



ISAIAH 1-39

GOD OF THE NATIONS

Growth Groups Material
(9 studies on Isaiah 1-39)
May-June 2024
LEADERS GUIDE

Teaching Schedule

<i>In our gatherings</i>	<i>2-5 May</i>	1: Isaiah 1:1-2:4
<i>we will work</i>	<i>9-12 May</i>	2: Isaiah 5:1-30
<i>through a 9-part</i>	<i>16-19 May</i>	3. Isaiah 6:1-13
<i>series:</i>	<i>23-26 May</i>	4. Isaiah 8:11-9:7
	<i>30 May - 2 Jun</i>	5. Isaiah 11:1-12:6
	<i>6-9 Jun</i>	6. Isaiah 13:1-14:2
	<i>13-16 Jun</i>	7. Isaiah 24:1-23
	<i>20-23 Jun</i>	8. Isaiah 35:1-10
	<i>27-30 Jun</i>	9. Isaiah 36:1-37:7

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Additional Resources

We've put together some additional resources that might help you as you make your way through this series:

<https://jannalianglican.org.au/godofthenations/>



Introduction

We've all heard of the book of Isaiah. It seems like one of those big and important books in the Old Testament, spanning 66 chapters. It's quoted many times in the New Testament, second only to the Psalms in frequency. But making sense of it feels like a daunting prospect. It's complex! Like lots of prophetic literature, there are strange images, and (to many minds) a frustrating lack of chronological, or even, logical order. Despite these hurdles, there is much to be gained from examining this part of God's Word. It covers essential and profound themes such as the sovereignty of God, sin, judgment, salvation and new creation. This term, we're focusing on the first part of the book, chapters 1-39. We can't do it verse by verse. So we'll focus on some of the key passages.

Isaiah chapters 1-39 were written in the context of the looming dominance of the neighbouring Assyrian Empire. Ultimately, this empire would bring about the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and threaten the existence of the Southern Kingdom (also known as Judah, or its capital Jerusalem). This crisis led the people of God to ask big questions like:

- Is God truly more powerful than the other godless nations?
- What is the role of God's people in the world?
- If God judges, will they be destroyed totally? Will God still love them?
- What is the future of the Davidic monarchy (David's line)?

As Isaiah's prophetic vision gradually addresses these questions we will be confronted by God's severe opposition to human sin and his determination to judge it. But at the same time, we'll be comforted by God's sure plan to extend mercy to his people and accomplish his saving plans for the world. We pray that God would teach us all wonderful things from this part of his word, and moreover, that our hearts and lives would be conformed into the likeness of Jesus through our learning.

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Note for leaders:

- Leaders' notes look like this (dot point, grey shading)
- Please refer group members to the QR code on page 2, if they would like to explore further resources.
- As usual, please don't feel compelled to do every question. I encourage you to tailor the study to suit your group.

Study 1 | Isaiah 1:1-2:4

Introduction

1. As a group, have a go at coming up with a timeline of the main events in the Bible? Then mark where Isaiah would be placed. How would you go about finding out where Isaiah was located on the timeline?

- This intended as a fun opening exercise to orient, or re-orient people to the Old Testament if they are less familiar with it. If possible, ask people to avoid looking at the timeline on page 4 prior to do thing exercise.
- Some creative ways of doing this as a group could be doing it all together, on a large piece of paper; preparing some small cards with key events and asking the group to put them in order; or asking each person to have a go privately, and then comparing efforts.
- The crucial information to discern Isaiah's placement is the reference to the kings in 1:1. You can read about these kings in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. FYI, Uzziah is also known as Azariah

2. What do you understand by the term a 'renovators delight'? Have you ever purchased a 'renovators delight' or seen a TV program focused on one? What typically happens to a 'renovators delight'?

- This idea of a renovators delight is concrete, and hopefully familiar to all group participants. This metaphor is relevant as the journey through Isaiah is often described as a renovators delight. The city of Jerusalem (as code for God's people of Judah) are the run-down, damaged 'renovators delight'. But God promises to restore it to it's former glory: a people who truly live for God and bring him glory.

Read and Discuss

3. Read Isaiah 1:1-2:4. What charges does God bring against his people?

- God's people have rebelled against him. Verses 2-4 are key.
- In verses 10-15 they are described as religious hypocrites.

4. What are some of the images or analogies used to describe God's people?

- 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).

5. How would you summarize God's feeling towards his people? What is he proposing to do about it?

- He is clearly angry
- God is planning judgment against his people (v25).

6. Despite the gloomy outlook, can you identify which verses offer hope to the Israelites? What do they say?

- There is an opportunity for the forgiveness of sins for those who repent (v18-20)
- Verses 24-27 convey a sense of purification and restoration. I.e. is it just the really evil people that will be judged, leaving a more godly remnant?
- Chapter 2 pictures a future, new Jerusalem which compares favourably to the surrounding nations. This is place which will attract the nations to it, and God's Word will go out from it.

7. **Read Acts 2:5-12, 22-24.** What features of Isaiah 2:1-4 do you see being fulfilled?

- People coming to Jerusalem from other nations.
- 'last days' – cf Peter's use of the phrase in verse 17 (quoting from Joel, not Isaiah)
- Isaiah 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.

Reflect and Apply

8. Isaiah's picture of Jerusalem (representing God's people) is sometimes described as a 'renovators delight'. How does the movement from chapter 1 to chapter 2 convey that idea?

- See comments with question 2. In chapter 1, Jerusalem is corrupted and far from its intended purpose as a beacon of God's glory. In chapter 2, though, Jerusalem is restored, and drawing all nations to God.

