

Useful Resources for Isaiah:

Recommended Commentaries:

The Message Of Isaiah, Barry Webb, IVP 1996 (The Bible Speaks Today series)

Online resources:

A timeline that helps locate Isaiah in history:

<https://visualunit.me/2010/11/17/isaiah-timeline/>

An outline that helps summarise how Isaiah fits together:

<https://visualunit.me/2010/10/16/isaiah-overview/>

A helpful Bible Project overview of the book:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/isaiah/>

Study 1 - A Renovators Delight. ISAIAH 1:1-2:4

The Big Idea of this study is twofold: to introduce the overall theme of Isaiah that God is doing a renewal work of his people, using the city of Jerusalem as a focal point, while secondly highlighting how this applies to each of us individually.

Getting started

Have you ever purchased a 'renovator's delight'? A project where something was once beautiful, has since fallen into disrepair, but you can see the potential for a gloriously restored future in it? If you have, how did you feel when you first bought it? If you haven't, what do you imagine you might feel about it?

Observation and interpretation

Read 1:1-2-4

1. What is life like in Jerusalem/Zion?

Terrible! Its citizens have rejected God (1:2) and are corrupt (1:3, 17). In particular, they are religious hypocrites (1:10-15).

2. What are some of the (colourful!) images used to describe Jerusalem?

Dumber than a donkey (1:3); someone who's been mugged (1:6); hut in a cucumber field (1:8); Sodom and Gomorrah (1:9, 10); bloodied hands (1:15); prostitute (1:21); an oak in autumn (1:30); a man who throws a match upon himself (1:31).

3. Summarise as simply as you can Isaiah's message to Judah and Jerusalem.

They have rebelled. As a result, God is judging them (remember, this passage is probably written around the time Assyria has Jerusalem besieged in 701BC, which makes particular sense of 1:7-8). All is not lost, though: if they repent, he will forgive them (1:18-20). For those who don't accept his offer, he will judge (1:25). For the remainder who do repent, he will restore them (1:26ff). In particular, this work of restoration will find its fulfilment in the 'last days', when not only Israelites but the nations will take refuge in Jerusalem (2:1-4).

4. Is there any hope for Jerusalem? If so:

- a. what is it?

The hope of restoration.

- b. who is it for?

The penitent, including the nations.

- c. and when?

'the last days' (2:2)

5. Isa 2:1-4 says that in 'the last days' when Jerusalem has been restored, 'all nations' will stream to it to hear God teach them his ways. *Read Ac 2:5-12, 22-24.*

- a. Who has come to Jerusalem?

People from all over the world (cf. Isa 2:2)

- b. Who is the message they hear about?

The message of Jesus crucified. That is, where Is 2:3 promises many people will come to Jerusalem for God to 'teach us his ways', now it becomes clear that the message he'll be teaching them is the message about Jesus' death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit.

- c. How is this a manifestation of the vision of Isa 2:1-4?

It's a direct fulfilment of it: the nations are flooding to Jerusalem in 'the last days' (cf. Acts 2:17) and finding safety in the message of Jesus.

Application

Trust

What elements of Jerusalem's behaviour or attitudes in Isa 1 can you see in our community and in your life?

You might wonder what this has to do with trust. One of the first steps of trusting that the message of the Bible impacts our life is to see the points of congruency - how our hearts are being addressed by the ancient text.

Say

Memory verse : Isaiah 1:18

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

Do

What choices in your life are in harmony with Isaiah 2:1-4? What needs changing?

You might want to remind people of Michael Morrow's encouragement to memorise scripture as a great way to really wrestle with it, understand it, and recall it.

Pray

Isaiah calls the people of Judah and Israel to repent from their sinful ways and turn to God, so he can cleanse them (Isaiah 1:18). Let us pray to God acknowledging our personal sins that have been brought to mind by this passage and bringing before him the sins of our world and ask him to cleanse us

Study 2 - Cut down to Size ISAIAH 2:5-4:6

The Big Idea of this study is to introduce a major theme of Isaiah: pride and humility, as well as a repeated pattern in Isaiah: judgment and grace. The message is simple, and could be summed up in the words of 1 Peter 5:5 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble'

Looking back

Last week, we saw Isaiah warning Israel and Judah to turn away from their wickedness and turn to God or else face his judgement. Has God impressed upon you any particular sins in your life or in our community during the past week? Use the following prayer (or your own words, if you prefer) to bring your sins before God in confession:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, We confess with shame the sins we have done, against you, and against those whom you have made. We have not loved you with our whole heart, and we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are sorry, and turn from our sins. For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us and change us. Set us free by your Spirit to live for you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Read Isaiah 1:18 and then Isaiah 53:5-6 as a reminder of God's mercy to us in Christ.

Background

As Isaiah continues his critique of Jerusalem in his day, he moves on to the theme of its immense pride and God's determination to break it. To do so, he presents a series of pictures of proud things: human idolatry (2:5-22), leaders (3:1-15) and ladies (3:16-4:1).

Observation and interpretation

Read 2:5-22

1. How have Judah become scheming and self-reliant in the way they think?

They've come to rely on their own money (2:7a), wealth (2:7b) and made-up gods (2:8)

2. How will God respond?

He will humble them (2:9, cf. 2:11, 12, 17)

Read 3:1-15

3. What will God do to the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem?

Smash 'em. In particular, note how he judges Jerusalem: gives them totally unsuitable leaders, e.g. children or even people who just look the part (e.g. have a cloak!). That is, if they want unsuitable leaders, God will give them to them!

4. What will be the result for the nation and city?

Disaster (3:1-3, 8).

Read 3:16-4:1

5. How does God describe the leading ladies of Jerusalem?

As haughty and callous to the needs of others (3:16)

6. How will God deal with them?

Bring them low, humble them (3:17-4:1)

Isaiah has painted a grim picture: a city of proud thinkers, leaders and women all about to be cut down to size by a humiliating God. What a relief 4:2-6 is, then!

