

ISAIAH 40:1-44:23

Getting started

Background

Unlike Isaiah 1-39, Isaiah 40-66 is set well in advance of Isaiah's own lifetime. At the very end of Isaiah 39, Isaiah warned Judah's king, Hezekiah, that the nation he was relying on to be Judah's ally against Assyria - Babylon - would one day become its enemy and deport its people into exile (39:5-7). Well after Isaiah and Hezekiah had both died, this is exactly what happened: in 586BC, Babylon invaded Judah, destroyed Jerusalem, and took nearly all of its inhabitants into exile.

Isaiah 40:1 comes in on the story just at the point where this exile is about to end. As such, it marks a massive 'jump forward' in the story, and is addressed to a totally different group of people than Isaiah 1-39: not Israelites living in the land but in exile, and desperately wanting to go home. If ever there were a group of people in need of some good news, it was them! Thankfully, that's exactly what God has for them and what he starts with in this next section. Let's get into it.

Observation and interpretation

Read 40:1-11

1. 'Comfort, comfort my people' are the first words out of God's mouth. What things does he comfort them with?
 - *They are still his people (40:1)*
 - *Exile is almost over (40:2)*
 - *Sin has been paid for (40:2)*
 - *God is going to take them home to Jerusalem (40:3-5)*
 - *They may feel weak, like grass, but God - whose word endures forever - will sustain them (40:6-8)*
 - *God will be like a shepherd to them (40:9-11).*
2. Given the tone of so much we've read so far in *Isaiah*, how does this make you feel?

Read 41:8-20

3. Having told his readers (who he now simply calls 'Israel') that he will save them from exile, God now tells them he will also give them a job to do - he will make them his 'servant'.

- a. What job will he give Israel? (See Micah 4:11-13 - Micah is writing at the same time as Isaiah, to the same people - to find out who 'the mountains' of 41:15 might be and what it means to 'thresh' them).

This is a tricky bit, so be patient with people. The job he's given them is to be a 'threshing sledge' for the 'mountains': 41:15. A threshing sledge was a bit like a plough - a heavy wooden platform with iron teeth on its bottom which you dragged over the ground to break it up or over wheat to separate the grain from the chaff ('winnowing', 41:16). Micah makes clear that 'mountains' are the nations. Therefore, to thresh them is to break them up and winnow them, i.e. to destroy them but also to separate out from them those who could be saved, i.e. the wheat.

- b. How must this job seem impossible, given their current situation?

The Israelites are currently still in bondage in Babylon, the largest super-power in their known world. For God to tell them they'll one day 'thresh' them must seem incredible! Hence, they feel 'little' and like 'a worm' (41:14).

- c. How does God offer to help them, regardless?
God will strengthen them for this job, e.g. 41:10.

Read 42:18-25

4. How will Israel actually go at being God's 'servant'?

Terribly! They're blind and deaf: 42:18-19.

5. What have they failed to learn from their time in exile?

They should have learned from the fact God sent them into exile that God is in control of all nations (42:23-25). As such, if God was in charge of Judah enough to send them into exile, he should also be in charge of Babylon enough to hand them over to Judah!

Read 42:1-4

6. God will bring Israel back from exile, give them a job to do (make them his 'servant'), and give them all the help they need to do that job. And yet they will still muck it up. Israel will make a lousy 'servant'. But then God starts talking about another 'servant': an individual ('him, he') who, although he bears the same title as Israel, will be able to do everything they cannot. It is as if this person will be the 'ideal Israel': everything that nation is meant to be, but wrapped up in an individual.

- a. What does God tell us about this 'servant'?

He's going to do a much better job of being God's 'servant' than the actual nation of Israel is! Just go through these verses and list all his attributes.

- b. What word gets repeated three times in 42:1-4? What does this tell us about this person's main job?

He'll bring justice (note the threefold reference to it here). 'Justice' here means setting everything to rights.

New Testament

Read Matthew 12:9-21

7. Who does Matthew identify as the 'servant' of Isaiah 42:1-4?

Jesus.

8. What is it about him that looks so similar to 'the servant'?

He is bringing healing to people (Matthew 12:15). As such, he is someone who does not 'snuff out' or 'break' weak people. Rather, he sets them to rights. Also, he does not make a big song and dance about himself (Matthew 12:16). As such, he is also someone who does not 'quarrel or cry out'. In this sense, by his bringing healing to people - and all that represents - he's showing that he's setting the world to rights: 'bringing justice' in the language of Isaiah.