9. Kirk Patston, in his commentary, writes:

"The book of Isaiah often presents the severity of God, such as we encounter here [in chapter 1]. This is one of the reasons we need books like Isaiah. They do not let us escape the serious business of God's holiness".

Why do you think we need books like Isaiah that confront us with God's holiness? How should we respond if we're confronted by our sin and God's holiness?

- For discussion. This quote is intended to set expectations for the rest of the term. We're dealing with a serious book that will feel different to much of the New Testament, and other narrative parts of the Old Testament that are easier to follow.
- It's good for God's holy character and his opposition to sin to be made clear to us because it pushes us towards the cross of Christ – to find grace AND it trains us to take sin seriously like God does.

10. Consider your response to question 7. We live in the last days, after Jesus' resurrection. If this is the case, what point is there in us studying Isaiah this term?

- Again – for open discussion. When we read Old Testament prophesy from a context very different to ours, it can sometimes seem irrelevant. However, we learn a great deal about God's character in seeing how he deals with his Old Testament people.
- We also develop a deeper appreciation for how Jesus resolves all the questions, plans and dilemma's raised by the Old Testament.

Study 2 | Isaiah 5

Introduction

1. Can you list all the metaphors used in the Bible to describe the church?

- Have a brainstorming exercise. There are a lot of images used: flock, body, temple, building.
- The purpose of this question is to prepare for the vine metaphor which features in this chapter.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Isaiah 5:1-7.** What is the metaphor used here to describe God's Old Testament people? What is the problem described? What is God going to do?

- The vineyard image is used. God is the vineyard owner. God's people are the vineyard.
- The problem is that, despite God/vineyard owner's hard work, the people/vine has not produced good fruit.
- This image symbolises the sinful rebellion of God's people.
- God is planning to 'rip' up his vineyard. This is a picture of judgment.

3. How do these verses help us remember the history of relationship between God and his people? Why is this so important in understanding God's response to Israel's sin?

- Israel's rebellion does not come in a vacuum. Remember all God had done to save his people out of Egypt, bring them to conquer and settle the promised land, rescued them from judges and other nations etc. God has demonstrated his love and faithfulness to his people in so many ways. This makes their disobedience far worse.

4. **Read Isaiah 5:8-25.** These verses contain six cycles of 'woe'. Can you identify the 6 sections? What is the essential category of sin that is highlighted in each section?

- The best way to identify the units is by looking for the word 'woe' which begins each unit
- Verse 8-10 – greed
- Verses 11-17 (esp 11-12) – self-indulgence and pleasure seeking
- Verses 18-19 – contempt for God
- Verses 20 – moral perversion
- Verse 21 – arrogance
- Verse 22-23 – corruption/injustice

5. **Read Isaiah 5:26-30.** What do these verses describe? What do we learn about God's relationship to the nations that eventually conquered his people (e.g. Assyria, Babylon)?

- These verses describe God's plans to use the surrounding nations as instruments in his own hand, to execute judgment against his people.
- This reminds us that all nations (not just his own people) are under God's control. From a human perspective, the rise and fall of empires, wars etc appear to be the natural course of history. But in reality, God is behind it all, directing history according to his purposes.

Reflect and Apply

6. Are there elements of Judah's sin that you/we are guilty of today? What have we learnt about God's feeling towards that sin?

- For discussion. There are many elements of Judah's sin that are prominent in our modern society, and perhaps our own lives.
- Discuss which categories of sin are most tempting for us.

7. Why is the exposure of our sin and the threat of judgment a good thing for us?

- For discussion. Ultimately, it is a kindness of God when we're convicted of sin, because it forces us to reckon with our dangerous situation and, hopefully, turn to Christ.

8. **Read John 15:1-7.** Jesus alludes to the vineyard imagery of Isaiah. Why is it good news that Jesus is the 'true vine'. According to Jesus, what is the key for us in bearing fruit? How can we implement Jesus' exhortation?

- Jesus is the true vine insofar as he lives perfectly, producing the fruit of righteous living to God's glory. This is good news for us because he is the 'true Israelite' who earns God's favour. He lived the life we can never live. But according to the gospel, we are grafted into Jesus' vine and share in his life and his perfect relationship with God the Father.
- The key for us to bearing fruit is to abide /remain in Jesus. That is, we can only produce godly living by being united to Jesus by faith.
- What does it look like to 'remain in Jesus'? At a minimum it would mean regularly listening to his word of grace in the gospel and depending on his help through prayer. It's an error to think we can grow in godliness without availing ourselves of the grace Jesus extends to us.

Study 3 | Isaiah 6

Introduction

1. If you had to imagine seeing God, how would you describe what you see?

- This chapter contains Isaiah's vision of God. It's an amazing, mind-boggling vision. This chapter will help introduce group members to the concept of seeing God, how he might be visually presented.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Isaiah 6:1-4.** What did Isaiah see in his vision. What impression of God does this vision convey?

- This is a comprehension question. Isaiah sees the Lord seated on a throne, with a robe filling the temple. He is surrounded by seraphim (which are heavenly, angel like creatures – see the description of them in verse 2).
- The words they speak to each other capture the unparalleled significance attributed to God.
- Invite the group to share the overall impression they get from the scene. Clearly the majesty, glory, and 'bigness' of God is being communicated.

3. **Read Isaiah 6:5-7.** What is Isaiah's response to what he sees. What does God do for him?

- Confronted with the Holy God, Isaiah recognizes his own sin, and the sin of his people.
- However, God graciously provided atonement for him. He is made clean by God's own provision.
- It's interesting that Isaiah's sin and the part of his body that is touched both related to his prophetic speaking ministry: unclean lips (v5), mouth/lips (v7)

4. **Read 6:8-13.** Can you summarize the message Isaiah is to deliver to the people? What is unusual about it?