Read 4:2-6

7. Isaiah has already used a term similar to 'in that day' (see 2:2). When does this make you think he is talking about?

On the one hand, in their own lifetimes. 'In that day' has been a refrain all through this section, and seems to have their lifetime in view.

On the other hand, it also seems to refer to now, 'the last days' of the gospel-age, as there seems to be something supernatural about the protection he brings (4:5-6).

If you want to chase this theme through of how 4:2-6 connects to us, it's good to follow the logic of what happens to the Branch:

- 4:2 – 'Branch' = just general salvation
- 11:1-2 – 'Branch' = king in line of David, who Spirit 'rests' on
- Matt 3:16-17 – Jesus king Spirit 'rests' on.
- Therefore: Jesus = Branch, who will bring salvation to people.

8. Who is Isaiah talking about in this vision?

The 'survivors' of Jerusalem (4:2)

9. What will they be like, in contrast to their predecessors?

Kept perfectly safe

Read Philippians 3:4b-11.

10. How has Paul taken on board the lessons of Isaiah when it comes to being proud of human accomplishments?

Considers them nothing compared to Christ.

Application

Trust

What accomplishments in your life might tempt you to become proud and less reliant on God?

Say

Let's not just gloss over the simple exhortations of this passage. As odd as it might feel, pair up with someone in your group and take a moment to speak the following verses to each other, reflecting together on one situation in life where you need to put this into practice. Isaiah 2:5 Isaiah 2:22

This is a skill we need to keep growing in. Please do make the effort to build this into your group time. You won't necessarily see the benefit of it on the first time you to it, or even the second time, but over time it will have a marked impact on our culture of speaking about the gospel with each other and with non-believers.

Do

What can you do to remind yourself to depend on God daily?

Think back to Michael Morrow's third sermon in the Magnification series - on daily quiet time.

Pray

Thank God for his gift of righteousness that he has given us through Jesus. Pray that we will learn to place our confidence for salvation in Jesus alone and not in our accomplishments. You might consider using Philippians 3:4b-11 as a prompt for prayer.

This final suggestion is quite deliberate in encouraging us to pray scripture more. Again, its about developing healthy habits, so please persist in it.

Study 3 - The King's Ambassador ISAIAH 5-6

The Big Idea of this study is to see how Isaiah's commission as a spokesperson for God serves as a template for our own commissioning. This is not to diminish from the unique role and office that Isaiah had as prophet who spoke with God's authority. We are not saying that we are all commissioned as prophets who should start writing big books to add to the Bible!! But we are all called to speak on behalf of the true king.

Looking back

Last week, we considered the accomplishments in life that might tempt us to become self reliant instead of depending on God. What have you done in the past week to remind yourself to depend on God daily?

Background

Isaiah 5 is another critique of Judean society in the eighth-century B.C., especially its greed (5:8-10), drunkenness (5:11-17), foolishness (5:18-21) and worship of false heroes (5:22-30). It's a picture that bears remarkable similarities to twenty-first century Australia and is worth reading for that reason alone, but for reasons of time we won't get to it now. Just read it in your own time. What we'll focus on instead is Isaiah 6 and its contrast between two kings: Uzziah and God.

Observation and interpretation

Read 2 Chronicles 26:1-5, 16-21 (you can read 6-15 as well if you have time)

1. What was Uzziah like as a king?

- Generally, good (and v6-15 highlights this in terms of military victory and the provision under God of peace and prosperity in the land - signs of a big thumbs up for him from God under the expectations of the Old Covenant)
- However, his prosperity led to pride and presumption before God.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

1. How does the description of God as king contrast with the descriptions of Uzziah as king we've just read?

God is altogether glorious. Whereas Uzziah is flawed, Yahweh is flawless.

2. Summarise the stages of Isaiah's encounter with God in 6:1-8.

- In the year Uzziah died (740BC), Isaiah saw Yahweh, on his throne.
- He saw that Yahweh was totally holy.
- As a result, he became acutely conscious of his own sinfulness (6:5). You could summarise this saying that his sin separated him from God.
- Then one of the seraphim cleansed him by using a red-hot coal to touch his 'unclean lips' and atone for his sin (6:6). (Note how sin has to be atoned for, it can't just be swept under the carpet). You could summarise this saying that God has now separated Isaiah from his sin.

- *Then God asks Isaiah to represent him, and Isaiah agrees.*

3. Why is Isaiah so reluctant to be commissioned as God's spokesperson?

Because he's sinful.

Read Isaiah 6:9-13

4. What is so unusual about the message God tells Isaiah to give his people?

It won't change any of their behaviour. In fact, it will only confirm them in their sinfulness and unbelief. In fact, this is no accident, it's God's intention ('Otherwise', 6:10)!

5. When will Isaiah's strange mission be over?

Until the land is totally desolate (6:11), i.e. until God's work of judgment is totally finished.

6. Is there any hope in this chapter?

Yes: there will still be a 'stump' of repentant people left in the land (much like the 'survivors' of 4:2).

Read Matt 13:10-17

7. How is the time of Isaiah's strange mission now over that Jesus has come?

Because although Jesus' message still hardens lots of people, some now come to find out more about it and he explains it to them, so they can repent.

8. How is the period of God's judgement on those who have already decided not to listen to him still ongoing, even now Jesus has come?

For the same reason as in Isaiah's day: people continue to ignore Jesus' message and so the offer of salvation he holds out.

Read Mathew 28:16-20

1. Like Isaiah, we too have been commissioned to be spokespersons for God. What is the message we have been given to carry and who are we to carry this message to?

We have been commissioned to announce to the whole world that all authority in heaven and on earth now belongs to Jesus and therefore everyone should repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of their sins and follow King Jesus.

2. How similar or different is our message to the message the prophet Isaiah took to Israel and Judah?

Scope: Judah vs the whole world.

Context: anticipating God's expression of judgment on the nation vs his judgment on each person.

Specificity: Many things that Isaiah spoke of in general terms we have seen focused in on Jesus.