Application

9. Are you feeling guilty at the moment about something you've done or not done? When you get home, write out 40:1-2, but insert your own name in place of 'my people' and 'Jerusalem'. Recite it to yourself to remind you of God's comfort to you in Christ.

10. Are there areas in your life where you're not letting yourself listen to God (42:18ff)? What needs to change so you can hear him properly?

11. Thank God that when we are weak - 'smouldering wicks', 'bruised reeds' - and serve him poorly, Jesus doesn't break us or snuff us out but shows us mercy instead.

ISAIAH 44:24-48:22

Getting started

Tim Keller says in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*: 'When anything in life is an absolute requirement for your happiness and self-worth, it is essentially an "idol", something you are actually worshipping.' What do you think of this?

Background

God has told Israel that he will free them from exile and bring them back home to Jerusalem, but he hasn't yet told them exactly how. Now, he gets to specifics. And they are surprising! It turns out God is going to use a pagan king, Cyrus of Persia, to do the job. And Cyrus isn't even going to know he's doing it on God's behalf! As far as Cyrus is concerned, he's taking Babylon and freeing her captives, including Israel, for solely political and financial reasons. But God doesn't care if Cyrus sees God's hand in his actions or not. God's not insecure: he knows he's the king of the universe and the lord of history, and so as long as Cyrus gets the job done for him and brings his 'servant' Israel home, then that's good enough. That's the point we come in on in this new section.

Observation and interpretation

Read 44:24-45:8

1. What are God's plans for Jerusalem and Judah?

To free them from exile and send them back to Jerusalem: 44:26, 28.

2. How does Cyrus fit into them?

He'll be the one to defeat Israel's captors, Babylon, and release them: 44:28, 45:1 (see also 45:13).

3. What is Cyrus' attitude to these plans?

He's blissfully unaware he's part of God's plan at all! (45:4, 5).

4. Isaiah is writing 150 years before the events he predicts. *Read 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.* How did these predictions turn out? What does this tell us about who God is? (See 44:26)

Isaiah's predictions come true. What that tells us about who God is, is that he is powerful and can tell the future.

Read 45:9-13

5. Israel is naturally surprised that God would select a pagan idolater to save them. What is God's response to their problem with this?
You see Israel's shock in 45:9, where it's clear they're 'quarrelling' with God about his choice of rescuer, Cyrus (see 45:12). God effectively says in reply: 'Who are you to quarrel with me about who I get to rescue you?'

Read 46:3-7

6. God will use an idolater to rescue Israel. Does that mean God approves of idolatry?

No

Read 48:1-5, 12-15

7. God has made a point of his ability to predict the future when it comes to their salvation (44:26). We now find out why. Why?

All along, Israel have really been trusting in idols more than God. Now, God contrasts himself with those idols: could an idol have predicted that, in 150 years time, a guy called 'Cyrus' would have been able to rescue them? No! Idols are just dumb and blind bits of wood and stone. Instead, God is living and active. So, they'd be better off trusting him.

8. What does this tell us about where Israel's heart is really at when it comes to worshipping God and worshipping idols?

Really, they're still trusting in the nations' gods rather than their own. They need to repent of that.

New Testament

God tells Israel he will free them from Babylon and take them home to Jerusalem. But to be truly free, they will need more than a new address, because what they are really enslaved by is the idolatry of their own hearts. Until Israel let God deal with *that* they will always be in 'exile' from him - wherever they live. Rather than worrying about Cyrus' idolatry, they should be worrying about their own!

When we come to the New Testament, God's message is the same for us. Read *Colossians 3:5-11*.

9. How are the things Paul lists in 3:5, 'idolatry'? What are we to do to them?

Go through the list. Note: there is a chance that 'idolatry' here only relates to greed, not everything else in the list. If that's the case, it's still a pretty cover-all term: 'greed' is really just wanting all the other stuff in the world, a way of saying people 'worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator' (Ro 1:23), which God also calls idolatry.

10. What are we to do instead? How is this possible?

They're to put on the new self. If this sounds like works-based self-improvement, it's not. It's only possible because Christ 'is all, and is in all' and they are 'being renewed into his image' (by God, presumably).

Application

11. Have you ever had a 'Cyrus moment'? One where God used someone who was totally opposed to Jesus to nonetheless save you from a mess you had made or even rebuke you for a sin? How did you feel? How can *Isaiah* help you respond next time?

