trouble the people remembered Moses and the old days. They asked, "Where is He?" Where is the God who brought Israel through the Red Sea, with Moses and Aaron as the shepherds of His flock? Where is the God who put His Spirit among them? Sometimes the first step back to God is simply remembering what He did before and longing for Him to do it again.

63:12 *who caused the arm of His splendor to go at the right hand of Moses, who split the waters before them, to make for Himself an everlasting name,*

They remember how "the arm of His splendor" went at the right hand of Moses. When Moses raised his staff, it was God's power that split the sea (Exodus 14:21). God did it "to make for Himself an everlasting name." The Exodus wasn't only about rescuing Israel. It showed the whole world who God is, and people still talk about it thousands of years later.

63:13 *who led them through the deeps? Like the horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble.*

God led them "through the deeps," the bottom of the sea, and they walked through as easily as a horse running on open ground. Not one of them stumbled. When God leads, He can take His people safely through places that should have drowned them.

63:14 *Like the livestock* ***that*** *goes down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So You led Your people, to make for Yourself a name of splendor.*

Cattle go down into a valley to graze and rest after a long walk. In the same way, "the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest," bringing Israel into the land. Verses 10, 11 and 14 all mention the Spirit. Isaiah sees the Spirit as present and active in Israel's whole story, guiding, grieving and giving rest. All of it was done "to make for Yourself a name of splendor."

63:15 *Look down from heaven and see, from the lofty dwelling of Your holiness and Your splendor. Where* ***are*** *Your zeal and Your mighty deeds? The stirring of Your inward parts and Your compassion toward me have restrained themselves.*

Having remembered the past, the prayer now turns to the present. "Look down from heaven and see." Where is the zeal and the power God showed before? His compassion seems to be held back. This is an honest prayer. God's people are allowed to tell Him plainly that they feel His absence. The Psalms are full of prayers like this (Psalm 13:1; 44:23-24).

63:16 *For You* ***are*** *our Father, for Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; You, LORD,* ***are*** *our Father; our Redeemer from long ago* ***is*** *Your name.*

"You are our Father." Even if Abraham and Jacob, the great ancestors of the nation, wouldn't recognize this ruined people, God still does. He is their Father, and His name is "Our Redeemer from long ago." Calling God "Father" this directly is unusual in the Old Testament. Jesus taught us to pray the same way: "Our Father who is in the heavens" (Matthew 6:9).

63:17 *Why, LORD, do You make us go astray from Your ways, **and** harden our heart from fear of You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your inheritance.*

This is a hard verse. The people ask why God has caused them to stray and hardened their hearts. Is God to blame for their sin? No. The rest of this prayer admits that the sin was theirs (64:5-7). But when people keep rejecting God, He can hand them over to the hardness they have chosen (6:9-10; Romans 1:24). The prayer is a cry for God to stop that judgment and "return for the sake of Your servants."

63:18 *For a little while Your holy people possessed **it**; our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.*

God's people held His sanctuary "for a little while," and then enemies trampled it. Isaiah is looking ahead to the destruction of the temple by Babylon in 586 B.C., well over a century after his own ministry began. Jesus later warned that Gentiles would trample Jerusalem "until the times of the nations are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The trampling has an end date.

63:19 *We have become **like those** over whom You have not ruled from long ago, over whom Your name has not been called.*

The prayer ends in a low place. "We have become like those over whom You have not ruled." Israel feels as though they were never God's people at all. But the very fact that they are praying shows they still belong to Him. Chapter 64 continues the prayer, and chapters 65 and 66 give God's answer. When we feel far from God, the right move is the one they made: keep praying.

Chapter 63 Summary

A warrior marches from Edom with garments stained red. He has trodden the winepress of God's wrath alone, bringing both the day of vengeance and the year of redemption. I believe this is Christ at His return, the same scene as Revelation 19:13-15. Then Isaiah leads a prayer remembering God's loving devotion in the Exodus, His closeness in Israel's suffering, and Israel's rebellion that grieved His Holy Spirit. The people cry out to God as their Father to look down and act again.

Chapter 63 Study Questions

1. Have you ever had to do a hard job completely by yourself? How did it feel?

2. Who is the warrior coming from Edom, and how does He describe Himself? (63:1)

3. Whose blood is on His garments, and how does that differ from the blood of the cross? (63:3; Revelation 19:13-15)

4. How does verse 4 connect to the place where Jesus stopped reading in Luke 4? (63:4; 61:2)

5. What does verse 9 teach about how God responds to His people's suffering? (63:9)

6. What does it mean that Israel "grieved His Holy Spirit," and how does Paul apply this? (63:10; Ephesians 4:30)

7. What do the people remember about Moses and the Exodus, and why does it matter to their prayer? (63:11-14)

8. What has God done for you in the past that you can "make mention" of when He feels far away?

9. In what area of your life might you be grieving the Holy Spirit, and what step could you take this week to change that?

Chapter 64: The Potter and the Clay

Scripture: A Prayer for God to Come Down

64:1-4 Oh that You had torn the heavens ***and*** come down, ***that*** the mountains had quaked at Your presence, as fire kindles brushwood, ***as*** fire makes water boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries; the nations will tremble at Your presence. When You did awesome ***things that*** we did not look for, You came down; the mountains quaked at Your presence. And from long ago they have not heard, they have not given ear; ***the*** eye has not seen a God besides You, ***who*** acts for the one who waits for Him.

64:5-7 You meet the one who rejoices and does righteousness, ***those who*** remember You in Your ways. Look, You, You were angry, and we sinned; in them ***we have been*** a long time, and will we be saved? And we have all become like the unclean, and all our righteous deeds like a garment of menstruation; and we all wither like the leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away. And ***there is*** no one who calls on Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and You have melted us by the hand of our iniquities.

64:8-12 And now, LORD, You ***are*** our Father; we ***are*** the clay, and You ***are*** our Potter; and all of us ***are*** the work of Your hand. Do not be angry, LORD, exceedingly, and do not remember iniquity forever. Look, please look: Your people ***are*** all of us. Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. The house of our holiness and our splendor, where our fathers praised You, has become a burning of fire, and all our pleasant things have become a ruin. Will You restrain Yourself at these ***things***, LORD? Will You be silent and afflict us exceedingly?

Chapter 64 Preview

The prayer that began in 63:7 reaches its peak. God's people ask Him to tear open the heavens and come down, as He did at Mount Sinai, so the nations will tremble. Then they look honestly at themselves and confess that even their best deeds are like a filthy garment.

They have nothing to offer but this: God is their Father, and they are the clay in His hands. Isaiah closes with a ruined Jerusalem, a burned temple, and a question left hanging: will God keep silent?

Chapter 64 Study

64:1 *Oh that You had torn the heavens **and** come down, **that** the mountains had quaked at Your presence,*

"Oh that You had torn the heavens and come down." The people want God to rip the sky open like a curtain and step into their world, so that the mountains shake at His presence. This isn't a polite prayer. It is a desperate one.

I believe this prayer will be answered in full when Christ returns. John wrote, "I saw heaven opened, and look, a white horse" (Revelation 19:11). The warrior of 63:1-6 is the answer to this cry. Until then, believers still pray the same thing in other words: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

64:2 *as fire kindles brushwood,* ***as*** *fire makes water boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries; the nations will tremble at Your presence.*

They ask God to come with the power of fire, fire that sets dry brush ablaze and makes water boil. The goal isn't destruction for its own sake. It is "to make Your name known" to His enemies, so that the nations "tremble at Your presence." When God shows up, nobody can pretend He isn't real anymore.

64:3 *When You did awesome* ***things that*** *we did not look for, You came down; the mountains quaked at Your presence.*

They remember that God has done this before. "You came down; the mountains quaked." This looks back to Mount Sinai, where the whole mountain trembled and smoked as the LORD descended on it in fire (Exodus 19:18). God did "awesome things that we did not look for." He isn't limited to what we imagine He can do.