Emphasis: Judgment is inevitable, so expect it to come vs Salvation has come so take hold of it before the day of judgment.

Application

Trust

People often reject the gospel, even though the true king, Jesus, has now come. How does Isa 6:9-10, and Jesus' interpretation of it in Mt 13:10-17, help you understand and cope with this?

Note that Jesus teaches us to expect such rejection of him and his rule. It is not a surprise nor an indication that he is limited in his authority. Make sure you're explaining it accurately but, once you've done that, don't take it personally. It's not your fault they're not becoming Christians, it's just that their hearts are hard, and the gospel only hardens them further. So, just keep preaching the gospel and pray that God will use it to soften rather than harden them.

Say

Not all 'kings' in life are worth speaking on behalf of. What are some of the 'kings' - causes, worldviews, etc. - for which you sometimes find yourself speaking up, even unwittingly, and yet you wish you wouldn't?

Do

How can you be a better messenger of the true king, Jesus?

Don't make this a session for beating ourselves up. Link it to the passages we've studied - how does understanding our calling, trusting our king, knowing the time in which we live all help us grow in this?

Pray

Think of someone in your life that you hope to talk to about Jesus. Pray with each other for opportunities to have such a conversation.

Study 4 - God with Us - in more ways than one!

ISAIAH 7:1-9:7

The Big Idea of this study is that God's presence with us can be both a great threat of judgment and also a great promise of grace. We should come to the end of it even more thankful for Jesus!

Looking back

Last week we read about Isaiah being commissioned with a message of judgement to carry to the people of Israel and Judah. We learnt that, like Isaiah, we too have been commissioned as spokesperson, for God, and we started praying about people in our lives that we hope to talk with about Jesus. Has there been any progress in this? Are there things to give thanks for, things to ask God for? Pray again for these people and your desire to share with them about Jesus.

Getting started

At Christmas, we remember that one of Jesus' names is 'Immanuel', 'God with us.' We assume that 'God with us' must always be a good thing, but is that necessarily so? What circumstances might make it a bad thing?

Background

Isaiah 7 needs some historical context for it to make sense. The year is 735BC (5 years after Isaiah was commissioned as a prophet). Ahaz is king of Judah. Assyria is threatening Judah's northern neighbours, Israel (also known as 'Ephraim') and Syria (also known as 'Aram'). Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, want Ahaz to form an alliance with them to oppose Assyria. Ahaz refuses. In retaliation Rezin and Pekah try to force Judah to join them by besieging Jerusalem and then, they hope, installing a puppet king to be their ally. In 7:1, we enter the story right in the middle of the siege.

Observation and interpretation

Read 7:1-9

1. What is Ahaz's predicament in 7:1?

Syria and Israel (i.e. the northern kingdom) are attacking Jerusalem, but have not yet been able to pierce its defences. In other words, Ahaz's capital is under siege.

2. What is Ahaz's reaction to his predicament in 7:2?

He's terrified.

3. What is Isaiah's message to Ahaz in 7:3-9?

Don't be terrified. God will rescue you by destroying Syria and Israel.

Read 7:10-12

Ahaz thought he only had two choices when it came to Judah's survival: side with Syria and Israel, or side with Assyria. God has offered him a radical, third choice: side with neither of them and trust God instead. To reinforce this, God volunteers to prove his trustworthiness to Ahaz by offering him a sign (7:10).

4. How does Ahaz respond to God's offer of a sign and what does it look like on the surface?

'No thanks, I don't want to test God'. Which looks very pious (he even has Dt 6:16 on his side!).

5. Read 2 Kings 16:5-9. What does this show us about the real reason behind Ahaz's answer?

Because he's already decided who to rely on to help him against Syria and Israel, and it isn't God. Rather, he's already sold Judah into slavery to Assyria in exchange for them destroying Syria and Israel. In other words, he chooses long term pain in exchange for only short-term gain (when God could have solved the problem for him without any pain at all!).

Read Isaiah 7:13-25

Ahaz refuses God's offer of a sign because he has already chosen who he will ask to help him in this fight: Assyria, not God. In response, God insists on giving him a sign anyway, but it comes in two stages.

6. Remembering that Immanuel means 'God with us', let's consider what the sign is that 'God is with' Judah:
- a. From v16, what will happen before the child is old enough to know right and wrong? (see also the timing of the birth of Isaiah's own child in 8:3-4).
'the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste' = Israel and Syria will be defeated, which is good news for Judah.
 - b. From v15 and its explanation in v18-25, what will life be like when the child is old enough to know right and wrong? (see also 8:5-8).
'he will be eating curds and honey' sounds like it could be a description of a good life, but v18-25 helps us see that it is a summary statement of a land that has been decimated by war and so there is only 'wild food' rather than 'stable food' remaining. In this sense, there is bad news for Judah - after initial respite from Israel and Syria comes destruction at the hand of Assyria.
7. What does it mean for God to be 'with' Judah in each of these timeframes?
Blessing and rescue in the short term, destruction and judgement in the next phase (note, this isn't the long term picture of Isaiah - as the book develops, God With Us has both on view for the long term: both terrifying judgment and wonderful blessing, depending on how we respond to him.

The child 'Immanuel' is a sign that God is 'with' Judah in two very different ways. In the short-term (before the child is old enough to know right from wrong), God is 'with' Judah in the sense that he is on their side. He will defeat Israel and Syria and so protect Judah from them. This sign came true in history. A son born at this time (735BC) would be a young boy when Syria fell to the Assyrians (732BC) and a young adolescent when they conquered Israel (722BC). God was 'with' Judah in salvation. However, in the long term (by the time the child had grown up), God is 'with' Judah not in salvation but in judgment. In 701BC, when the child would be about thirty years old, Judah fell almost completely into Assyrian hands and only

narrowly avoided Jerusalem being captured (see Is 36-37). In this sense, God will be 'with' Judah in judgment.