- The message feels a bit unusual: as it's a message of judgment.
- The message itself is in verse 9.
- But the thrust of God's instructions focus more on the outcome of Isaiah's ministry than the precise message he will deliver. The intended outcome is that Isaiah's ministry will harden God's people and confirm them in their sinfulness and unbelief.

5. Is there any hope in this chapter?

- The other key hope comes in verse 13. After God's judgment, there will be a 'stump', a remnant of faithful people left. Judgment is not the end of God's dealings with his people.
- This idea of a faithful remnant will continue to be an important theme in Isaiah. Amidst the judgment, there will be a small subset of faithful Israelites who will carry on God's purposes for his nation.

Reflect and Apply

6. In light of what we have read in Isaiah so far, how might Isaiah's personal journey bring hope to those reading his message.

- Isaiah's atonement (v5-7) shows us the possibility that God is capable and willing to forgive sin. In this sense, he functions as a bit of a representative for the people. He confesses his sin before God, and is made clean.
- This is a great comfort to us: God is big and holy and we're unworthy before him. And yet this same God provided atonement for us, at his own initiative.

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

- People rejecting the gospel is always tragic, and hard to understand. It's good not to dismiss this reality.
- However, the confronting reality of Isaiah 6, and Matthew 13 is that God still allows for his word to harden people in their rejection of himself. We see this in the gospels when people reject Jesus, in spite of all the evidence. This is a sign of spiritual blindness.
- It's not easy to cope with this, particularly when it's friends or other loved ones that reject the truth. It's important in these times to remember that people are guilty in God's sight, and deserving judgment, prior to hearing the gospel. It's also a reminder to pray for God to open people's hearts and minds.

8. Do you consider yourself to be sent by God to deliver his message? What qualifies you to speak on God's behalf?

- The first part of this question invited reflection.
- In a sense, we have all been sent by God to deliver his message – see Matthew 28:16-20. If Isaiah is the model, the main qualifications are (1) being atoned for – that is being reconciled to God and (2) a humble willingness to serve (as Isaiah says in verse 8 – “Here I am. Send me.”)
- We often think the minimum qualifications for speaking to others about God are greater: like intelligence, eloquence, or a really high level of godliness. The reality is that God wishes to use ordinary faithful people.

Study 4 | Isaiah 7-9

Introduction

1. What do you do when you face a threat in your life? Why are threats so good at revealing what we put our ultimate trust in?

- This is an open question, inviting reflection. This question anticipates the situation King Ahaz finds himself in, and a primary issue of application: who do we really trust. Often when we're threatened in some way, the things we really trust are revealed.

Read and Discuss

2. Read Isaiah 7:1-9 and 2 Kings 16:1-6. What crisis is facing King Ahaz? How does God meet him in his need?

- 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.
- God sends Isaiah to Ahaz to assure him that he need not fear his northern neighbours
- God wants Ahaz to stand firm in his faith (v9).

3. Read Isaiah 7:10-12 and 2 Kings 16:7-9. What is Ahaz' response to God's offer? Whom does Ahaz trust for political security?

- 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).
- Ahaz refuses (v12). It seems like Ahaz is being godly by saying he will not put God to the test. But negative Isaiah's response to Ahaz in verse 13 and following indicate that Ahaz is not being godly.
- We learn in 2 Kings that Ahaz actually put his trust in a political alliance with Assyria, rather than trusting God.
- **Note:** the meaning and significance of the famous verse 14, is debated. Clearly the name means *God with us* (see Matt 1:18-23). However, what does it mean

that God with us. Who is he with? Is it Isaiah and other faithful Israelites, who distinguish themselves from faithless Israelites like Ahaz. Does it mean that God is with his people in judgment?

4. From 7:13 through to 8:8 God is announcing judgment against Judah because of their sin (and in particular, King Ahaz's refusal to trust God). Briefly read through this section. Who will be God's instrument of judgment?

- God will raise up the Assyrians (the very nation Ahaz sought to be aligned with) as his own instrument of judgment. History shows this is what eventuated – as the Assyrian empire continued Southward.
- In 732BC Syria was conquered by Assyria. In 722BC the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria. The Assyrians continued south and occupied much of the rest of Judah, and laid siege to Jerusalem in 701BC.

5. From 8:11-17, God is issuing an appeal to Isaiah about how he ought to be different from Ahaz and the other faithless Israelites. What should characterize Isaiah and other faithful Israelites?

- This is a crucial passage for understanding this section of Isaiah.
- Isaiah is called by God to remain faithful and obedience, even as his countrymen (like King Ahaz) are faithless and disobedient.
- They are to distinguished from others in fearing God above all else. Remember, it was Ahaz who feared the surrounding nations, and turned to one of them (Assyria) for help.

Reflect and Apply

6. 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?

- This is more of a brainstorming question. We want to be like Isaiah in fearing God above all else, and not being sucked into holding other things in higher regard than God.
- What are the keys to doing this? At the heart of it is continuing to read and listen to God's word, which puts God's greatness before us in every passage. The world puts before eyes other things and calls us to put their hope in them. But we must counter that by focusing on God's revelation of himself in the Bible.

7. Read 1 Peter 3:13-15. What people or situations in life are you inclined to fear, more than you fear God? How does this passage help you deal with such fear?