64:4 *And from long ago they have not heard, they have not given ear;* ***the*** *eye has not seen a God besides You,* ***who*** *acts for the one who waits for Him.*

No one has ever heard of or seen a God like Israel's God, "who acts for the one who waits for Him." The idols of the nations do nothing. The LORD acts.

Paul draws on this verse in 1 Corinthians 2:9 when he says, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard," speaking of all that God has prepared for those who love Him. In the Bible, to wait for God means to keep trusting Him, expecting Him to move (40:31).

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (quoted)

64:5 *You meet the one who rejoices and does righteousness,* ***those who*** *remember You in Your ways. Look, You, You were angry, and we sinned; in them* ***we have been*** *a long time, and will we be saved?*

God meets the person who gladly does what is right and remembers His ways. But Israel hasn't been that person. "You were angry, and we sinned." They have been in their sins "a long time." Then comes the honest question: "will we be saved?" That is the right question for any sinner to ask. The answer is found in God's mercy, not in us, as verses 8 and 9 will show.

64:6 *And we have all become like the unclean, and all our righteous deeds like a garment of menstruation; and we all wither like the leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away.*

"All our righteous deeds like a garment of menstruation." This verse is humbling, so notice what it says. Not just our sins, but our "righteous deeds," the best things we do, are stained. The Hebrew phrase pictures a cloth soiled and fit only to be thrown away.

This doesn't mean good deeds are worthless before people. It means they can't pay for our sin before a holy God. Paul says the same: "There is not a righteous one, not even one" (Romans 3:10). That is why we need a righteousness that isn't our own, given to us through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9). Compare 61:10, where God Himself clothes His people with a robe of righteousness. Our rags are exchanged for His robe.

"We all wither like the leaf." Sin dries us up, and our iniquities blow us away like the wind carries off dead leaves. Without God we have no strength to stand.

64:7 *And **there is** no one who calls on Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and You have melted us by the hand of our iniquities.*

No one calls on God's name. No one stirs himself to take hold of Him. So God hid His face and let them feel the weight of their sin. This is a picture of a people who have stopped seeking God altogether. It is a warning to us too. When prayer dries up, we slowly drift, and the consequences of our choices start to rule us.

64:8 *And now, LORD, You **are** our Father; we **are** the clay, and You **are** our Potter; and all of us **are** the work of Your hand.*

"And now, LORD, You are our Father." Everything turns on these words. The people have nothing good to point to in themselves. So they point to who God is. He is their Father. He is the potter, and they are the clay, "the work of Your hand."

A potter doesn't throw away clay because it is marred. He reshapes it (Jeremiah 18:4-6). That is the hope here. Israel is asking God to take the mess they have made and form them again. Paul uses the potter and clay in Romans 9:21 to show God's right over His creation. If you feel broken or spoiled, this is a good prayer to pray. You are still in the Potter's hands.

64:9 *Do not be angry, LORD, exceedingly, and do not remember iniquity forever. Look, please look: Your people **are** all of us.*

They ask God not to be angry "exceedingly" and not to "remember iniquity forever." Their plea rests on one fact: "Your people are all of us." They don't deny their guilt. They ask God to remember the relationship. God answers prayers like this. He promised that He wouldn't remember sins under the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12).

64:10 *Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.*

Isaiah describes the land as already ruined. The holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, and Jerusalem is a desolation. In Isaiah's own day Jerusalem was still standing; God spared it from Sennacherib in 701 B.C. But Isaiah speaks here as though he were standing among the ruins of the Babylonian destruction in 586 B.C. God let him see it ahead of time and pray as though it had already happened.

64:11 *The house of our holiness and our splendor, where our fathers praised You, has become a burning of fire, and all our pleasant things have become a ruin.*

"The house of our holiness and our splendor." The temple where their fathers praised God has been burned. Everything precious is in ruins. The Babylonians burned Solomon's temple when they took Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:9). Isaiah wrote this more than a century before it happened.

That tells us two things. God knows the future, and He doesn't hide hard things from His people. Isaiah 6:11-12 had already warned that the land would be left desolate. God prepares His people for sorrow, and He also gives them words to pray in it.

64:12 *Will You restrain Yourself at these **things**, LORD? Will You be silent and afflict us exceedingly?*

Isaiah leaves the prayer hanging: "Will You restrain Yourself at these things, LORD?" Will God keep silent while His people suffer?

The next chapter is God's reply. He hasn't been silent, and He won't stay silent. When you pray and heaven feels quiet, it is all right to ask God this same question. Just keep reading, and keep praying, because God answers.

Chapter 64 Summary

The prayer of God's people reaches its climax. They ask God to tear open the heavens and come down in power, as He did at Sinai, and I believe the final answer to that cry is Christ's return. They confess that even their righteous deeds are like a filthy garment, and they appeal to God as their Father and Potter. Looking ahead to Jerusalem's ruin and the temple's burning, they ask whether God will keep silent.

Chapter 64 Study Questions

1. When was a time you wished God would do something big and obvious in your situation?

2. What are the people asking God to do in verse 1, and how will He answer it? (64:1; Revelation 19:11)

3. What earlier event do they remember when God came down? (64:3; Exodus 19:18)

4. What does God do "for the one who waits for Him," and how does Paul use this verse? (64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9)

5. What does verse 6 say about our "righteous deeds," and why do we need a righteousness from God? (64:6; Philippians 3:9)

6. Why do the people call God their Father and their Potter? (64:8-9)

7. How could Isaiah describe the burning of the temple more than a century before it happened? (64:10-11)

8. Is there an area of your life where you have been trusting your own good deeds instead of God's mercy?

9. What would it look like this week to place yourself, like clay, in the Potter's hands?

Chapter 65: New Heavens and a New Earth

Scripture: God's Answer: Judgment, a Remnant, and a New Creation

65:1-7 I let Myself be inquired of by those who did not ask; I let Myself be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, "Here I ***am***, here I ***am***," to a nation ***that*** was not called by My name. I spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk ***in*** the way ***that is*** not good, after their own thoughts; the people who provoke Me to anger to My face continually, sacrificing in the gardens and making smoke on the bricks; who sit among the graves and spend the night in the secret places; who eat the flesh of the pig, and broth of unclean meat ***is in*** their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself; do not come near me, for I am ***too*** holy for you." These ***are*** smoke in My nose, a fire ***that*** burns all the day. Look, it is written before Me: I will not be silent, but I will repay, and I will repay into their bosom your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, says the LORD, who made smoke on the mountains and taunted Me on the hills; and I will measure their former recompense into their bosom.

65:8-12 Thus says the LORD: As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, "Do not destroy it, for a blessing ***is*** in it," so I will do for the sake of My servants, so as not to destroy all. And I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah a possessor of My mountains; and My chosen ones will possess it, and My servants will dwell there. And Sharon will become a pasture of sheep, and the Valley of Achor a resting place of cattle, for My people who have sought Me. And you who forsake the LORD, who forget My holy mountain, who arrange a table for Fortune, and who fill mixed wine for Destiny, and I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter; because I called, and you did not answer; I spoke, and you did not listen; and you did what is evil in My eyes, and you chose that in which I did not delight.

65:13-16 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, My servants will eat, and you will be hungry; look, My servants will drink, and you will be thirsty; look, My servants will rejoice, and you will be put to shame; look, My servants will shout for joy from goodness of heart, and you will cry out from pain of heart, and from brokenness of spirit you will wail. And you will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, and the Lord GOD will put you to death; and He will call His servants ***by*** another name, so that he who blesses himself in the land will bless himself by the God of Amen, and he who swears in the land will swear by the God of Amen; because the former distresses are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My eyes.