In summary: because of Ahaz's stubborn refusal to trust God and instead trust in 'mere humans' (2:22), Judah will only stand in the short term, not the long (7:9). God will be 'with' them in the last way they'd ever want him to be.

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

8. As v1 implies, the picture for Judah has been pretty gloomy so far. How do these verses provide hope?

A king utterly unlike Ahaz will come to rule them forever and perfectly. The 'child' of Isa 7:14 - i.e. any child born during the siege of Jerusalem - will be followed by one particular 'child' (9:6) who will bring salvation.

9. What is the contrast between this royal son and Ahaz?

Couldn't be greater: whereas Ahaz was compromised and failed to trust God for salvation, this child will be God himself.

Read Matthew 1:20-23

10. Matthew helps us see the ultimate and far greater fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 7. The woman is not merely young, but the virgin mother Mary. The child is not merely a reminder that God is with us, he literally is God with us. How is this Immanuel much greater news than the Immanuel of Isaiah's day?

He is not merely a sign of God's presence, he is God's presence. He comes not to judge but to save, and as the gospel unfolds we learn that he saves by laying his life down for his people.

Application

Trust

Isaiah 7 helps us see that 'God with us' can be good news or bad news depending on where we stand with God. How conscious are you of God's presence in your life and how does this affect the way you carry yourself in public and how you spend your private time?

Say

It's been said that we don't really understand something until we can explain it. Split into pairs and explain why 'God with us' can be both a warning of judgment as well as a message of hope.

Do

Humanly speaking, where we stand with God is determined by whether we stand firm in the faith (Isaiah 7:9). What is one practical step you can take this week to stand firm in Christ?

Pray

Thank God that through Jesus he has come to live with us not to condemn us but to forgive our sins and make us more like his son. Pray that we will be sensitive to his presence in our lives, so that we can be secure in his love for us and encouraged to reject sin that grieves him.

Study 5 - The Fear of the Lord

ISAIAH 8:5 - 9:7

The Big Idea of this study is to place our fear and reverence in the Lord, not in anything else.

Looking back:

In the last study we learnt that “Immanuel” which means God is with us can be both a good thing because he is our salvation and a bad thing because he is our judge. However, in Jesus, God is with us to save us from our sins and this should feel us with gratitude and hope and embolden us to reject sin. What have you done to remain cautious of God's presence in your life in the past week? Take a moment to thank God for this.

Getting started

What are some of your childhood fears that you have since overcome as an adult?

Background

In chapter 7, King Ahaz was informed of an impending attack on Judah by Israel and Syria. All of Israel reacted in fear but God sent Isaiah to tell Israel's King Ahaz not to fear but rather to place his faith in God if Israel was to survive. Instead King Ahaz rejected God's message and sought help from the King of Assyria. In the following passages, God reminds the people of Judah why he alone is to be feared.

Read Isaiah 8:5 - 9:7

What is God's accusation against the people of Israel and/or Judah in 8: 6?

“This people” refers to Judah and the waters of Shiloah are a pool of water supplied from the Gihon river at the South East end of Jerusalem. Rejecting it's water is imagery used by Isaiah to say that these people had rejected God's providence and instead aligned themselves with pagan Kings.

In chapter 8: 7 - 10, how does God promise to respond to the sins of Israel and Judah.

He promises to punish them by handing them over to the King of Assyria in battle.

What is God's instruction to the prophet Isaiah in 8:11-16?

God instructs Isaiah not to fear what the people of Israel and Judah fear but instead to fear God alone.

From 8: 17 - 22, how does Isaiah demonstrate his fear of God?

*vs 17 He waits upon the Lord for his salvation and puts his trust in him
vs 20 He consults with God's instruction and the testimony of his warning*

How does the promise of 9:1-7 further inform us of what it means to fear the Lord?

The fear of the Lord is not simply fearing his judgment. It is also trusting in his provision. It is taking him at his word and honouring his promise to show mercy. It is trusting that he is the one who will enlarge, increase, provide, rescue, defend and lead.

How would you sum up from this passage why Israel and Judah should fear God alone and not the pagan kings of Syria and Assyria?
God is the ultimate authority and in this sense he is the one who can both ultimately destroy and ultimately protect.

Read 1 Peter 2:4-8

How are God's promises of judgement and redemption fulfilled in Jesus?

To those who believe in him, Jesus offers redemption from judgement but he condemns those who do not believe in him.

According to this passage, how can we demonstrate our fear of God?

We demonstrate our fear of God by believing in his son Jesus and obeying his word.

Application

Trust

What people or situations in your life could cause you to fear them more than God? How does this passage help you deal with such fear?

Say

Last week we practised explaining how 'God with us' can be both warning and hope. This week, split into pairs and explain from this passage what it means to fear God.

Remember that while this might feel a bit unnatural, it is a really valuable skill for both growing in understanding but also in confidence to speak in a variety of situations.

Do

What can you do routinely to help you grow in your reverent fear of God?

Pray

Use 1 Peter 2:4-8 as a prompt for prayer, that we would grow in the fear of the Lord and invite others to join us in being built into God's household.

Study 6 - The One Who Will Make All Things New

ISAIAH 9:8-12:6

The Big Idea of this study is to understand more of who Jesus is as the fulfilment of the expectation raised by Isaiah 11:1-9.

Looking back

Last week, we learnt that God alone is to be feared because he is both the ultimate judge and saviour of his people. Has this reality impacted your week at all? If yes, how? (and give thanks!) If no - praise God for his patience with us and ask that he'd help us to put his word into action.

Getting started

Do you ever find it hard to believe that God really will restore the world to order in the new creation? Why? Why not?

Background

Isaiah 9:8-10:34 is a description of the thoroughness of God's justice: he will not stop until every sin has been punished. God will punish Israel for its sin but, even when that has been done, his anger will still not have been exhausted (9:12, 17 & 21). Judah still needs to pay for its crimes, and will do so via Assyria (10:1-4). But even then, God will still have justice to mete out, this time to Assyria itself, for its pride in seeing itself as anything more than a weapon in God's hands to carry out his will (10:5-34). It is only when *every* sinner - Israelite, Judean or Assyrian - has been given justice that God can rest.