- The language of 1 Peter seems to be a deliberate echo of Isaiah 8:12. In that context, the Christians were suffering persecution. Perhaps they were tempted to align themselves with non-Christian political power in order to escape the persecution they were facing. But Peter exhorts them to fear God above man.
- It would be good to discuss what kinds of things we fear. In some respects this is asking the same question as what our idols are. A helpful diagnostic question for identifying our fears might be “Who or what has the ability to take away what you treasure most”.
- This passage helps us to deal with those fears as it reminds us that God’s power is superior to any other earthly powers.

8. In this section of Isaiah we often read of ‘God with us’. Most famously, it’s there in 7:14, in the name Immanuel (which means *God with us*); as well as 8:10.

a. 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?

b. **Read Matthew 1:18-23.** How might your understanding of ‘God with us’ evolve in light of this passage?

- Both of these sub-questions are for open discussion.
- It will be important to move beyond comments which link experiences to God’s presence. E.g. “I feel God is with me when I feel a sense of calm” or similar. Whilst there may be some truth in that, we run risk of interpreting our circumstances as the litmus test of whether God is with us or not.
- Remember, in 8:16-17 Isaiah and his disciples were to continue waiting in God, even in the midst of his judgment against their nation.
- The key to this question is understand the idea of God’s presence in the person of Jesus. God truly came to express solidarity with humanity when he took on flesh. God is with us, and indeed *for* us, because of Jesus saving work.

Study 5 | Isaiah 11-12

- 9:8 through to the end of chapter 10 continue to speak of God's judgment against his people for their rebellion. Remember, the big historical reality these visions refer to is the coming invasion of the Assyrian empire. But God also assures his people that his justice will be upheld, insofar as he will also judge the Assyrians, after he has used them for his judging purposes.
- With this background in mind, chapters 11 and 12 refer to what will happen after judgment

Introduction

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

- For open discussion. One of the big themes of chapter 11 is how God's new ruler will bring about a wonderful new order, which, in effect, reverses the curses of the fall. The images of 11:6-9 are incredible.
- Christian hope in the new creation is a major element of our faith, but perhaps some of don't really think about it very much. If that's the case (our neglect of the idea), it's a shame, and we are depriving ourselves of great resources for ongoing faithfulness.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Isaiah 11:1-9.** This section focuses on one particular figure. From this passage, what do we learn about:

- These questions are straightforward comprehension. The aim here is not simply to say – this must be referring to Jesus. But first, to notice how this figure is described according to Isaiah's vision.

a. Who this is;

- From verses 1-2
- A shoot from stump of Jesse – see question 3,
- Someone with divine approval – they have the Spirit of the Lord which brings, wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord

b. What they will be like;

- Form verses 3-5
- They will judge righteously, not according to their sight or hearing. Perhaps that was the way of corrupt earthly judges in Isaiah time – i.e their standards were

wordly, and they did not make good judgments? The characteristics of this figure are righteousness and faithfulness (verse 5)

- This figure will also be strong and assertive in bringing judgement against evil (verse 4)

c. What will result from their rule.

- Form verses 6-8
- These are incredible images of a new world, no longer plagued by the brokenness of the current age. A lot of the images are of peace and harmony in the created order (symbolised the animals: predator and prey living together)
- Verse 9 explains the images – no more harming and destroying of one another because the whole land will be full of true knowledge of God. This is a picture of perfection (like it was in the Garden of Eden – and will be again in the new creation)

3. Skim read **1 Samuel 16:1-13** and **2 Samuel 7:12-16**. Who is Jesse, and what is the significance of this figure coming from the ‘stump of Jesse’?

- Jesse was King David’s father (language referring to Jesse is probably another way of referring to King David’s line).
- 2 Sam 7 is a crucial passage in the Old Testament and one which had a profound impact on the Jewish people after David. They understood the messiah to come from the line of David.
- The point here is to see the continuity between Isaiah’s vision, and what we learn elsewhere about the identity of the messiah.

4. **Read 11:10-12:6**. We’ve learnt about this wonderful new ruler in the question above. How will the ruler impact the world at large, beyond the borders of Judah/Israel?

- We notice in this section, an introductory phrase repeated three times: *On that day* (v10, 11, 12:1). The day being referred to must be the arrival of the righteous King described earlier in chapter 11.
- The global scope of this King’s rule is a major theme in this section. Notice how many times the nations are referred to.
- The nations will come to this figure, finding guidance (verse 11:10).
- What the nations are to see and understand is the works of the Lord (12:4) and glorious things (12:5). There are echoes of Isaiah 2:1-4.
- This is about worldwide mission following the revelation of the messiah.

5. Read the following NT verses. How does King Jesus fulfill the pictures of God's ruler presented in Isaiah.

- Note: this list of NT reference is not exhaustive. There could be many other relevant verses, and ways in which Isaiah 11-12 points us to Jesus.

a. Matt 1:5-6, Rev 5:5

- Jesus as Son of David (c.f 11:1 and question 3 above)

b. Luke 3:21-22;

- Jesus was given Holy Spirit by God the Father (c.f. 11:2)

c. Luke 2:52, Mark 13:54

- Jesus was known for his wise teaching (c.f.11:2)

d. Acts 1:8, Romans 15:8-9, 12,

6. Jesus mission extended beyond the Jews to the Gentiles, and the whole earth

Reflect and Apply

7. Consider all the key events described in chapters 11 and 12. Which of these events have already occurred? Which are yet to occur? Which have begun and are ongoing?