65:17-20 For look, I am creating new heavens and a new earth; and the former ***things*** will not be remembered, and they will not come up on ***the*** heart. But rejoice and be glad forever ***in*** what I am creating; for look, I am creating Jerusalem ***as*** gladness, and her people ***as*** joy. And I will be glad in Jerusalem and rejoice in My people; and the sound of weeping and the sound of crying will not be heard in her again. There will no longer be from there an infant ***living but a few*** days, or an old man who does not fill out his days; for the youth will die a son of a hundred years, and the sinner, a son of a hundred years, will be cursed.

65:21-25 And they will build houses and dwell ***in them***; and they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another dwell; they will not plant and another eat; for like the

days of the tree ***will be*** the days of My people, and My chosen ones will fully use the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, and they will not bear ***children*** for sudden terror; for they ***are*** the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. And it will be that before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. Wolf and lamb will graze as one, and the lion like the ox will eat straw, and ***as for the*** snake, dust ***will be*** its food. They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all My holy mountain, says the LORD.

Chapter 65 Preview

Chapter 64 ended by asking whether God would keep silent. Chapter 65 is His answer. He has been reaching out all along, holding out His hands to a stubborn people who chose idols instead. Judgment will fall on the rebels, but God will keep a faithful remnant, His servants, and they will be blessed.

Then God announces something astonishing: new heavens and a new earth. Jerusalem becomes a joy, weeping ends, people live long lives, and the wolf and the lamb graze together. I believe this describes Christ's thousand-year reign and looks beyond it to the eternal new creation.

Chapter 65 Study

65:1 *I let Myself be inquired of by those who did not ask; I let Myself be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, "Here I **am**, here I **am**," to a nation **that** was not called by My name.*

God answers the prayer of chapters 63-64, and His first words are surprising. He let Himself be found "by those who did not seek Me." He said "Here I am, here I am" to a nation that didn't even call on His name.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:20 and applies it to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations who weren't looking for God and yet found Him through the gospel. That is how grace works. Most of us weren't searching for God when He found us. He came looking first.

New Testament links: Romans 10:20 (quoted)

65:2 *I spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk **in** the way **that is** not good, after their own thoughts;*

"I spread out My hands all the day." The picture is of someone holding out his arms, pleading for someone to come home. God did this "all the day" to a "rebellious people" who kept following their own ideas. Paul quotes this verse right after verse 1, in Romans 10:21, and applies it to Israel. So God hasn't been silent. He has been calling, and Israel has been refusing.

New Testament links: Romans 10:21 (quoted)

65:3 *the people who provoke Me to anger to My face continually, sacrificing in the gardens and making smoke on the bricks;*

Israel provoked God "to My face." Their sin was open and constant. They offered sacrifices in gardens, which were places of pagan worship (1:29), and burned incense on bricks, probably small altars set up for other gods. God had given them one place to worship Him, and they set up their own altars instead.

65:4 *who sit among the graves and spend the night in the secret places; who eat the flesh of the pig, and broth of unclean meat* ***is in*** *their vessels;*

They sat among graves and spent nights in hidden places, most likely trying to contact the dead, something God had forbidden (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19). They ate pork, which the Law called unclean (Leviticus 11:7), and kept unclean broth in their pots. These were deliberate acts of turning from God to the practices of the nations around them.

65:5 *who say, "Keep to yourself; do not come near me, for I am* ***too*** *holy for you." These* ***are*** *smoke in My nose, a fire* ***that*** *burns all the day.*

Worst of all, these people thought they were holier than everyone else. "Keep to yourself; do not come near me." They had mixed pagan religion with pride and called it holiness.

God's verdict: they are "smoke in My nose," like a fire that smolders all day and keeps stinging the eyes. Few things offend God more than people who are deep in sin and still look down on others. Jesus faced the same attitude in His day (Luke 18:9-14).

65:6 *Look, it is written before Me: I will not be silent, but I will repay, and I will repay into their bosom*

"It is written before Me." God keeps a record. He won't stay silent, and He will repay "into their bosom," meaning into the fold of the garment, the way grain was measured into a lap. They will receive exactly what they earned. Revelation 20:12 describes the books that are opened at the final judgment.

65:7 *your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, says the LORD, who made smoke on the mountains and taunted Me on the hills; and I will measure their former recompense into their bosom.*

The judgment covers their own sins and their fathers' sins together, because the children kept doing what their parents did. They burned incense on mountains and hills, the high places where Israel worshiped idols for generations. God will measure out "their former recompense" to them. God is patient, but He doesn't forget unrepented sin.

65:8 *Thus says the LORD: As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, "Do not destroy it, for a blessing **is** in it," so I will do for the sake of My servants, so as not to destroy all.*

Now God shows mercy inside the judgment. When a farmer finds a cluster of grapes with some bad ones in it, he doesn't throw it all away. Someone says, "Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it." In the same way, God won't destroy all of Israel. He will save "My servants."

This is the remnant, a word Isaiah uses for the faithful few God preserves when the rest of the nation is judged. God always keeps a remnant (Romans 11:5).

65:9 *And I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah a possessor of My mountains; and My chosen ones will possess it, and My servants will dwell there.*

From Jacob and Judah, God will bring "offspring," a people who will inherit His mountains, the land of Israel. They are "My chosen ones" and "My servants," and they will live there. God's promises to Abraham's descendants aren't cancelled because many of them rebelled. He keeps them through the faithful remnant.

65:10 *And Sharon will become a pasture of sheep, and the Valley of Achor a resting place of cattle, for My people who have sought Me.*

Sharon was the fertile coastal plain in the west. The valley of Achor was near Jericho in the east, the place where Achan was stoned for his sin (Joshua 7:24-26). Its name means "trouble." Hosea 2:15 promised that God would make the valley of Achor "a door of hope." From west to east, the land will be full of peaceful flocks "for My people who have sought Me." God can turn a valley of trouble into a place of rest.

65:11 *And you who forsake the LORD, who forget My holy mountain, who arrange a table for Fortune, and who fill mixed wine for Destiny,*

God now speaks directly to the rebels. They forsake the LORD and forget His holy mountain. Instead, they set tables for "Fortune" and pour drinks for "Destiny." In Hebrew these are Gad and Meni, names of gods of luck. People still do this in their own way, trusting luck or fate rather than the living God.

65:12 *and I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter; because I called, and you did not answer; I spoke, and you did not listen; and you did what is evil in My eyes, and you chose that in which I did not delight.*

God makes a play on words. They poured drinks to Destiny, so God will "destine" them for the sword. Why? "Because I called, and you did not answer." God had called them again and again. They chose what He didn't delight in. Judgment is never God's first word. It comes after a long season of calls that were ignored.

65:13 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Look, My servants will eat, and you will be hungry; look, My servants will drink, and you will be thirsty; look, My servants will rejoice, and you will be put to shame;*

Three times God says "look." His servants will eat, and the rebels will be hungry. His servants will drink, and the rebels will be thirsty. His servants will rejoice, and the rebels will be ashamed. In this life the faithful and the faithless often seem to get the same treatment. In the end, God will make a clear difference between them (Malachi 3:18).

65:14 *look, My servants will shout for joy from goodness of heart, and you will cry out from pain of heart, and from brokenness of spirit you will wail.*

His servants will shout for joy with glad hearts, while the rebels cry out from heavy hearts and wail with broken spirits. Jesus spoke of this same reversal (Luke 6:21, 25). Those who mourn now in faithfulness will laugh, and those who laugh now while rejecting God will mourn.

65:15 *And you will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, and the Lord GOD will put you to death; and He will call His servants **by** another name,*

The rebels' name will be used as a curse, a byword for what happens to those who turn from God. Isaiah says that "the Lord GOD will put you to death." But His servants receive "another name." Isaiah has already promised a new name for Zion (62:2), and Jesus promises a new name to those who overcome (Revelation 2:17; 3:12). A new name means a new identity in God.