But when all that has been done, the way is clear for some hope: a new king who will rule for the benefit of all of God's people, not just in Judah but in every nation on earth. This is the theme of Isa 11:1-12:6.

Observation and interpretation

Read 11:1-9

1. Isaiah 11 focuses on one particular figure. From 11:1-9, summarise:
 - a. who he is
 - *A king (he's a 'shoot from the stump' of Jesse, who was David's father - see 1 Sa 16)*
 - *Like an OT king (see 1 Sa 10:6; 16:13), the Spirit will rest on him.*
 - b. what he will do
 - *He will delight in the fear of the Lord (i.e. be godly).*
 - *He will judge fairly.*
 - c. what his actions will result in
 - *He will bring about a new world order in which violence, even among animals, will be a thing of the past.*
2. How does this figure remind you of the child of 9:6-7?

They have much in common. In particular, he will govern well.

3. What does the imagery of 11:6-9 teach us about the scope of this figure's impact? Can you recall coming across imagery like this elsewhere in the Bible?

His impact will be global (even cosmic) in scale. The whole earth will be filled with a knowledge of God. Not just knowledge though, this figure is going to impact even the way the natural world functions. Isaiah will use similar images in chapter 65, but for many people in your group, this will bring to mind images of heaven. The specific images aren't used in Revelation, but we so clearly associate these images with a promise of peace that it brings to mind similar passages about a renewed creation as we find in places such as Rev 21:3-4. In summary, this will be a king whose influence will not just be over Judah, but over the whole world and he will bring a radical transformation for peace.

Read 11:10-16

4. Who will this figure:
- a. save?
The nations and the exiles of Israel (i.e. all of Israel, both the northern and southern kingdoms).
 - b. destroy?
All of Israel's enemies (e.g. Philistia, Edom, etc)
5. When?

'In that day' (11:10). See previous studies.

Read 12:1-6

6. What is the great theme of this song of praise?

Thanksgiving to God for his salvation, not only of the people of Israel but for people from all the nations.

Isaiah refers to this figure as a 'shoot . . . from the stump of Jesse'. By mentioning Jesse, the father of King David, Isaiah makes us think of kings, and hence that this 'shoot' will be a new king. The fact that Isaiah goes on to mention the Spirit in the next verse therefore makes perfect sense. Historically, the Spirit empowered the kings of Israel to perform their kingly duties (1 Sa 10:10; 11:16; 16:13-14). If the king did not have the Spirit, they couldn't do their job. If they did have the Spirit, they could. In fact that was part of how you identified a king of Israel: by whether they had the Spirit or not. So with all that in mind . . .

Read Jn 1:29-34

7. How did John know who Jesus really was?

Because the Spirit came to rest on him.

8. What does this tell us about who Jesus really is?

The true 'Stump of Jesse' who has come to save not just Israel but the whole world.

Application

Trust

How often do you reflect on God's promise of heaven? Does this passage challenge or affirm your attitude towards God's promise of heaven?

Say

Here's a memorisation challenge: commit Isaiah 12:4-6 to memory.

Do

How does the guarantee of a place for you in heaven shape the way you live and respond to the evil and injustice that you see in life now?

Pray

Pray in thanksgiving to God that he will one day bring all evil and injustice to an end and establish his Kingdom of peace, righteousness and justice. Thank God that he has sent his son Jesus to establish his Kingdom and that through his death and resurrection we who believe have the sure hope of entering God's Kingdom. Pray that we will not grow weary of warning those who reject King Jesus about the judgment of God that awaits them if they don't repent.

Study 7 - A Heart For The Nations

ISAIAH 13-20

The Big Idea of this study is to see the pattern of God's judgment and grace connecting again with both terrifying judgment on the sin of the world and also glimmers of hope and grace as God promises to bring even his enemies into his kingdom.

Looking back

How did you go committing Isaiah 12:4-6 to memory? What impact did it have, saying this over and over to yourself?

Getting started

Have you ever considered overseas mission work? Why? Why not?

Background

Isaiah 1-12 is about the transformation of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been ruined through poor leadership, hypocrisy and injustice, and will face God's anger in the form of the Assyrian army. However, the city also has a great future which will be achieved by a God-like king.

Isaiah 13-27 is a new section with a new topic: the transformation of the nations. The nations, including Israel and Judah, defy God and will face God's anger. But a day is coming when even the nations can be included in the city of God. Isaiah 11 had pictured a gathering of God's people from around the world and this idea is developed in chapters 13-27.

Isaiah 13-20 is a series of oracles against the nations surrounding Judah.

Observation and interpretation

1. Split into four groups and each read one of the following passages:

- 13:1-14:27
- 14:28-16:14
- 17-18
- 19-20

2. As you read your section, answer the following questions:

a. What are the sins of the nation you're reading about?

They are various, so just get your members to sing them out.

b. What will God do in response to these sins?

Punish them.

c. Is there any hope for the nation?

Yes:

- *Babylon (13:1-14:27): there is the faintest hint that some of the Babylonians could be OK, because God will restore Judah once Babylon*

has destroyed them and will bring back people from 'the nations' with them, which could include Babylonians (14:1-2).

- *Philistia and Moab (14:28-16:14): 16:1-5. Note how this is a fulfillment of the vision of 2:1-4, tribute sent, refuge sought, the blessing of God's rule.*
- *Damascus and Cush (17-18): 18:7. Again, see the links back to 2:1-4*
- *Egypt (19-20): 19:18-25.*

3. Now get back together and briefly summarise your findings. Are there any similarities? Differences?

Just compare each person's notes.

4. Isa 11:9 told us that God has plans for the whole earth to be filled with the knowledge of him. How do we see the first glimmers of this hope in these chapters, even in the midst of God's judgment on the nations?