- The aim here is to help people see that the messianic visions of Isaiah do indeed refer to Jesus and what we read about is fulfilled in the gospel. Some things have already happened, others we are waiting for.
- Some thoughts on each stage of biblical history and the events of this chapter
 - *Already happened* – Jesus the Messiah has been revealed. He's exhibited the qualities of 11:1-4 –with the exception final execution of justice
 - *Ongoing*: worldwide mission – the ends of the earth coming to Jesus, and God's people making God's greatness known
 - *Future*: perfect new creation (of 11:6-8) in all it's fullness

8. Verses 12:1-2, are a bit different from the rest of the section? How are they different? What makes these words suitable to be spoken by Christians today?

- What's different about these verses are the voice and speaker. It is first person, e.g. "I", whereas that type of language doesn't feature in the rest of this section. Who is this saying these things? Maybe Isaiah. Maybe a representative Israelites who has been faithful, survived the judgment and now experiences salvation.
- The movement in these verses is precisely the kind of thing a Christian could say. We give thanks to God because his anger was turned away from us when Jesus died on the cross. Therefore, we can trust God, without fear, and know that in His promise we're assured of salvation

9. Verses 1-6 of chapter 12 make a personal connection between personal joy in salvation and mission to others. What lessons can we derive from this in growing in our own personal evangelism.

- It's the same people who have joy in God because of their salvation that are the one's telling others. It's the normal pattern of life – we tell other people about products or restaurants we've enjoyed.
- If we want to grow in our personal evangelism rather than focusing on the right method etc (evaluating methods/strategies is good and has a place), perhaps what's most important is cultivating our own joy and love for Jesus, so that we can't help but share it with others.

Study 6 | Isaiah 13-23

Introduction

1. Does it ever feel like God's people in the world are in the minority and the progress of gospel growth is being jeopardised by those who oppose Christianity? How do you respond when you feel like that?

- This introductory question is aimed at drawing parallels between our current situation and the situation God's people were in at the time of Isaiah. Allow people to share their thoughts freely. It might be that the way they respond to the sense of concern indicates they have already learnt to trust God despite appearances. That's great. This study adds specifics to that trust, by showing us that God has the fate of all nations (and all opponents of Christianity) in his hands.
- The geo-political context is very important. Remember that Judah was a pretty small nation, in the midst of many other nations. Many of them were bigger and stronger.
- The temptation – particularly exemplified by faithless King Ahaz, is to compromise and seek the favour of the 'opponents' so that we survive

Read and Discuss

2. Pick a few of the passages listed below. For each passage, identify:

- a. Which nation is being spoken about?
- b. What are the sins of the nation?
- c. What will God do in response to these sins?

Isaiah 14:3-23; 15:1-16:14; 17:1-11; 19:1-15

- This question represents the bulk of the reading and comprehension part of the study.
- Chapters 13-23 contain ten oracles against nations surrounding Judah. There are glimmers of hope (reminiscent of Isaiah 2:1-4 – nations coming to Jerusalem – however on the whole, these are dark chapters, proclaiming God's judgment. They are often overlooked in sermon series, and published bible study. Most of your will be less familiar with this section, than other more well known passages.
- It's not necessarily worth reading every word of this section as 1 or 2 of the oracles can serve as an accurate representation of the whole.

- It will be important to not get bogged down in too many details. The main value of these passages is in discerning Isaiah's purpose in sharing these oracles.
- I won't provide detailed answers for the comprehension questions above (2a, b and c). The main gist is that God will judge these nations for the godless ways.

3. To summarise, what is God's view towards nations (and their people) that do not acknowledge him?

- This question should allow you to draw some threads together from question 2. Clearly God is angry with sinful humanity, who have become godless.

4. Remember the political/military mistakes of King Ahaz. **Read Isaiah 7:10-12, 2 Kings 16.** What were these mistakes? How do these prophecies of judgment against the nations expose the folly of Ahaz's approach?

- You may wish to refer back to the leaders notes to study 4.
- The context is that the nation of Judah is in a precarious geo-political situation. Israel (the northern Kingdom, also called Ephraim or Samaria) has formed an alliance with Syria (also called Damascus). They are pressuring Judah to join them, so that together, they can resist the powerful Assyrian empire, which is moving south towards them. Instead of joining them, and contrary to God's encouragement, Ahaz seeks protection by bribing Assyria.
- In the long-run though, Assyria is not Judah's friend. Their march south towards Egypt will conquer much of the Judean territory (leaving only Jerusalem).
- These oracles of God's judgment against the nations expose that it's silly to align with them, because they are opposed to God. They too will be humbled by God. They do not represent better security than God himself.

5. Commentary writer David Jackman, writes of Isaiah chapters 13-23:

"These prophecies are primarily designed for God's people to hear [...] we should not imagine Isaiah on a middle-eastern preaching tour, so much as instructing Judah and Jerusalem about God's perspective, which they should share"

How would you sum up God's perspective from these verses? Why was it important for God's people in Isaiah's time to understand and share this perspective?

- Invite group members to put in their own words what God is saying about the nations.
- The point is that God's people should not trust the nations for security. There is no one bigger and more powerful than their God.

Reflect and Apply

6. Unlike rebellious Judah, we're not likely to look to surrounding nations for hope and security. What things other than God are we tempted to look to for when it comes to:

- The language and message of Isaiah 13-23 will feel very abstract to us. In Old Testament times, there was a much closer relation between God's purposes for his people, their faithfulness, and matters of national security. That is no longer the case for God's people now. God's Kingdom does not correspond to any nation or geographic region.
- Having said that, we can draw a parallel between the nations of Isaiah, and worldly 'power' of our time. In other words, we're asking what are the things of this world that seem to have the most influence? Some possibilities...include wealth, property ownership, mainstream media, secular ideology, big business.
- If you're struggling to get much out of the group, you could rephrase the question as "What do you think the key to *personal fulfillment* is?" or "What do people these days think the key to *personal fulfillment* is?"

a. personal fulfillment;

b. success in church ministry

c. safety and security.