65:16 *so that he who blesses himself in the land will bless himself by the God of Amen, and he who swears in the land will swear by the God of Amen; because the former distresses are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My eyes.*

In that day, people will bless themselves and swear "by the God of Amen." Amen means "it is true" or "so be it." Jesus calls Himself "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness" (Revelation 3:14). God's word is always true, and in His kingdom people will rely on it fully. Then "the former distresses are forgotten." That sets up the next verse.

New Testament links: Revelation 3:14 (alluded to)

65:17 *For look, I am creating new heavens and a new earth; and the former **things** will not be remembered, and they will not come up on **the** heart.*

"For look, I am creating new heavens and a new earth." Here is God's final answer to the prayer of chapters 63-64. He won't only repair the old world. He will create a new one. The word "create" is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 1:1, a word used only of God's own creating work.

"The former things will not be remembered." The sorrows of the old creation won't haunt the new one. Peter says we look for "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13), and John saw "a new heaven and a new earth" after the first one passed away (Revelation 21:1).

Here is how I read verses 17-25. Bible teachers differ on this, and I hold my view with care. Verse 17 points all the way to the eternal new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21. But verse 20 still has death and old age in it, and Revelation 21:4 says plainly that in the eternal state "death will not be any longer." So I believe verses 18-25 describe the Millennium, Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, which is the first stage and foretaste of that new creation. Isaiah sees the whole future of God's renewed world as one great view, and the New Testament shows us that it comes in two steps.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (alluded to); 2 Peter 3:13 (alluded to); Revelation 21:1 (alluded to); 2 Corinthians 5:17 (alluded to)

65:18 *But rejoice and be glad forever **in** what I am creating; for look, I am creating Jerusalem **as** gladness, and her people **as** joy.*

God commands joy. "Rejoice and be glad forever in what I am creating." And what He creates is "Jerusalem as gladness, and her people as joy." The city that had been a desolation in 64:10 becomes the center of joy on earth. During the Millennium, Christ will reign from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:9, 16), and the city will finally be what God always meant it to be.

65:19 *And I will be glad in Jerusalem and rejoice in My people; and the sound of weeping and the sound of crying will not be heard in her again.*

God Himself will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in His people, and "the sound of crying will not be heard in her again." Imagine a city where no one cries. God doesn't only stop the weeping. He shares in the joy. Revelation 21:4 carries this promise all the way into eternity, where God wipes away every tear.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:4 (alluded to)

65:20 *There will no longer be from there an infant **living but a few** days, or an old man who does not fill out his days; for the youth will die a son of a hundred years, and the sinner, a son of a hundred years, will be cursed.*

"There will no longer be from there an infant living but a few days." Infant death will end. Old men will live out their full days. Someone who dies at one hundred will be considered a youth, and only someone under a curse would die that young.

Read this plainly and it is clear that death still exists here, though rarely, and only where sin is judged. That is why I place verses 18-25 in the Millennium rather than the eternal state. During Christ's reign on earth, people who survive the Tribulation and enter the kingdom in natural bodies will live very long lives. I believe they include the people of Israel who turn to Christ when He returns (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26), and people from the nations who are still alive and are spared at His coming (Zechariah 14:16). They will live like people before the Flood (Genesis 5). Sin will be rare and quickly judged, but it won't yet be gone. That fits Revelation 20:7-9, where people born during the thousand years still rebel when Satan is released. Believers who are raised at Christ's return won't die again (Revelation 20:6). This verse describes those still living in mortal bodies.

65:21 *And they will build houses and dwell **in them**; and they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

People will build houses and live in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their own grapes. That may sound ordinary, but for Israel it was a deep promise. In the curses of Deuteronomy 28:30, they would build houses others would live in. Christ's kingdom reverses the curse. Ordinary life will finally be good, safe and lasting.

65:22 *They will not build and another dwell; they will not plant and another eat; for like the days of the tree **will be** the days of My people, and My chosen ones will fully use the work of their hands.*

No one will build only to have someone else move in. No one will plant only to have someone else eat the harvest. People will live as long as trees, some of which stand for centuries, and they "will fully use the work of their hands," meaning they will live long enough to enjoy everything they make. Work will no longer feel useless. Under Christ's rule, our labor will finally bear lasting fruit.

65:23 *They will not labor in vain, and they will not bear **children** for sudden terror; for they **are** the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.*

They won't work for nothing. They won't have children only to see them meet disaster. Every parent who has feared for a child's future can feel what this means. They are "the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them," and the blessing will pass from one generation to the next.

65:24 *And it will be that before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear.*

"Before they call, I will answer." God will be so near that He answers prayers before they are even spoken. This is the opposite of 64:12, where the people felt God was silent. In the kingdom, there will be no gap between asking and receiving.

Even now, Jesus says our Father knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). That should give us confidence in prayer today.

65:25 *Wolf and lamb will graze as one, and the lion like the ox will eat straw, and **as for the** snake, dust **will be** its food. They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all My holy mountain, says the LORD.*

"Wolf and lamb will graze as one." This repeats the picture of 11:6-9. The lion eats straw like an ox. Animals that once hunted each other live at peace. I take it as written. When Christ reigns, the curse on creation will be lifted, and even the animal world will change (Romans 8:19-21).

"As for the snake, dust will be its food." This looks back to Genesis 3:14, where God cursed the serpent to eat dust. In the kingdom, the serpent stays under that curse, a reminder that Satan's defeat is certain. Revelation 20:2-3 says Satan himself will be bound during the thousand years.

"They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all My holy mountain." The chapter that began with a rebellious people ends with a world of peace under God's rule. That is where history is going. God's last word isn't judgment. It is a new creation where His people live in joy and nothing harms them.

Chapter 65 Summary

God answers the prayer of chapters 63-64. He had stretched out His hands to a rebellious people who chose idols and pride, and He will judge them. But like a farmer who saves a good cluster of grapes, He will keep a faithful remnant, His servants, and bless them. Then God announces new heavens and a new earth. Jerusalem becomes a joy, weeping ends, life is long, work is fruitful, and the wolf and lamb graze together. I read verses 18-25 as the Millennium, a foretaste of the eternal new creation.

Chapter 65 Study Questions

1. Has someone ever reached out to you over and over before you finally responded? What changed your mind?

2. How does Paul use verses 1 and 2 in Romans 10, and what do they show about God's heart? (65:1-2; Romans 10:20-21)

3. What sins does God point out in His people, and which one does He seem to find most offensive? (65:3-5)

4. What does the picture of the grape cluster teach about God's remnant? (65:8-9)

5. How does God contrast the future of His servants with the future of those who forsake Him? (65:13-15)

6. What does God promise to create, and how does it connect with 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1? (65:17)

7. Why does verse 20 suggest that verses 18-25 describe the Millennium rather than eternity? (65:20; Revelation 21:4)

8. Is there anything you are trusting more than God, like "Fortune" or "Destiny," that you need to give up?

9. Which promise in verses 17-25 gives you the most hope right now, and how might it change the way you live this week?

Chapter 66: The Final Word

Scripture: True Worship, Zion's Birth, and the End of All Things

66:1-6 Thus says the LORD: The heavens ***are*** My throne, and the earth ***is*** the footstool of My feet. Where then ***is*** a house that you could build for Me, and where then ***is*** a place of My rest? And all these ***things*** My hand has made, and all these ***things*** came to be, declares the LORD. And to this ***one*** I will look: to the afflicted and stricken of spirit, and trembling at My word. He who slaughters the ox ***is like*** one who strikes down a man; he who sacrifices the lamb, ***like*** one who breaks the neck of a dog; he who offers up a grain offering, ***like one who offers*** the blood of a pig; he who offers frankincense as a memorial, ***like*** one who blesses wickedness. They also have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their detestable things. I also will choose their punishments, and I will bring their fears on them; because I called, and ***there was*** no one answering; I spoke, and they did not listen; and they did what is evil in My eyes, and they chose that in which I did not delight. Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word: Your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for the sake of My name, have said, "Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy"; and they will be put to shame. A sound of uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD repaying recompense to His enemies!