12. God has given us a 'new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator' (Colossians 3:5). What comfort can we take from this when we fall back into our own forms of idolatry?

ISAIAH 49:1-52:12

Getting started

When you watch the news, it's hard to believe that 'salvation is reaching the ends of the earth.' Do you ever get discouraged by the way the world's going?

Background

Isaiah 40-48 has seen a lot of conflict between God and Israel. Although God has said, 'Comfort, comfort my people' (40:1), there is a real question as to whether Israel will accept this comfort or simply retain its stubborn, idolatrous ways. At the end of chapter 48, it feels like God has given up on Israel: *"There is no peace", says the Lord, "for the wicked"* (48:22). But then in chapter 49 there is something new. An anonymous person gets given the title 'Israel' and goes about doing all the things Israel should do. A strange voice has spoken in these chapters from time to time, someone who wants to speak for God (40:6) and be sent by him (48:16). In Isaiah 49, finally he speaks to us at length.

Observation and interpretation

Read 49:1-6

1. What do these verses tell us about 'the servant'?

The way Isaiah builds up the picture of the servant is gradually, like a police identikit: with each new Servant Song, a new piece of the puzzle is added, so that at the end of the last Song we have a complete picture of him. So, if people are keen to rush on to build up a complete picture of him now, because they're familiar with the songs, get them to hold off.

In the meantime, with this song just list the attributes listed.

2. We've met the servant once before in 42:1-4. What new things do 49:1-6 tell us about him?

Just focus on the new things we learn about him here:

- *he's like a 'weapon', in that what he'll tell Israel will cut them in two (49:2a), but he's a 'secret weapon', whose ability is currently hidden (49:2b).*
- *it's even clearer that he's an individual who represents Israel, rather than Israel itself (note 49:5, where although the servant is called 'Israel' in 49:3, he also talks to Israel in 49:5).*
- *most importantly, the servant's reach when it comes to being a warrior and a saviour extends not just to Israel but to the rest of the world (49:6).*

3. The servant is called 'Israel' (49:3) but is also someone who has been sent to Israel (49:5). How do you think this works?

See above. The servant is the 'ideal Israelite', doing everything Israel is meant to do but can't.

4. What is the servant's ultimate mission?

To save the world (49:6).

Read 50:4-11

5. The 'servant' speaks again. What new things do these verses tell us about him?

- *He listens attentively and obediently to God (50:4b-5) and passes what he learns from him on to others (50:4a).*
- *He suffers for his determination to do this (50:6-7)*
- *He knows God will vindicate him for his resoluteness (50:8-9)*

6. How are people to respond to him? (50:10-11)

Again, to trust in him.

Read 52:1-10

7. The servant is someone who 'wakens' each morning to listen to and obey God (50:4-5). What does God tell Israel to do here (52:1)?

Awake, awake! (See also 51:17). That is, don't slumber, but get up, listen to God, and do what he says.

8. Once they have, what does God:

- a. tell them to do?

Get up, leave Babylon, and go back to Jerusalem.

- b. say he will do?

He will be the one who redeems them (i.e. brings them back): 52:3, 8-10.

New Testament

Read Acts 13:44-48

9. What are Paul and Barnabas doing and what do the Jewish leaders dislike about it?

Preaching to the Gentiles.

10. How do Paul and Barnabas respond?

By quoting 49:6 – they are only doing what the Servant does.

Application

11. How do you think of evangelism: as a matter of obedience or an 'optional extra'? (Be honest, we're all friends here!)

12. It's often hard to think of outreach as something beautiful (52:7). Why do you think this is? How could *Isaiah* help 'beautify' outreach in our minds?

13. 'How can God send people to hell who haven't heard the gospel yet? What about all those Amazonian tribes?' How do you think *Isaiah* would answer this question?

14. *Isaiah* promises that, 'all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God' (52:10). How does this encourage us get involved in world mission?

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

Getting started

Do you ever wish Christians and Christianity looked more impressive by worldly standards? Why or why not?

Where this question is going is: the Servant looks very unimpressive, but achieves incredible things. This is actually the shape of the whole Christian life: God working through weakness to bring about amazing things.