7. **Read James 4:4.** How is James' warning to Christians similar to Isaiah's message from these chapters? When does friendship with the world cross the line into being a problem for Christians? Are you in 'friendship' with the world in a manner that would exasperate God?

- James is issuing a similar warning to Isaiah – don't befriend the world if the world is opposed to God. The idea of being a friend of the world seems fairly innocent, but we must remember that in the New Testament the concept of the 'world' often has negative connotations. It is shorthand for 'the world in opposition to God'.
- Perhaps 'friendship with the world' cross a line when our decisions indicate our confidence and hope is in the things of the world more than God. Are we more zealous for advancement according to worldly standards (wealth, career) rather for serving God. Are we inclined to compromise our theological and moral convictions or hide our Christian identity in order to be acceptable to the world?

8. These chapters demonstrate that our God truly is the God of the nations. He is ruler over all people and all of history. How might this comfort us as we consider current world events?

- There is plenty of chaos and conflict in world events. It's always been the case, but we can point to current examples. Some nations and governments perpetrate evil. Other nations and people are the victims. It's re-assuring to know that all nations are ultimately answerable to God, and their rise and fall is in his hands.
- Isaiah 14:24-27 – concerning the main power in Isaiah's time, Assyria could be helpful to read. God is in control of history. His will dictates which nation rises and which one falls.
- This means we need not be afraid about world events. They are not outside the control of God.

Study 7 | Isaiah 24-25

Introduction

1. How often does the notion of God's final judgment of the world enter your mind? If not very often, why are we reluctant to dwell on this idea?

- This will be a heavy chapter which will focus on God's final judgment of the world. It will be good to begin thinking about the concept.
- We're often reluctant to dwell on this topic because it can feel confronting and it calls to mind people we know, that aren't reconciled with God through Jesus, who are facing this judgment.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Isaiah 24:1-23.** Can you sum up in one sentence, what this chapter is about?

- This is about God's final judgment on the world.

3. What images of judgment stand out to you the most? What is your emotional response to this imagery?

- This is a question mainly designed to help people keep engaging with the text in front of them, rather than moving too quickly on to speaking about the idea of judgment, without referring to the text.
- Encourage group members to be honest with their emotional response. It is certainly a frightening prospect.

4. This is a picture of God's final judgment of the world. Let's dig a bit deeper. Can you identify:

a. The reasons for judgment (e.g. why)

- Verse 5 – sin is described as transgression, overstepping of decrees. The breaking of the permanent covenant is probably a reference to the covenant between God as creator, and humanity as creatures – a covenant implicit the act of creation itself.
- Verse 20 - rebellion

b. The scope of judgment (e.g. who is it aimed at)

- The scope is universal – everyone is under judgment
- Verse 2 – all different types of people
- Notice also the frequent reference to earth. E.g verse 17 – “you who dwell on earth”, and verse 19 – “earth is completely devastated”

c. The goal of judgment (e.g. what is God’s aim in judging)

- This is a bit harder to pick up.
- In verses 14-16 we see people praising God’s honour because of his judgment
- Verse 23 speaks of God reigning as king and displaying his glory
- The general picture is that because God upholds justice in judgment his glory is displayed and his rightful place as the only King is acknowledged. It is manifested in the destruction of his opposition (incl sinful humanity)

5. **Read Isaiah 25:1-9.** How do these verses show us that God’s judgment is a reason to praise Him?

- Verses 1-5 give the impression of being spoken by someone who has been the victim of evildoers and oppressive nations. Therefore, when they are judged that is good news. It might feel odd for us to celebrate judgment, but when you’ve been severely hurt by wicked people(s), whether on an individual level, or national level, there is joy in seeing justice prevail and wrongdoers held to account.

6. In verses 6-8, what can God’s people look forward to after judgment has been carried out?

- These verses describe a time and place after judgment where God is with his people. It’s likened to a feast (v6), the defeat of death (v7-8a), and will be the end of pain and shame (v8). It all sounds pretty awesome.
- There are strong connections here to Revelation 19:9 and 21:1-4

Reflect and Apply

7. Considering what we know about Isaiah's time, and the biblical story at large, when do you think the events of chapter 24 take place?

- Even though Isaiah's context was of the looming invasion of Assyria, it's hard to see this as being a reference to anything other than the final judgment.
- The theme of God's people being vindicated and godless nations being judged would have been relevant to Isaiah's peers. But it remains relevant to all God's people.
- We are still awaiting the fulfillment of this chapter.

8. Why should the reality of God's judgment against the world motivate us to seek the salvation of the lost? How might the imagery of chapter 24 help us to grow in that desire?

- We ought to be moved by the awful fate of those opposed to God. The reality of judgment compels us – we don't wish this fate upon anyone. The more we expose ourselves to chapters like this the more likely we are to have the reality of judgment on our mind.

9. **Read 2 Peter 3:1-13.**

a. Verse 3 describes people scoffing at the idea of God's judgment. Do we still see that attitude today?

- Yes ofcourse! People might not verbalise their thoughts in the same way, but many unbelievers don't believe in God at all, or if they do, they imagine him to allow all in to heaven. The idea of God punishing people for sin seems far-fetched to many people.
- Peter undermines that view by using the example of the great flood in Noah's time. People were scoffing then, not thinking God's judgment would come. But we can look back and see that it did happen.

b. What is the reason that God hasn't yet delivered his final judgment?