66:7-11 Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before pain came to her, she delivered a male. Who has heard ***anything*** like this? Who has seen ***anything*** like these? Will a land be brought forth in one day? Or will a nation be born at one time? For Zion was in labor; she also gave birth to her sons. Will I break open ***the womb*** and not cause ***it*** to bring forth? says the LORD. Or ***am*** I the One who causes to bring forth, and will I shut ***it***? says your God. Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad in her, all who love her; exult with her ***with*** exultation, all who mourn over her, so that you may suck and be satisfied from the breast of her consolations, so that you may drink deeply and delight yourselves from the abundance of her glory.

66:12-17 For thus says the LORD: Look, I am extending to her peace like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing torrent; and you will suck; you will be carried on ***the*** hip, and you will be bounced on ***the*** knees. Like a man whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and in Jerusalem you will be comforted. And you will see, and your heart will exult, and your bones will sprout like the grass; and the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, and He will be indignant against His enemies. For look, the LORD will come in fire, and His chariots ***will be*** like the storm wind, to render His anger with rage, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire the LORD will enter into judgment, and by His sword, with all flesh; and the slain of the LORD will be many. Those who consecrate themselves and purify themselves ***to go*** to the gardens, following one in the midst, eating the flesh of the pig and the detestable thing and the mouse, will come to an end together, declares the LORD.

66:18-21 And I, their deeds and their thoughts ***I know***; ***the time*** is coming to gather all the nations and the tongues; and they will come and see My glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubal and Greece, the distant coastlands that have not heard My report and have not seen My glory; and they will declare My glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers

from all the nations ***as*** an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in wagons and on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the sons of Israel bring the grain offering in a clean vessel ***to*** the house of the LORD. And also from them I will take for priests ***and*** for Levites, says the LORD.

66:22-24 For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I am making will stand before Me, declares the LORD, so your offspring and your name will stand. And it will be that from new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh will come to bow down before Me, says the LORD. And they will go out and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me; for their worm will not die, and their fire will not be extinguished; and they will be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Chapter 66 Preview

The last chapter of Isaiah brings the whole book together. God, whose throne is heaven, says He looks for one kind of person: the humble one who trembles at His word. Then Zion gives birth to a nation in a single day, and God comforts Jerusalem like a mother comforts her child.

The LORD comes in fire to judge, and He gathers all nations to see His glory. The book closes with two pictures side by side: the new heavens and new earth that endure forever, and the end of those who rebelled against God.

Chapter 66 Study

66:1 *Thus says the LORD: The heavens **are** My throne, and the earth **is** the footstool of My feet. Where then **is** a house that you could build for Me, and where then **is** a place of My rest?*

"The heavens are My throne, and the earth is the footstool of My feet." God is so great that the whole universe is His throne room. So what kind of house could people build for Him? This isn't God rejecting the temple. He chose it and filled it with His glory (1 Kings 8:10-11). He is warning against thinking a building can hold Him or that religion can control Him.

Stephen quoted this verse when he stood trial before the council in Jerusalem (Acts 7:49-50). Solomon himself said it at the temple's dedication: heaven can't contain God, "how much less this house" (1 Kings 8:27).

New Testament links: Acts 7:48-50 (quoted); Matthew 5:34 (alluded to); Matthew 5:35 (alluded to)

66:2 *And all these **things** My hand has made, and all these **things** came to be, declares the LORD. And to this **one** I will look: to the afflicted and stricken of spirit, and trembling at My word.*

God made everything, so He needs nothing from us. "To this one I will look." God isn't impressed by grand buildings. He looks for the person who is "afflicted and stricken of spirit," broken over sin, and "trembling at My word," taking Scripture seriously.

This verse speaks right into daily life. You don't need to be important or impressive for God to notice you. He is looking for a humble heart that honors what He says. Psalm 51:17 says a broken and contrite heart God won't despise.

Stephen's quote in Acts 7:48-50 ends with the first words of this verse: "Did not My hand make all these things?"

New Testament links: Acts 7:48-50 (quoted)

66:3 *He who slaughters the ox **is like** one who strikes down a man; he who sacrifices the lamb, **like** one who breaks the neck of a dog; he who offers up a grain offering, **like one who offers** the blood of a pig; he who offers frankincense as a memorial, **like** one who blesses wickedness. They also have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their detestable things.*

This verse is shocking. A man offers an ox, and God counts it as murder. He offers a lamb, and God sees it like breaking a dog's neck. A grain offering is like swine's blood, and incense is like blessing an idol.

Why such strong language? Because these worshipers have "chosen their own ways" and love "their detestable things." Their offerings are right on the outside, but their hearts are full of sin. Isaiah said the same in 1:11-15. Worship without a changed heart isn't worship to God. It offends Him.

66:4 *I also will choose their punishments, and I will bring their fears on them; because I called, and **there was** no one answering; I spoke, and they did not listen; and they did what is evil in My eyes, and they chose that in which I did not delight.*

Because they chose their own ways, God will choose their punishment and "bring their fears on them." Then He repeats the charge He made in 65:12, this time saying, "I called, and there was no one answering." God is fair. People receive the result of the path they insisted on taking. Hebrews 3:15 gives the warning for us: when you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts.

66:5 *Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word: Your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for the sake of My name, have said, "Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy"; and they will be put to shame.*

Now God speaks to the faithful, those "who tremble at His word." They are being hated and pushed out by their own brothers, and their persecutors mock them: "Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy." In other words, "If your God is real, let Him show it."

God's answer is short: "they will be put to shame." Jesus warned that His followers would be thrown out by religious people who think they are serving God (John 16:2). If you are mocked for your faith, God sees it, and He will vindicate you.

66:6 *A sound of uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD repaying recompense to His enemies!*

A loud noise rises from the city and from the temple. It is "the sound of the LORD repaying recompense to His enemies." The mockers asked God to show Himself, and now He does, but in judgment. God may seem slow, but when He acts, everyone will hear it.

66:7 *Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before pain came to her, she delivered a male.*

Here is a strange birth. Zion gives birth before her labor pains even start. She "delivered a male" before the pain came.

I believe this points first to the birth of the Messiah from Israel. In my study of Revelation I noted how closely Revelation 12:2-5 echoes this passage: a woman, who stands for Israel, gives birth to a son who will rule the nations. That Son is Jesus Christ, born from the nation of Israel.

New Testament links: Revelation 12:2-5 (alluded to)

66:8 *Who has heard **anything** like this? Who has seen **anything** like these? Will a land be brought forth in one day? Or will a nation be born at one time? For Zion was in labor; she also gave birth to her sons.*

"Will a land be brought forth in one day?" The question expects the answer no. Nations take generations to form. Yet "Zion was in labor; she also gave birth to her sons." God will do what seems impossible.

I take this as the rebirth of Israel as a nation that turns to her Messiah. Teachers read the details differently, but in my view the fullest fulfillment comes at Christ's return, when Israel looks on Him whom they pierced and mourns (Zechariah 12:10), and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). The birth pains of the Tribulation will be short, and the result will be a whole nation brought to God.

66:9 *Will I break open **the womb** and not cause **it** to bring forth? says the LORD. Or **am** I the One who causes to bring forth, and will I shut **it**? says your God.*

God asks two questions. Would He bring a child to the point of birth and then not let it be born? Would He open the womb only to shut it again? Of course not. When God begins something, He finishes it. Paul says the same about believers: He who began a good work in you will perfect it (Philippians 1:6). God will finish His work with Israel too.