Despite the words of judgment upon these nations, we also see links back to the hopeful vision of 2:1-4 as well as very clear promises of grace and mercy (eg, 19:22-25).

5. Isaiah tells us that the only hope the nations have of escaping God's wrath for their sins is to escape as refugees to Jerusalem. *Read Rev 21:1-2, 22-27.* How does this hope find its ultimate fulfilment?

Heaven.

Application

Trust

Do you see yourself as a refugee running to God? What do you need to trust about this world, and what do you need to trust about God, to view yourself in this way?

This question picks up from the language of the nations taking refuge in God (eg 16:1-5, 19:22-25) and places us in with them.

Say

It's been a few weeks since we've spoken specifically about the people in your life that you hope to be able to talk with about Jesus. How are those conversations going?

Do

How are the hopes of Isaiah 14:1-2 coming true today in Christian world mission? What can you do to support such mission?

Pray

Use Revelation 21:22-27 as a prompt for prayer for our world. Take time to pray for our Global Mission partners who are serving across cultures around the world.

Study 8 - Money and Power

ISAIAH 21-23

The Big Idea of this study is to see how money and power threaten to tempt us away from trusting in the Lord.

Getting started

'Money and power are two of the Christian's greatest temptations.' Discuss.

Background

Isaiah 21-23 is another series of oracles against the nations. In this sense, it is no different from chapters 13-20. However, as it closes the cycle of these messages, it focuses on two nations who held particular temptations for Judah: Babylon and Tyre. For the first readers of *Isaiah*, Babylon was the epitome of wealth and Tyre was the epitome of wealth. For a nation struggling against a massive superpower like Assyria, either of these nations seemed like attractive allies. But Isaiah wants to warn Judah that their best hope lies not in power or money, but in God. And so he records these (at times very strange) visions.

Observation and interpretation

Read 21:1-10

1. Isaiah doesn't tell us who the vision is about right until the very end of the vision. Who is it about? (21:9).

Babylon.

2. What does the vision foresee?

Babylon destroyed (21:9) by Elamites and the Medes (21:2). Elam was a precursor to the empire of Persia and could describe the people group or be a reference to the region at the heart of the Persian empire. Put together, comments on Elam and Media are a reference to the future superpower of Persia, which hadn't yet become a dominant force during Isaiah's lifetime.

3. What is the implication for Judah and Jerusalem?

Trusting in Babylon is a bad bet: eventually, they'll be destroyed too.

Read 23:1-18

4. Who is this vision about?

Tyre (a coastal city, known for its great traders).

5. What does the vision foresee?

Tyre destroyed.

6. What are the implications for Judah and Jerusalem?

Again, trusting in Tyre is a bad bet: they, too, will be destroyed.

Babylon and Tyre were real, historical cities that suffered real, historical fates, as Isaiah foretold they would. But they also held symbolic value for Isaiah's readers:

they epitomised everything that was impressive and alluring in the world, and in particular the seeming security of power and wealth. Later biblical writers would use them to convey the same symbolism of a world relying on power and money, rather than God.

Read Revelation 18

7. Which bits of this (equally strange!) vision talk about Babylon? Which bits seem to be talking about Tyre?

- *Babylon: 18:2, etc.*
- *Tyre: although Tyre is never mentioned explicitly, everyone knew that Tyre was the great trading city of the region, as alluded to in Isaiah. Hence, given the descriptions of Rev 18:11-20, and the close association of Babylon and Tyre in Isaiah, it is probably Tyre John has in mind when he writes this bit of Revelation.*

8. What does it say about the future of 'Babylon' and 'Tyre'?

They will be destroyed.

Application

Trust

How can we be tempted to rely on power and money for our security rather than the gospel? How has this reliance been challenged in what we have read?

Say

Like the Israelites we struggle with the allure of wealth and power, but we can be blind to our own failings. How might we give permission to each other to speak into each other's lives, asking the hard questions, encouraging a dependence on God?

Do

Revelation 18:4-5 calls for action. Are there actions you need to take to extricate yourself from a dependence on power or wealth that undermines your dependence on the Lord?

Pray

Take time to confess your hunger for worldly security. Ask God to grow us in our dependence on him.

Study 9 – A Tale of Two Cities

Isaiah 24-26

The Big Idea of this study is to see how the summary statement of Isaiah 26:8 contrasts with the pride that brings God's judgment.

Looking back

We talked about taking action last week to extract ourselves from dependence on power or wealth that undermines our dependence on God. How did you go with this last week? Are there things to give thanks for or ways we can pray for each other to keep putting this into action?

Getting Started

Can you think of a time when you've taken the credit for something that really belonged to someone else? (or maybe you did the right thing and deflected the praise to where it rightly belonged?)

Background

With chapters 13-23 we've seen the sweep of God's righteous judgement of the nations, with glimmers of his grace shining through. Chapter 24 sums this up with a picture of his world-wide judgement, while chapters 25-27 reflect on a promise of world-wide renewal. Isaiah's attention will then turn back to Judah in a more focused way, which we'll see culminating in chapters 36-39 in the next study.

Observation and Interpretation

Read Isaiah 24:1-13

1. What is the point being made in v1-3?

Total catastrophic judgment is coming on the whole world and every part of it!

2. V4-13 expand on this with numerous images to explain why this is happening and what it will be like. What stands out to you from this section? If you're feeling creative, draw some of the scenes described here.

Don't try to cover all these off - just let the group identify images that stand out to them.

eg,

v4 - the earth dries up and withers

v6 - a curse consumes the earth... the inhabitants are burned up

v7 - wine dries up, vine withers (ie, there's no partying!)

v8 - the music of parties and celebration goes quiet

v12 - a city destroyed and left in ruins

It's not vital that people draw, but this is such a good opportunity to engage with the visual learners in our midst. Even non-artists can gain a lot from stick figure drawings of a scene as it helps us conceptualise what the metaphor/image portrays.