- Verse 9 – patience. God wants more people to come to faith and repentance and be saved.

c. What ought to be the attitude of Christians as we wait for the final judgment?

- Along with seeking the salvation of the lost (See question 9a), this passage exhorts us to wait (v12-13). Waiting means we anticipate and order our lives around this coming reality. It may feel distant and irrelevant, but it is the most important thing in our future that we can be controlled by. We're also called to be godly and holy, while we wait (v11)

Study 8 | Isaiah 35

Introduction

1. Have a go at remembering the historical context that Isaiah and his readers were in. What features do you recall? What similarities might exist between their situation and the situation of Christians today?
 - This is a chance to take stock of the journey so far, and in particular, remember the context of Isaiah's readers. They were living in a very vulnerable time in which the might of the approaching Assyrian army was a concern.
 - The likely timeframe here is after the death of Ahaz, and early in the reign of Hezekiah. Just as King Ahaz had sought security from Israel and Syria by making an alliance with the Assyrians, the leaders of Judah were seeking security in the nation of Egypt – the other world superpower, to the south. God's response to this is of continued displeasure with the faithlessness of his people. See 31:1, for example.
 - The big similarities between Isaiah's context and ours remain as they have been throughout the book so far:
 - a. God's faithful people being in the minority as people continue to rebel and make compromises with the world, which is opposed to God
 - b. Looming judgment – and where to turn to survive judgment.

Read and Discuss

2. Read Isaiah 35:1-7

- a. What is your first impression of these verses?

- For discussion. This is chance to get our noses in the text, and notice what's there. Clearly it's a positive vibe. If you have time, you might like to read Chapter 34:1-7 as well. That is a picture of God's judgment against the nations (other than Judah). Edom is just one of the nations, but is probably used as a representative for all.

- b. These verses speak of a future time (future to Isaiah and his audience). Come up with two lists: things that will be there, and things that won't be there.

- Again, a comprehension exercise to aid in seeing the wonderful blessing envisioned by these verses.

3. Verses 3-4 issue encouragement to some people. What do we know about these people? What do these verses teach us about the connection between God's judgment and his salvation.

- These verses are likely to addresses to faithful Jews like Isaiah. We can see that they are gripped by fear and weakness. The cause of this fear is likely to be the approaching Assyrians – which would have felt like the end of the world.
- The message is one of hope in God's judgment. In verse 4, the promise of God's judgment against the proud, oppressive nations like Assyria, was good news. Often times in the Old Testament, when the Kingdom of God was closely associated with the political nation and place of Judah, to be saved meant to be saved from oppressive enemies. This is a theme repeated throughout the Bible – when God comes in the end, there are two very distinct possibilities. And only two. You are either with God, or you are opposed to him. That might seem odd to our modern way of looking at people, but it's a consistent teaching

4. Read Isaiah 35:8-10.

a. What can we learn about the 'road' that as described?

- It will be called Holy. There will be no 'unclean' – so perhaps free from sin in some way?
- It will be safe – no lions or other beasts.

b. Who will and won't travel on this road

- It is a road for the 'redeemed' (v9) and the 'ransomed of the Lord' (v10).
- No fools will be on it, nor will anyone 'unclean'.

c. Where does the road lead?

- The road leads to Zion – another name for Jerusalem, or the temple in Jerusalem.
- It leads to a place where people will be crowned with unending joy – and sorrow and sighing will flee.
- This is a picture of eternal salvation. A place of safety, joy, peace with God, rather than darkness, pain, death and judgment which has come before.

Reflect and Apply

5. **Read Matthew 11:1-6.** Which part of Isaiah 35 does Jesus allude to. What point is he making?

- Jesus is alluding to Isaiah 35:5-7. Obviously, not all of Jesus' images are found in Isaiah 35, but there is enough parallels to see the allusion.
- The point he is making is that the time of salvation spoken of by Isaiah is now here, because Jesus is here. It's a huge claim.

6. Do you think Isaiah 35 is fulfilled in Jesus first coming, or his second coming?

- This question is designed deliberately to prompt reflection and debate. The 'staged' nature of salvation history create a timeline which Old Testament prophets, and believers could not have foreseen.
- In Jesus first coming his presence did show us the power of this new kingdom of God – where bodily weakness and death was taken away. Jesus miracles demonstrated that wherever Jesus is – God's new kingdom is manifest. Jesus own' resurrection is ofcourse the most stunning example of the new kingdom coming to life.
- However, the problems of Isaiah 35:5-7 (deafness, blindness, etc) still exist. Jesus promises to come back and all the blessings of the new creation will materialise then.
- So in a sense, the answer to the question is both Jesus first and second coming.

7. Our world is full of examples of physical impairment and bodily disability. In fact, all of us have bodies that are plagued with weakness. Isaiah 35:5-6 pictures a time when these problems will no longer exist.

Read Philippians 3:20-21. How do these realities expand our understanding of salvation?

- The restoration of physical bodies is a wonderful, but sometimes overlooked feature of the Christian hope. Our aim is not to escape the body, or the physical world, and then spend eternity floating around as souls. The biblical vision is much grander than that.

8. Verses 3-4 use future hope to encourage ongoing faith and endurance. How does future hope help Christians endure? What kind of trials in life should prompt us to remember our hope?

- The presence of real hope in the Christian experience lifts our vision from the troubles of here and now, to the glorious future that awaits us. There really is no hardship or trial that ought not prompt us to draw on our hope. Hope helps us endure because it puts things in an eternal perspective. If we judged God's blessings to us according to our earthly circumstances alone, there would be many believers (across history, and across the world) who would see no value in persevering. But whatever our circumstances we can continue to pursue faithful living because we know God wins in the end, and his people will be vindicated for their loyalty to him.