66:10 *Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad in her, all who love her; exult with her **with** exultation, all who mourn over her,*

Everyone who loves Jerusalem is invited to rejoice with her. Even those who have mourned over her are told to "exult with her." Many have grieved over Jerusalem's long history of suffering. Jesus Himself wept over the city (Luke 19:41). God promises that the grief will turn to joy.

66:11 *so that you may suck and be satisfied from the breast of her consolations, so that you may drink deeply and delight yourselves from the abundance of her glory.*

Jerusalem is pictured as a mother nursing her children. Those who love her will "suck and be satisfied" with her comfort. This is a picture of deep satisfaction and safety, like a child resting in its mother's arms. God's people will be fed and comforted from the city where God dwells.

66:12 *For thus says the LORD: Look, I am extending to her peace like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing torrent; and you will suck; you will be carried on **the** hip, and you will be bounced on **the** knees.*

God promises peace for Jerusalem "like a river," steady and full, never drying up. The wealth and glory of the nations will flow to her "like an overflowing torrent," as chapter 60 described. And God's people will be carried on the hip and played with on the knees, the way a mother treats a little child. It is a beautiful picture of how gently God will care for His people.

66:13 *Like a man whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and in Jerusalem you will be comforted.*

"Like a man whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you." God usually compares Himself to a father, but here He uses the picture of a mother. Both show His heart. There is no comfort like a mother's comfort to a hurting child, and God says His comfort is like that.

Isaiah 40 began with "Comfort, comfort My people." Here near the end, God is still comforting. Whatever you are carrying, God offers you that kind of comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

66:14 *And you will see, and your heart will exult, and your bones will sprout like the grass; and the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, and He will be indignant against His enemies.*

God's people will see it all and be glad. Their "bones will sprout like the grass," a picture of new strength and life. Then the verse turns. The LORD's hand will be known to His servants in blessing, but He will be indignant toward His enemies. The same coming of God brings joy to some and judgment to others.

66:15 *For look, the LORD will come in fire, and His chariots **will be** like the storm wind, to render His anger with rage, and His rebuke with flames of fire.*

"The LORD will come in fire." His chariots come like a whirlwind, and He brings His anger "with rage" and His rebuke "with flames of fire." Paul describes Christ's return in similar words, saying He will be revealed from heaven "in flaming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). This is the second coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation.

New Testament links: 2 Thessalonians 1:8 (alluded to)

66:16 *For by fire the LORD will enter into judgment, and by His sword, with all flesh; and the slain of the LORD will be many.*

The LORD will judge "all flesh," all humanity, by fire and by His sword, and many will be slain. Revelation 19:15 and 21 describe the sword that comes from Christ's mouth when He returns and strikes down the nations gathered against Him. This is the Day of the LORD, the day when God steps in to judge the world and set things right.

66:17 *Those who consecrate themselves and purify themselves **to go** to the gardens, following one in the midst, eating the flesh of the pig and the detestable thing and the mouse, will come to an end together, declares the LORD.*

God names some of those who will be judged. They make themselves "holy" through pagan rites, follow a leader into the gardens of idol worship, and eat "the flesh of the pig and the detestable thing and the mouse," all unclean under the Law (Leviticus 11). They "will come to an end together." This repeats the charges of 65:3-4. The book won't end without making clear that idolatry has no future.

66:18 *And I, their deeds and their thoughts **I know**; **the time** is coming to gather all the nations and the tongues; and they will come and see My glory.*

God knows "their deeds and their thoughts." Nothing is hidden from Him. Then He announces His plan: "the time is coming to gather all the nations and the tongues." People of every nation and language will come and see His glory. This reverses the scattering of the nations at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:9). Revelation 7:9 shows a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue standing before God's throne.

66:19 *And I will set a sign among them, and I will send survivors from them to the nations: Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubal and Greece, the distant coastlands that have not heard My report and have not seen My glory; and they will declare My glory among the nations.*

God will "set a sign among them" and send survivors to the far nations, people who never heard of Him. These messengers will "declare My glory among the nations." The survivors are those who come through the judgment of verses 15-16. They become missionaries to the ends of the earth.

This is God's heart from the beginning. He told Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3), and He called His Servant to be "a light of the nations" (49:6). The church carries this mission now (Matthew 28:19).

66:20 *And they will bring all your brothers from all the nations **as** an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in wagons and on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the sons of Israel bring the grain offering in a clean vessel **to** the house of the LORD.*

The nations bring "all your brothers," the scattered people of Israel, back to Jerusalem on horses, chariots, litters, mules and camels. Isaiah calls them "an offering to the LORD," like an offering brought in a clean vessel. The returning people of Israel are like a gift offered to God.

Paul seems to draw on this picture when he describes his ministry to the Gentiles as an offering made acceptable to God (Romans 15:16). God gathers His people from everywhere and presents them as His own.

66:21 *And also from them I will take for priests **and** for Levites, says the LORD.*

"And also from them I will take for priests and for Levites." Who are "them"? Readers take this two ways. Some say it means the Israelites who are brought home. Others say it means the Gentiles who bring them. I lean toward the Gentiles, because the passage has been speaking of the nations, and that would be a stunning sign of grace, since under the Law only Levites could serve this way. In either case, God opens His service wider than anyone in Isaiah's day would have expected. In Christ, believers from every nation are now a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6).

66:22 *For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I am making will stand before Me, declares the LORD, so your offspring and your name will stand.*

"The new heavens and the new earth which I am making will stand before Me." God returns to the promise of 65:17. The new creation won't wear out or pass away. And just as surely, "your offspring and your name will stand." Israel's future is as secure as the new creation itself. God tied the survival of Israel to the permanence of His own work (compare Jeremiah 31:35-36).

I see this verse reaching to the eternal new heaven and new earth that John saw after the final judgment (Revelation 21:1). The Millennium is its first stage, and eternity is its fulfillment. Either way, the point is the same. What God makes lasts, and the people He saves will last with it.

For the believer, this is the hope at the end of every hard day. Our lives aren't heading toward nothing. They are heading toward a world God has made new, where we will live with Him forever.

New Testament links: Revelation 21:1 (alluded to); 2 Peter 3:13 (alluded to)

66:23 *And it will be that from new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh will come to bow down before Me, says the LORD.*

From one new moon to the next, and from one sabbath to the next, "all flesh will come to bow down before Me." Worship becomes the regular rhythm of life for every person on earth. New moons and sabbaths were Israel's set times of worship. This fits the Millennium, when the

nations come up to Jerusalem to worship the King (Zechariah 14:16). One day every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10-11).

66:24 *And they will go out and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me; for their worm will not die, and their fire will not be extinguished; and they will be an abhorrence to all flesh.*

"And they will go out and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me." The book ends on a sober note. Outside the city lie the bodies of those who rebelled against God, likely those slain at His coming (verse 16; Revelation 19:21). "Their worm will not die, and their fire will not be extinguished."

Jesus quoted these words to describe hell, the place of final punishment (Mark 9:48). So this verse points beyond the battlefield to eternal judgment, the lake of fire of Revelation 20:14-15. It isn't a comfortable way to end a book. But it is honest. Isaiah has offered mercy in chapter after chapter, and he won't pretend there is no cost to refusing it.

Why would such a hopeful book end this way? I see it as a final warning wrapped inside a final promise. Isaiah began by calling a sinful nation to come and reason with God (1:18). He ends with two destinies: the new creation for those who tremble at God's word, and lasting judgment for those who rebel. The choice is still open today. Come to Jesus, the Servant who was pierced for our transgressions (53:5), and you will share in the new heavens and new earth that never end.

New Testament links: Mark 9:48 (quoted); Mark 9:43-44 (quoted)

Chapter 66 Summary

Isaiah ends by showing who God is looking for: the humble person who trembles at His word, not the proud worshiper with empty offerings. Zion gives birth in a day, and God comforts Jerusalem like a mother. The LORD comes in fire to judge, gathers all nations to see His glory, and brings Israel home. The book closes with the new heavens and new earth that endure forever, all mankind worshiping Him, and the unending judgment of those who rebelled.