Background

God has mentioned the mysterious 'servant' three times now (42:1-4; 49:1-6 and 50:4-9). However, his exact identity and how he will complete his mission is still unclear. We know he will bring *justice* (42:1, 3 & 4), but we don't yet know how. We also know he will bring *forgiveness* (49:5, 6) - even to the ends of the earth - but we don't yet know how he will do that either. How can God use his servant to bring both *justice* and *forgiveness*? If he brings justice, for sinful people won't that mean judgment - the opposite of forgiveness? And if he forgives them, won't that mean ignoring the demands of justice? How will God's servant do it? Finally, we find out: 'My righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities' (53:11).

Observation and interpretation

Read 52:13-53:12

1. How does the servant look and how do people treat him?

He looks awful and ugly, and people treat him terribly: 52:14; 53:2-3.

2. Why did he go through all of this?

- a. Did we deserve to suffer?

Yes. It is our transgressions, iniquities, etc. he suffered for: 53:4-6, 8.

- b. Did he deserve to suffer?

No. He was meek: 53:7. He was innocent: 53:9.

c. And yet, what did he do?

Suffered on our behalf: 53:4-6, 8, 10, 12

d. And what did that achieve?

Justification for sinners: 53:11

3. What will God do once the servant has done all this?

He will raise him to life: 53:11a.

New Testament

Read 1 Peter 2:21-25

4. How many quotes or allusions to Is 52:13-53:12 can you see here?

There are loads!

5. How does this even further deepen our understanding of the identity and mission of 'the servant'?

Firstly, that it's Jesus, and secondly, that his sin-bearing death on the cross brought healing and salvation to the world.

6. 'Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps' (1 Peter 2:21). In this passage, how does the shape of the Christian life resemble the shape of Jesus' life?

What this is getting at is that, just as the shape of Jesus' life was suffering, then glory, so to is ours if we follow him. See also 1 Peter 4:12-13.

Application

7. Look back at Isaiah 52:13-53:12. How does this deepen your appreciation for what God has done for you in Jesus?

8. Someone asks you how God can forgive sinful people without being guilty of sweeping wrongdoing under the carpet. How do you use this passage to help you answer them?

9. Jesus doesn't look terribly impressive to our culture any more. Christians don't either. We look and feel weak. How does this final 'servant song' get our thinking straight about how God can use weakness for his strength?

ISAIAH 54-55

Getting started

Every beauty pageant contestant in the world always answers the question the same way: 'If you could wish for one thing, what would it be?' 'World peace'. The crowd claps and the rest of us roll our eyes. But why? Why is world peace such an unrealistic goal? What are the things stopping peace in our world?

Background

Isaiah has just explained how 'the servant' will bring both justice and forgiveness to the world. So now, it's time to celebrate! And that's what Isaiah 54-55 is: a series of songs celebrating what the servant has achieved. The theme unifying all of them is 'peace'. The fundamental human problem is the absence of peace: 'There is no peace for the wicked' (48:22). But because the servant has suffered on our behalf he has brought peace (53:5; 54:10, 13; 55:12). This passage celebrates that truth.

Observation and interpretation

Read 54-55

1. These two chapters are a series of joyful commands followed by colourful images of what salvation looks and feels like. In the table below, fill in the commands, the images, and the promises God makes to assure us that the images will become reality (note: not all will have all three elements).

Verse	Command	Image	Promise
54:1	E.g. 'Sing'	A barren woman now has lots of children.	N/A
54:2			
54:4			
54:16			
55:1			
55:6			

2. Combining all of these images, how would you describe Isaiah's vision of 'peace' for our world?

New Testament

Read Ephesians 2:14-18

3. How has Jesus made peace:
- a. between us and God?
Through the cross.
 - b. between us and each other?
By combining us in 'one body'.

4. How does this ultimately fulfil Isaiah's vision for 'world peace'?

It shows that the fundamental barrier between people in God's mind - between Israel and the rest of the world, i.e. those with whom he's reopened 'diplomatic relations' and those with whom he's still at war - has now been removed in the cross.

Application

5. Isaiah 54-55 is full of emotion. Isaiah expects us to sing, and not be afraid, and eat, drink and excitedly seek as a result of the good news he's just told us. Often, however, our response to the gospel is far less emotional. We know it in our head but don't feel it in our gut. Are we missing out on something here? If you think you are, ask God to deepen the emotional aspect of your Christian life and give you the kind of godly passions described here.
6. Are you not at peace with someone at the moment, especially a Christian? What can you do to restore it?
7. Although as Christians we know in our heads we have peace with God, we sometimes find this hard to accept in our heart. Our consciences condemn us and we lack assurance. So think about these words: *'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5:1)*. What is it about the objective nature of the cross that helps us understand that we really are now at peace with God?