Study 9 | Isaiah 36-37

Introduction

1. Reflect on the term so far. What big ideas and lessons have you taken out of our journey through Isaiah 1-39 so far?

- There is no particular answer being sought here. This is more an opportunity to reflect on the term so far, and rememebr what has stood out.

Read and Discuss

2. **Read Isaiah 36:1-4.** What is the situation facing King Hezekiah?

- The mighty Assyrian army has conquered the northern nations of Syria and Israel (as predicted earlier in Isaiah). It has now come to Judah, conquered many Judean towns (as predicted earlier in Isaiah) and is now lining up Jerusalem!

a. How would Hezekiah and the people have been feeling at this point?

- Undoubtedly, they would have all been very afraid. As verse 2 says, the Assyrians had a massive army.

b. The location referred to in verse 2 is the same place Isaiah met King Ahaz back in 7:3. What might be the significance of that?

- In this parallel we are meant to see a comparison between King Hezekiah and his father King Ahaz. Both chapter 7, and now these chapters focus on a moment of military threat. How will the King respond to this threat? Will they trust God?

3. The events of chapters 36 and 37 are a bit easier to follow than the poetry and prophecy we've been reading for most of the term. Read through the following sections and come up with your own title and summary:

Passage	Title	Summary of main events/themes
36:4-10	Assyrian spokesman's first speech	Hezekiah and the Judean's are questioned about what they are relying on. They are

		ridiculed for relying on Egypt, and for relying on the Lord
36:13-20	Assyrian spokesman's second speech	Speech in Hebrew in earshot of the people, not just the King. People discouraged from trusting King Hezekiah and the Lord. People promised a better alternative. The unique power of the Lord mocked – which God can stand up to the Assyrians. There's strong blasphemy and arrogance on display here.
37:1-4	Hezekiah's reaction	Hezekiah has the right response. He acknowledges guilt and repentance, he seeks God's in the temple and in his word from Isaiah.
37:5-7	Isaiah speaks God's word	The Lord urges Hezekiah not to be afraid. He promises deliverance.
37:8-13	Assyrian spokesman's third speech	The Assyrian King continues blaspheme God and declare himself more powerful than the Lord.
37:14-20	Hezekiah's prayer	Hezekiah prays to the Lord in the temple. He praises God supremacy and unique sovereignty. He appeals to God on the basis of the Assyrian arrogance and blasphemy. He asks for deliverance so that all would know that the Lord is God.
37:21-38	God's response	God answer's Hezekiah through Isaiah, speaking a word against Sennacharib, King of Assyria. God is offended by Assyria's arrogance. It was God himself that has control of Assyria and it's movements. God promises Hezekiah that prosperity will return to Jerusalem. God re-declares his commitment to Jerusalem and the line of David.

		The Assyrian army is miraculously defeated and the King returns home, only to die.
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4. The question posed by the Assyrian spokesperson in 6:4 is “What are you relying on?” How does question this focus our attention on the central issue in these chapters?

- The question of trust is the central issue. Will Hezekiah and the Judeans turn to the Assyrians for security, or to God. This is question of faith – who is more powerful? Whose word is more trustworthy – that of God, or that of the Assyrian powerhouse, standing before them.

5. What do we learn about God in Hezekiah’s prayer (37:16-20), God’s response through Isaiah (37:21-35) and the downfall of the Assyrians (37:36-38)?

- Invite group members to share their own reflections.
- We see God’s unique supremacy – he alone is God over all. The Gods of other nations are as nothing.
- God is sovereign power of human affairs. He controlled the rise of Assyria.
- God opposes pride and arrogance, like that demonstrated by the Assyrians.
- We see God’s promise keeping nature – what he said he would do to the Assyrians, he does.
- These are all great truths for us to cherish: God does what he says, even if it seems impossible.

Reflect and Apply

6. Consider you answers to question 5. How does what we know about God, bring comfort and assurance to us in times of doubt/trial? Is there something in your life presently challenging your trust in God? How could these truths help you?

- People may have their own trials, which they may or may not share.
- We can trust that God is in control of all that happens. If he exercised control of the great Assyrian army that wreaked havoc on the world during the height of it’s powers, we can be sure that there is nothing in this world beyond God’s control – even if it is presently harming us.

- God's promise-keeping nature is always good to come back to. We have great promises to us in the gospel – of sins forgiven, eternal life. We're in a different time and place in salvation history compared to King Hezekiah, but we inhabit the same posture of faith – asking God to use his power for our God. The resolution of this scene with the Assyrians being destroyed and King Sennacherib being killed are yet another example of God doing what he says. That same power applies to the promises God makes to us.

7. In what ways is King Hezekiah a good example to us that we should seek to emulate in our own lives?

- Hezekiah is a great example in many respects.
- He expressed repentance (v37:1-2) by putting on sackcloth. This is likely informed and responsive to Isaiah's earlier prophecy about the sinful state of the nation.
- He goes to the temple where God can be found (v1, 14)
- He prays (v14-20)
- He seeks God's word, in this case from Isaiah (v2-4)
- He understands and puts confidence in God's unique and sovereign rule (v16-20).

8. Isaiah's account of these events reminds us of many themes we've already encountered this term: trusting God v trusting others, God's commitment to his people and purposes, God's rule over proud nations etc. What lessons from this term have stood out to you? What can you do this week to live in a way which demonstrates your learnings?

- Invite people to share their own reflections. Some of the themes identified in the question itself may stimulate discussion.
- God's judgment against sinful humanity has been another prominent (and sobering) theme.

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