The Nations of Isaiah 66:19

Tarshish: a far-off trading port reached by large ships, probably in the far west of the Mediterranean (also in 60:9).

Put: a people of North Africa, usually linked with Libya.

Lud: a distant people, probably the Lydians of western Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Meshech and Tubal: peoples of Asia Minor, also named in Ezekiel 38:2.

Javan: the Hebrew name for Greece, from the Ionian Greeks.

Chapter 66 Study Questions

1. When have you felt most comforted by someone? What made that comfort so meaningful?

2. If heaven is God's throne, what kind of person does He look for? (66:1-2)

3. Why does God reject the offerings described in verse 3? (66:3-4)

4. How does Zion's birth in verses 7-8 connect with Revelation 12? (66:7-8; Revelation 12:2-5)

5. How does God describe His comfort, and why does that picture matter? (66:12-13)

6. What happens when the LORD comes in fire, and how does Paul describe the same event? (66:15-16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8)

7. What will the survivors do among the nations, and how does that mission continue today? (66:18-21)

8. What two destinies does Isaiah set side by side at the end of the book? (66:22-24; Mark 9:48)

9. What would it look like for you to "tremble at His word" this week, and who could you invite to share in the hope of the new creation?

Conclusion

You've now walked through all 66 chapters of Isaiah. That's no small thing. As I said at the very start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly and literally, unless the text itself signals that something should be understood as a figure of speech.

Isaiah begins with a nation that had turned its back on God, and it ends with new heavens and a new earth. Everything in between boils down to one question: will you trust the Holy One of Israel? Ahaz wouldn't, and Judah paid for it. Hezekiah did, and God turned back the strongest army in the world in a single night. That same God is still keeping every promise He made through Isaiah, the ones already fulfilled and the ones still ahead.

The center of the whole book is the Servant of Isaiah 53, the one who was "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" (53:5). About seven hundred years before the cross, God told us exactly what His Son would do for us. His love is so complete and so unconditional that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross in our place. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior. Jesus is our mediator, the one and only way to be with God forever.

I hope this study has done what I set out for it to do: open up real conversation, stretch your thinking, and encourage you to keep discussing the book of Isaiah, and God's whole plan of salvation, with others.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are Savior of mankind and the forgiver of all. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross to provide me this opportunity to be atoned and forgiven. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer for the first time, tell someone. Find a church that teaches the Bible, ask about baptism, and start reading the Gospel of John. I would love to hear from you at the email address in the Introduction.

Old and New Testament Links in Isaiah

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
1:9	Romans 9:29	quoted
1:10	Revelation 11:8	alluded to
2:10	2 Thessalonians 1:9	alluded to
2:19	Revelation 6:15	alluded to
2:19	2 Thessalonians 1:9	alluded to
5:1	Matthew 21:33	alluded to
5:1	Mark 12:1	alluded to
5:1	Luke 20:9	alluded to
5:2	Matthew 21:33	alluded to
5:2	Mark 12:1	alluded to
5:2	Luke 20:9	alluded to
6:1	John 12:41	alluded to
6:1	Revelation 4:2	alluded to
6:2	Revelation 4:8	alluded to
6:2	John 12:41	alluded to
6:3	Revelation 4:8	alluded to
6:4	Revelation 15:8	alluded to
6:9	Matthew 13:14-15	quoted
6:9	Luke 8:10	quoted
6:9	Mark 4:12	quoted
6:9	John 12:40	quoted
6:9	Acts 28:26-27	quoted
6:10	Matthew 13:14-15	quoted
6:10	Mark 4:12	quoted
6:10	John 12:40	quoted
6:10	Acts 28:26-27	quoted
7:14	Matthew 1:23	quoted
7:14	Luke 1:27	fulfilled
7:14	Luke 1:31	fulfilled
7:14	Luke 2:7	fulfilled
8:12	1 Peter 3:14-15	quoted
8:13	1 Peter 3:14-15	quoted
8:14	1 Peter 2:8	quoted
8:14	Romans 9:32-33	quoted
8:14	Matthew 21:44	alluded to
8:14	Luke 20:18	alluded to
8:15	Matthew 21:44	alluded to
8:15	Luke 20:18	alluded to
8:17	Hebrews 2:13	quoted
8:18	Hebrews 2:13	quoted

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
9:1	Matthew 4:15-16	quoted
9:2	Matthew 4:15-16	quoted
9:2	Luke 1:79	alluded to
9:7	Luke 1:32-33	alluded to
10:22	Romans 9:27-28	quoted
10:23	Romans 9:27-28	quoted
11:4	2 Thessalonians 2:8	alluded to
11:4	Revelation 19:15	alluded to
11:5	Ephesians 6:14	alluded to
11:10	Romans 15:12	quoted
11:10	Revelation 5:5	alluded to
11:10	Revelation 22:16	alluded to
13:10	Matthew 24:29	alluded to
13:10	Mark 13:24	alluded to
13:10	Luke 21:25	alluded to
13:10	Revelation 6:12	alluded to
13:21	Revelation 18:2	alluded to
14:12	Luke 10:18	alluded to
14:13	Matthew 11:23	alluded to
14:13	Luke 10:15	alluded to
14:13	2 Thessalonians 2:4	alluded to
14:14	Matthew 11:23	alluded to
14:14	Luke 10:15	alluded to
14:14	2 Thessalonians 2:4	alluded to
14:15	Matthew 11:23	alluded to
14:15	Luke 10:15	alluded to
19:2	Matthew 24:7	alluded to
19:2	Mark 13:8	alluded to
19:2	Luke 21:10	alluded to
19:12	1 Corinthians 1:20	alluded to
21:9	Revelation 14:8	alluded to
21:9	Revelation 18:2	alluded to
22:13	1 Corinthians 15:32	quoted
22:22	Revelation 3:7	alluded to
23:8	Revelation 18:23	alluded to
23:17	Revelation 17:2	alluded to
25:8	1 Corinthians 15:54	quoted
25:8	Revelation 21:4	alluded to
25:8	Revelation 7:17	alluded to
26:19	Ephesians 5:14	alluded to
26:20	Matthew 6:6	alluded to
27:1	Revelation 20:2	alluded to
27:9	Romans 11:27	quoted
27:13	Matthew 24:31	alluded to
28:11	1 Corinthians 14:21	quoted
28:12	1 Corinthians 14:21	quoted
28:16	Romans 9:33	quoted
28:16	1 Peter 2:6	quoted

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
28:16	Romans 10:11	quoted
28:16	Ephesians 2:20	alluded to
29:10	Romans 11:8	quoted
29:13	Mark 7:6-7	quoted
29:13	Matthew 15:8-9	quoted
29:13	Colossians 2:22	alluded to
29:14	1 Corinthians 1:19	quoted
29:16	Romans 9:20	alluded to
29:18	Matthew 11:5	alluded to
29:18	Luke 7:22	alluded to
33:18	1 Corinthians 1:20	alluded to
33:22	James 4:12	alluded to
34:4	Revelation 6:13-14	alluded to
34:4	Matthew 24:29	alluded to
34:4	Mark 13:25	alluded to
34:4	2 Peter 3:12	alluded to
34:4	2 Peter 3:10	alluded to
34:10	Revelation 14:11	alluded to
34:10	Revelation 19:3	alluded to
34:11	Revelation 18:2	alluded to
35:3	Hebrews 12:12	quoted
35:5	Luke 7:22	alluded to
35:5	Mark 7:35-37	alluded to
35:5	Matthew 11:5	alluded to
35:6	Luke 7:22	alluded to
35:6	Mark 7:35-37	alluded to
35:6	Acts 3:8	alluded to
35:6	Matthew 11:5	alluded to
35:6	Matthew 15:31	alluded to
35:10	Revelation 21:4	alluded to
40:1	Luke 2:25	alluded to
40:3	John 1:23	quoted
40:3	Matthew 3:3	quoted
40:3	Mark 1:3	quoted
40:3	Luke 3:4-6	quoted
40:3	Luke 1:76	alluded to
40:4	Luke 3:4-6	quoted
40:5	Luke 3:4-6	quoted
40:6	1 Peter 1:24-25	quoted
40:6	James 1:10-11	alluded to
40:7	1 Peter 1:24-25	quoted
40:7	James 1:10-11	alluded to
40:8	1 Peter 1:24-25	quoted
40:8	Matthew 24:35	alluded to
40:8	Luke 21:33	alluded to
40:10	Revelation 22:12	alluded to
40:13-14	1 Corinthians 2:16	quoted
40:13-14	Romans 11:34	quoted