3. How is the image of a city used in v10-12 to describe the way human pride is to be judged? You might find it helpful to think back to some of the cities that we've read about so far in Isaiah.

We've seen judgment against the pride of various cities (eg: Jerusalem, Samaria, Babylon). Here we're just told that 'the ruined city lies desolate... the city is left in ruins' but our attention is drawn to two particular things: v11, no more parties, v12, gates bashed down = no more security.

The rest of chapter 24 unpacks more of the devastation of God's coming judgment upon all the earth. In v14-16 Isaiah alludes to the remnant of humanity who are like the gleanings left after the grape harvest (v13), saved from God's judgment and raising their voice to praise God. Yet Isaiah is dismayed by the state of the world and the prospect of the coming judgment (v16-18) and he continues to describe the outcome of God's righteous rule. In chapter 25 his tone changes as he speaks from the perspective of the future, looking back on these acts of judgment.

Read Isaiah 25:1-8

4. In light of the terrifying judgements of chapter 24, how do v1-5 help us to see that God's judgement is a reason to praise God?

We see that the cities destroyed were strongholds and cities of ruthless nations (v3) and the joyful singing that has gone quiet weren't just innocent parties but 'the song of the ruthless (v5). Their destruction has provided refuge and shelter for the poor and the needy (v4-5).

5. What do v6-8 promise for 'all peoples'?

*A rich banquet of the best of everything (v6, an image of abundant blessing)
Ultimately, destruction of death (v7-8)*

6. Looking back over what we've read in 25:1-8,
a. How much of this was fulfilled in the historical events in the years that followed after Isaiah's lifetime (eg: destruction of Assyria by Babylon, destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon, destruction of Babylon by Persia, return of some of God's people to Jerusalem)?

In the years following Isaiah's prophecy ruthless cities were destroyed, and the vulnerable people of God were given refuge.

But even that seemed incomplete - there was still loads of injustice in the world, certainly not an endless banquet for all people, and of course there's still death...

- b. How much of this was fulfilled in Jesus' life, death and resurrection?

This description of judgment of sin helps us understand the horror of the cross, because this is part of what Jesus took upon himself. We also know that in Jesus resurrection he has defeated death, yet we still long for more...

c. How much of this is still waiting to be fulfilled?

The final wedding banquet, the destruction of death, and the final judgment on sin (see Rev 21:1-8)

As Isaiah looks forward to this final expression of God's judgement, he piles up song after song, with 25:9-12 providing a further song of praise, and more songs to follow in chapter 26 and 27. In chapter 26 Isaiah returns to the image of two cities to describe the glory of God's character and actions.

Read Isaiah 26:1-8

7. From the description in these verses, who are the people that will sing this song of praise?

Those in the strong city (v1), who humbly trust in God (v4-5)

8. From v1-6, how are the two cities described and what is the contrast between them?

On the one hand, a strong city established by God and dependent on him, on the other hand 'the lofty city' (v5) has been demolished.

9. Verse 8 provides a great summary of the person who dwells in the 'strong city' with its walls of salvation (v1), who trusts in the Lord forever (v4). The verse can be broken into three sections. Each section sums up some of Isaiah said to Judah, as well as giving us plenty to think about in terms of how we live today.

	What would this have looked like for Judah?	What does this look like for us today?
Walking in the way of your laws	<i>Covenant obedience (in contrast to their sin such as we see in chapter 1)</i>	<i>Obedience to Jesus as Lord</i>
We wait for you	<i>Trusting in God's salvation rather than fearing Syria, Assyria or Babylon.</i>	<i>Trusting in God's salvation rather than any other alternatives we might hope will provide for our comfort, security, purpose or hope.</i>
Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts	<i>Seeking his honour among the nations meant living in trust and obedience.</i>	<i>Seeking his honour among the nations still means living in trust and obedience</i>

Application

Trust

What is an area in your life where you find it hard to wait for God – either in his promise to bring justice or his promise to bring renewal?

Say

Isaiah 25:1 sums up a really good reason to speak God's praise to one another.

Take a moment to reflect on something wonderful that God has in his perfect faithfulness as planned long ago. But don't just think this – say it out loud!

It's been a while since we've done this, but remember the benefit of actually doing it - getting more practiced at actually articulating our thoughts helps us encourage one another and share our hope with those who don't yet know God. You could give people a simple prompt to complete the sentence: "I think God is worthy of our praise because..."

Do

How do the vision of the new creation given in 25:6-8 and the 'mission statement' of 26:8 need to shape our everyday decisions with our time, money and energy?

God's promise of the future prosperity and peace of 25:6-8 should shape us in depending on him to provide it and investing our energies into making it known. The 'mission statement' of 26:8 should impact our priorities if we're going to actually live it out.

Pray

Pray that 26:8 would be true in our lives.

Study 10 – Flawed king, Faithful King Isaiah 36-39

The Big Idea of this study is to see how Hezekiah points forward to the ultimate King, Jesus Christ, but leaves us longing for more - which we can only find in Christ. This study serves as a bit of a summary of the book so far, and given it will be leading into Christmas for most of our groups there are easy links to the wonderful news that God's Christ has come! It is structured to move through the narrative quickly - try not to get bogged down on tangents and side notes, just use the questions to pick out key elements of the narrative so you can see the points made by the sweep of the story.

Looking back

Have there been ways you've been challenged to let go of your dependence on wealth and power in this last week?

Getting Started

What has stood out to you from our time in Isaiah so far?

This isn't fishing for anything in particular, its just that this study serves as a bit of a summary of the book so far.