ISAIAH 56-59

Getting started

Have you ever re-watched a television show you used to love as a kid but now, as an adult coming back to it, find it deeply disappointing? Or revisited a place from your childhood which seemed huge and magical at the time but now seems small and ordinary? How did you respond?

Background

Isaiah 56-66 is the final part of Isaiah's vision. It launches us further forward again in time to the period following the arrival of the first returnees from Babylon. Upon coming home to Jerusalem, the home of their past, they have mixed emotions. On the one hand it is great to be back: this is, after all, what God had promised them all along! But on the other hand it is deeply disappointing: the city is ruined, their numbers are small, and they are still under Persian rule. They are stuck 'between the times': the return from exile has started but is far from complete (56:8). The question is: how will they use their second chance, now they're back in the land? Chapters 56-59 start answering that question.

Observation and interpretation

Read 56:1-8

1. Now that they're back in the land, what should Israel's approach be to:

- a. justice?

They should passionately pursue it (56:1-2)

- b. outsiders (e.g. foreigners and eunuchs)?

They should be profoundly open to them (56:3-8).

Side-note: isn't it interesting that, in Acts 8:26-40, the person Philip explains the gospel to and baptises is both a foreigner (Ethiopian) and a eunuch! He's the ultimate outsider! And that it should be Isaiah (albeit not this particular bit) that he's reading when Philip stumbles upon him! Do with this bit of information as you wish ☺.

2. According to the following verses, how are Israel going at living up to this 'charter of behaviour'?

Terribly

- a. 56:10-12 *Their leaders are terrible and unjust.*

- b. 57:3-6 *They're idolatrous.*
- c. 58:1-7 *Even when they're practicing the right religion, they are hypocritical about it.*
- d. 59:1-8 *A summary passage: they're all-round bad.*

Read 59:9-15a

- 3. What does Israel itself think of its own behaviour?

This is a tragic scene: they actually know they're sinful, but also are unable to stop themselves. They remind me a bit of a drug-addict who knows they're ruining their lives but also feels a profound sense of powerlessness to change anything about their situation. It's a picture of sin, but also despair.

- 4. What confidence does it have in its own ability to change?
None: 59:10

Read 59:15b-20

- 5. What is God's solution for Israel's inability to change its own behaviour?

59:15b-16 – God saw there was injustice, and no one to save them from it, so he decided to do it himself!

- 6. What will that solution look like for the people in:

- a. 59:18? *For those who refuse his help, wrath*

- b. 59:20? *For those who repent, help and salvation.*

New Testament

Read Romans 3:10-18, 21-24

7. How were we also powerless to change our own behaviour?

Paul is summarising in Romans 3:10-18 everything he's been saying about humans since 1:18: we're sinful, and powerless to stop ourselves being sinful. Note that he quotes part of today's passage in his list of sins.

8. How did God also intervene to save us when could not save ourselves?

9. *But in Romans 3:21, Paul introduces a big 'But': where humans were powerless to save themselves, God intervened and gave us Jesus.*

Application

10. Have you ever been aware of a sin in your life but felt powerless to change it? How did it make you feel? What hope can a passage like this give you in those situations?
11. Have you ever despaired of people who, no matter how many chances you give them, can never seem to get their act together? What hope does this passage give you for them?

ISAIAH 60-64

Getting started

What's the most dramatic sunrise you've ever seen? How did it make you feel?

Background

Isaiah 60-64 comes like a sunrise after the darkness of Isaiah 59. *'See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn'* (60:2-3). That is this section in a nutshell: Jerusalem will be turned into a *great* city in which *all nations* can live and over which God will rule *forever*. But this great sunrise hasn't happened yet, so now is the time of decision for any would-be residents of the glorified Jerusalem. Will they be humble or proud? The answer they give to that question will determine whether that day for them will be 'the year of the Lord's favour' or 'the day of vengeance of our God' (61:2).

Observation and interpretation

Read 60

1. As the sun rises over it, what is the overall impression you get of this new Jerusalem?

It's awesome! But not just awesome; supernaturally awesome. The way it's described, it couldn't possibly be any merely physical city. Isaiah's getting us ready for his 'big finish' in chapter 65: the new Jerusalem, which is actually the new creation.