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
41:4	Revelation 1:17	alluded to
41:8	James 2:23	alluded to
42:1	Matthew 12:18-20	quoted
42:1	Luke 3:22	alluded to
42:1	2 Peter 1:17	alluded to
42:1	Matthew 3:17	alluded to
42:1	Matthew 17:5	alluded to
42:1	Mark 1:10-11	alluded to
42:2	Matthew 12:18-20	quoted
42:2	Matthew 12:16	fulfilled
42:3	Matthew 12:18-20	quoted
42:4	Matthew 12:20-21	quoted
42:6	Luke 2:32	alluded to
42:6	Acts 26:23	alluded to
42:7	Acts 26:18	alluded to
43:5	Luke 13:29	alluded to
43:6-7	2 Corinthians 6:18	alluded to
43:6-7	Luke 13:29	alluded to
43:10	John 13:19	alluded to
43:19	Revelation 21:5	alluded to
43:19	2 Corinthians 5:17	alluded to
43:20	1 Peter 2:9	alluded to
43:21	1 Peter 2:9	alluded to
44:3-4	John 7:38	alluded to
44:6	Revelation 22:13	alluded to
44:6	Revelation 1:17	alluded to
44:6	Revelation 2:8	alluded to
44:6	Revelation 1:11	alluded to
44:25	1 Corinthians 1:20	alluded to
45:9	Romans 9:20	alluded to
45:14	1 Corinthians 14:25	alluded to
45:23	Philippians 2:10-11	quoted
45:23	Romans 14:11	quoted
47:7	Revelation 18:7	alluded to
47:8	Revelation 18:7	alluded to
47:9	Revelation 18:8	alluded to
48:12	Revelation 1:17	alluded to
48:12	Revelation 2:8	alluded to
48:20	Revelation 18:4	alluded to
49:1	Galatians 1:15	alluded to
49:2	Revelation 1:16	alluded to
49:2	Revelation 2:12	alluded to
49:2	Revelation 19:15	alluded to
49:6	Acts 13:47	quoted
49:6	Luke 2:32	alluded to
49:8	2 Corinthians 6:2	quoted
49:10	Revelation 7:16-17	alluded to
49:26	Revelation 16:6	alluded to

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
50:3	Revelation 6:12	alluded to
50:6	Matthew 26:67	alluded to
50:6	Mark 14:65	alluded to
50:6	Luke 22:63-64	alluded to
50:8	Romans 8:33	alluded to
52:1	Revelation 21:27	alluded to
52:1	Revelation 21:2	alluded to
52:3	1 Peter 1:18	alluded to
52:5	Romans 2:24	quoted
52:7	Romans 10:15	quoted
52:7	Ephesians 6:15	alluded to
52:10	Luke 2:30	alluded to
52:11	2 Corinthians 6:17	quoted
52:11	Revelation 18:4	alluded to
52:13	Philippians 2:9	alluded to
52:15	Romans 15:21	quoted
53:1	John 12:38	quoted
53:1	Romans 10:16	quoted
53:4	Matthew 8:17	quoted
53:4	1 Peter 2:24	alluded to
53:5	1 Peter 2:24	quoted
53:5	1 Corinthians 15:3	alluded to
53:6	1 Peter 2:25	alluded to
53:6	1 Corinthians 15:3	alluded to
53:7	Acts 8:32-33	quoted
53:7	Matthew 26:63	alluded to
53:7	Mark 14:61	alluded to
53:7	John 1:29	alluded to
53:7	Revelation 5:6	alluded to
53:7	Matthew 27:12-14	alluded to
53:8	Acts 8:32-33	quoted
53:9	1 Peter 2:22	quoted
53:9	Matthew 27:57-60	alluded to
53:11	1 Peter 2:24	alluded to
53:11	Mark 10:45	alluded to
53:11	Romans 5:19	alluded to
53:12	Luke 22:37	quoted
53:12	Mark 15:27-28	quoted
53:12	Luke 23:32-33	fulfilled
53:12	Matthew 27:38	fulfilled
53:12	John 19:18	fulfilled
53:12	Luke 23:34	alluded to
54:1	Galatians 4:27	quoted
54:11	Revelation 21:19	alluded to
54:12	Revelation 21:19	alluded to
54:13	John 6:45	quoted
55:1	John 7:37	alluded to
55:1	Revelation 21:6	alluded to

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
55:1	Revelation 22:17	alluded to
55:3	Acts 13:34	quoted
55:10	2 Corinthians 9:10	alluded to
56:7	Mark 11:17	quoted
56:7	Matthew 21:13	quoted
56:7	Luke 19:46	quoted
57:19	Ephesians 2:13	alluded to
57:19	Ephesians 2:17	alluded to
57:20	Jude 1:13	alluded to
59:7	Romans 3:15-17	quoted
59:8	Romans 3:15-17	quoted
59:17	Ephesians 6:14	alluded to
59:17	1 Thessalonians 5:8	alluded to
59:17	Ephesians 6:17	alluded to
59:20	Romans 11:26	quoted
59:21	Romans 11:27	quoted
60:1	Ephesians 5:14	alluded to
60:3	Revelation 21:24	alluded to
60:6	Matthew 2:11	alluded to
60:11	Revelation 21:25-26	alluded to
60:14	Revelation 3:9	alluded to
60:19	Revelation 21:23	alluded to
60:19	Revelation 22:5	alluded to
60:20	Revelation 21:23	alluded to
61:1	Luke 4:18-19	quoted
61:1	Acts 10:38	alluded to
61:2	Luke 4:18-19	quoted
61:10	Revelation 21:2	alluded to
62:2	Revelation 2:17	alluded to
62:11	Matthew 21:5	alluded to
62:11	Revelation 22:12	alluded to
63:1	Revelation 19:13	alluded to
63:2	Revelation 19:13	alluded to
63:3	Revelation 14:19-20	alluded to
63:3	Revelation 19:13	alluded to
63:3	Revelation 19:15	alluded to
63:10	Ephesians 4:30	alluded to
64:4	1 Corinthians 2:9	quoted
65:1	Romans 10:20	quoted
65:2	Romans 10:21	quoted
65:16	Revelation 3:14	alluded to
65:17	1 Corinthians 2:9	alluded to
65:17	2 Peter 3:13	alluded to
65:17	Revelation 21:1	alluded to
65:17	2 Corinthians 5:17	alluded to
65:19	Revelation 21:4	alluded to
66:1	Acts 7:48-50	quoted
66:1	Matthew 5:34	alluded to

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
66:1	Matthew 5:35	alluded to
66:2	Acts 7:48-50	quoted
66:7	Revelation 12:2-5	alluded to
66:15	2 Thessalonians 1:8	alluded to
66:22	Revelation 21:1	alluded to
66:22	2 Peter 3:13	alluded to
66:24	Mark 9:48	quoted
66:24	Mark 9:43-44	quoted

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