Background

Isaiah 36-39 is notable within Isaiah as an extended passage of historical narrative. 2 Kings 18 provides an account of King Hezekiah's ascension to the throne and describes his reign saying, 'He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.' (v3) In the fourth year of his reign Assyria destroyed Samaria and deported the Israelites of the Northern kingdom, and ten years later they returned and laid siege to Jerusalem. This is where Isaiah picks up the story in chapter 36 (and his account is quoted in 2 Kings 18-20). It comes on the back of chapters 28-35 that outline the foolish alliance Judah has entered into with Egypt (eg 30:1-5, 36:6), and it is followed by Hezekiah's foolish decision to court an alliance with Babylon in chapter 39. Yet sandwiched in between is this account of God's king standing firm in faith in the Lord (see 7:9). As a brilliantly recorded narrative it is repays the effort of reading it in full as we meet Hezekiah at his best. On the one hand he stands as a great example, yet at the same time his fallibility leaves us longing for a truly faithful king.

Observation and Interpretation

Read Isaiah 36:1-22

1. Verse 1 is brief, but how would it have felt for those living in Jerusalem to see the Assyrian commander approaching?

This is a brief description of widespread destruction. It must have been a fearsome army and the approach of the Assyrian commander would have been terrifying.

2. How would you sum up what the Assyrian field commander says to the Judean officials in v4-10?

You can't trust your God to save you... or something to that effect

3. How would you sum up what he says to the people in v13-20?

You can't trust your king to save you, because you can't trust your God to save you... or something like that.

4. Based on what we've seen in Isaiah so far, what are the possible reactions we might expect from Hezekiah?

We've seen God's people respond in faithlessness many times. And the last block of narrative we had about a king in Jerusalem demonstrated a great lack of faith in God (Isa 7), so we might expect the same.

Read Isaiah 37:1-38

5. How would you describe Hezekiah's response to the Assyrian threat? How does this relate to what we have read in Isaiah about fear and trust?

Humility before God, dependence upon God. He is clearly terrified by the Assyrian threat, but he knows a greater power and he humbly turns toward God in his time of fear. It is a wonderful example of the things Isaiah has said about fearing God above all else.

6. What is Sennacherib's response? How does this relate to what we have read in Isaiah about pride and humility?

Pride!! Even to the extent of sending excuses on his way out the back door (v10-13)

7. How does God respond? How does this relate to what we have read in Isaiah of his character?

We see God's dependability and power. He also humbles the proud just as he has said he would. The defeat of the army in v36 is embarrassing (so it's not surprising that it doesn't show up in any of Sennacherib's official records that archeologists have found). The murder of Sennacherib himself is hardly glamorous (betrayed by his own sons - and not just one but a coalition of at least three of them), and it is an important detail that it occurs in the very act of his idol-worship. His own god did not save him!

Read Isaiah 38:1-20

8. Having faced down a terrifying foe at a national level, here we see Hezekiah in the privacy of his bedroom. How does this episode portray Hezekiah? In what ways does he exemplify the ideal of God's king?

As a side note, chapter 38 and 39 are flashbacks in time before the events of chapter 36-37. See how 38:6 implies Assyria is still in the future, but we've already read about it in chapter 37. And we know from 2 Kings that the alliance between Babylonia and Judah described in chapter 39 are part of what triggered Assyria's attack recorded in chapter 36. So Isaiah is deliberately presenting the account of Hezekiah's faithful public leadership in ch36-37 before we then see his private battles and personal failures in ch 38-39.

38:3 is interesting. Is he sulking, or is he genuinely and rightfully distressed. Isaiah isn't clear, so we should be careful not to read too much into it. But it's a pretty frank portrayal.

However, as much as we see his human fragility here, we also see his response of faith - he prays, and then he praises.

Read Isaiah 39:1-8

9. How would you sum up this final episode in Isaiah's account of Hezekiah? *He is hasty to enter into alliance with Babylon. On the surface we could argue that he didn't do anything wrong, but the action has moved very quickly without any effort from Hezekiah to consult God or his prophet. What could prompt Hezekiah to open up all the treasury to a foreign power except the offer of alliance? And We've already seen in Isaiah what God thinks of alliance with foreign powers - his people and their kings should rely on him alone.*

10. What does Isaiah teach us by including this episode here, bringing this first section of his book to such an abrupt conclusion?

Lots!!

In many ways it is a lived example of the themes of humility and pride, faith and faithlessness that we've seen throughout Isaiah. It also focuses on the king, who should be an example of faith, but sadly leaves so much to be desired.

Sadly, the episode of chapter 39 highlights Hezekiah's fallibility and folly. Hezekiah may have responded in faith under pressure and done what was right in the eyes of the Lord throughout much of his reign (2 Kings 18:3) and in the face of his own death, yet he was a deeply flawed king.

11. How would you describe the first 39 chapters of Isaiah? What are some of the unanswered questions we are left with when we get to the end of this first section of the book? How do these concluding chapters of this section build our sense of longing for the promised Deliverer-King of chapters 9 and 11?

It will be good to help people see the themes of pride and humility, faith and faithlessness/fear, judgment and grace that have run through this first section. We've also had narrative of two Davidic kings (Ahaz and Hezekiah) who stand in contrast to the promised rescuer of 9:1-7 and 11:1-16

Application

Trust

The Assyrian field commander ridiculed the Lord: “Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, ‘The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria’ (36:15) Read Matthew 27:38-43. How does Jesus’ demonstration of faith in God tower over Hezekiah’s? When we face insult from outside or doubt from within, how does his faithfulness assure us of our salvation?

Say

Hezekiah recognised that God used his sickness as a means to grow him and his healing was much more than just physical (38:15, 17). He responds in praise, saying this is the natural response for anyone who has experienced God’s saving work (v19). Our praise could be spoken to Christian family, a non-Christian friend or even the hairdresser. Who can you tell this week about God’s faithfulness? What is one thing you could share with them about God’s faithfulness?

Do

Isaiah’s account of Hezekiah has reminded us of what we have read in previous chapters about pride vs humility and fearing the Lord vs fearing others. As you reflect back over the practical change that we’ve talked about throughout these studies, is there action you need to take this week? Are there changes you want to make for 2021? Note down what you want to change, what you’ll do to change it, and when you’ll take that action.

Pray

Earlier we suggested Isaiah 1:18 and 12:4-6 as good memory verses for this series. Use them as a prompt for prayer.