2. Find every mention you can of 'the nations'. What does it say about them?

As you'll see, it's loaded with them. The picture is twofold: the nations will both serve Jerusalem and its inhabitants (which must have been good to hear for an exilic or post-exilic Jew!) but also share in the benefits of Jerusalem. That is, they must submit themselves to God and his city, but they will also be rewarded for doing so.

3. List every reference to time you can in 60:15-23 (e.g. 'no longer, no more, never, everlasting', etc). What does this tell us about this city?

Again, this is a more-than-earthly city: it will be eternal.

Read 61:1-6

4. For whom will the 'opening' of this new Jerusalem be 'good news'? What will life be like for them?

For the poor, broken-hearted, mourning, etc. For them, life will be great!

5. However, some will refuse to enter Jerusalem on that day, and for them it will be a 'day of vengeance.' What will life be like for them? See 63:1-6.

Impossibly ghastly (so you know, it seems like John has this passage in mind when he depicts the day of judgement in Revelation 14).

New Testament

Read Luke 4:16-21

6. Who is Jesus saying he is?

The one who will usher in the year of the Lord's favour.

7. What does that mean for us?

We need to respond to him humbly and accept his offer of refuge in this new city.

Application

8. How we respond to Jesus is the key to whether or not we'll enter this new Jerusalem. If we come to him poor in spirit, broken-hearted, and grieving about our sin, then his message for us will be 'good news'. Take a moment to reflect. Are there sins you need to grieve over and bring to God?
9. Being as open as you can with each other, are there things you are broken hearted about? Feel captive to? Are you mourning? If so, are Isaiah's - and Jesus' - words any comfort?

10. Did you notice that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of a sentence? He announced 'the year of the Lord's favour' but would not yet announce 'the day of vengeance'! That won't come until he returns as judge. How is this both an encouragement and a spur for us in our evangelism?

ISAIAH 65-66

Getting started

Have you ever prayed - *really* prayed - for Jesus to come back? What drove you to it?

Background

We didn't get to it in our last study, but it turns out Isaiah had real doubts about whether Israel would ever accept the good news of the 'year of the Lord's favour' (61:2). At one point, he cries out to God, '*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down*' (64:1). Human sin is so ingrained in our world that only a full-blown invasion of earth from heaven will fix it. Isaiah 65-66 is the answer to Isaiah's prayer.

Observation and interpretation

Read 65:17-25

1. What is God going to create?

A new heaven and earth: 65:17. And at the centre of it will be a new Jerusalem: 65:18.

2. What will this place be like? How will it be different to our world?
Perfect.

Read 66:18-24

3. Who is invited to come and live in this place? Who does the inviting?
People from every nation are invited, and also share the responsibility for doing the inviting.

4. What is the ultimate purpose of living there?
To glorify God: 66:18, 19. (See elsewhere in Isaiah where God bringing people to Jerusalem is so they will see how glorious he is).

5. Who doesn't get to live there?

Those who continue to rebel against him: 66:24

6. Read the following verses. How has *Isaiah* come full-circle?

a. 1:2 & 66:22

The book starts out with God calling 'heaven' and 'earth' as witnesses to how badly people have treated him (1:2), and ends with him making a 'new heaven' and 'new earth' full of people who love and delight in him (66:22).

b. 2:2-3 & 66:20

Isaiah predicts that the nations will stream to Jerusalem (2:2-3), and shows us that prediction coming true in the new heavens and earth (66:20).

c. 3:8 & 65:18

Jerusalem starts out a basket-case, full of deeply unpleasant people (3:8), and ends up being a place God delights in (65:18)

New Testament

Read Revelation 21:1-8

7. What looks awfully familiar about this scene?!

8. Who is at the centre of it all?

Jesus.

Application

9. When we say in the Lord's Prayer, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven', we are effectively praying what Isaiah prays in Isaiah 64:1, 'Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.' That is, we are praying for the end of the world! What are the tensions we should feel inside ourselves when we pray such a prayer?

10. Isaiah closes with a scene of the nations not just streaming into Jerusalem but streaming out of it to gather more people from the nations. How does this challenge a 'flypaper' approach to church evangelism, where we hope people will just drift close enough to us to get 'stuck'?

11. Isaiah 65:17 says the new creation will be so new that the past will be totally forgotten. Think of some things you've done that you'd rather forget, and thank God that one day you'll be able to do exactly that!

12. What's the thing you'll be happiest *won't* be in the new heaven and earth?

13. What is one new thing you've learned about God, or yourself, or both, as a result of reading *Isaiah*? Thank God for that.