

ISAIAH



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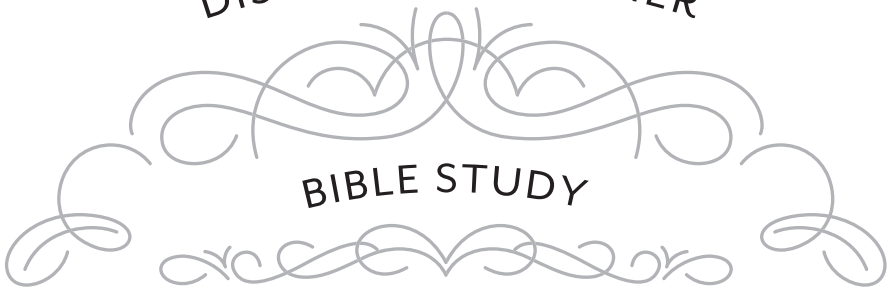
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DISCOVER TOGETHER



BIBLE STUDY

ISAIAH

*Discovering Assurance Through Prophecies
About Your Mighty King*



Sue Edwards



KREGEL
PUBLICATIONS

Isaiah: Discovering Assurance Through Prophecies About Your Mighty King
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Why Study the Bible?

Varied voices perpetually shout for our attention. Whose voice deserves our trust? The politician or evangelist on television? The Wall Street CEO? The Uber driver we've never met but count on to take us home? The man hawking cell phones behind the counter? The woman on the treadmill beside us? Maybe we can trust them; maybe we can't. Over time we can discern whether or not we're comfortable inviting them into our personal space or giving weight to their opinions. But the reality is that in time, everyone will disappoint us, and we will disappoint them too.

Only One is perfectly trustworthy. Only One offers authentic hope. "Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming" (1 Peter 1:13).

Years ago a wise woman, who secretly paid for my daughters to attend a Christian school we couldn't afford, planted that truth in my mind and heart. This concept blossomed into realistic expectations for life and a hearty hunger for a relationship with that One trustworthy person. That hunger led to a lifetime of savoring God's Love Letter, the Scriptures, and that relationship and practice upended everything. Wherever you are in your journey, Jesus invites you to experience abundant life with him. How?

Together let's discover what the Old Testament prophet Isaiah reveals about the King and his kingdom and find courage.



How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study

We're all at different junctures in our spiritual journeys, but God's Word doesn't separate us according to superficial differences. We all want to know God intimately and flourish, and we can all learn from one another. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

Discover Together Bible studies are designed to promote unity, for all women to learn from and enjoy together regardless of age, stage, race, nationality, spiritual maturity, or economic or educational status. God proclaims we are all sisters in his forever family, preparing to spend eternity together (Matthew 12:46–50).

However, our schedules vary week to week depending on the needs of loved ones, travel responsibilities, and work demands. To honor these differences, this study provides two choices:

- Basic questions that require one to one and a half hours of prep a week, offering in-depth Bible study with a minimum time commitment.
- "Digging Deeper" questions for women who want to probe the text more deeply.

Women wanting to tackle the "Digging Deeper" questions may

- need resources such as an atlas, Bible dictionary, or concordance;
- check online resources and compare parallel passages for additional insight;
- use an interlinear Greek-English text or Vine's Expository Dictionary to do word studies;
- grapple with complex theological issues and differing views; and
- create outlines and charts and write essays worthy of seminarians.

In addition to God's Love Letter, we also need authentic community and a place to be ourselves, where we are loved unconditionally despite our differences and challenged to grow.

This Bible study is designed for both individual and group discovery, but you will benefit more if you complete each week's lesson on your own and then meet with other women to share insights, struggles, and aha moments.

If you choose to meet together, someone needs to lead the group. You will find a free downloadable leader's guide for each study, along with tips for facilitating small groups with excellence, at www.discovertogether.com.

Choose a realistic level of Bible study that fits your schedule. You may want to finish the basic questions first and then dig deeper as time permits. Take time to savor the questions, and don't rush through the application.

Read the sidebars for additional insight to enrich the experience. Note the optional passages to memorize, and determine if this discipline would be helpful for you.

Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by women who have walked with the Lord longer, who have more time, or who are gifted differently. You bring something to the table no one else can contribute.

Make your study top priority. Consider spacing your study throughout the week to allow time to ponder and meditate on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you. Do not make other appointments during the group Bible study. Ask God to enable you to attend faithfully.

Come with an excitement to learn from others and a desire to share yourself and your journey. Give it your best to find the only One who will never let you down.

WHAT IS INDUCTIVE STUDY, AND WHY IS IT SO POWERFUL?

The Discover Together series uses inductive Bible study as a structure to dig into the Bible. Inductive study is the practice of investigating or interviewing a Bible passage to determine its true meaning, attempting to leave behind any presuppositions or personal agendas.

First, we seek to learn what the original author meant when writing to the original audience. We carefully examine the words and ideas. We ask questions like, What is happening? Who is it happening to? And where is it happening? Only after we answer those questions are we ready to discern what we think God meant.

And once we are clear about what God meant, then we are ready to apply these truths to our present circumstances, trusting that a steady diet of truth will result in an enriched relationship with Almighty God and beneficial changes in our character, actions, and attitudes.

Inductive study is powerful because discerning biblical truth is the best way we grow in faith, thrive in our lives, and deepen our relationship with the God who created us.

To experience this powerful process, we must immerse ourselves in the practice of study as a lifestyle—and not just focus on a verse here and

there. Our life goal must be to digest the Bible, whole book by whole book, as life-giving nourishment that cannot be attained any other way.

Over a span of sixteen hundred years, God orchestrated the creation of sixty-six biblical documents written by the Holy Spirit through more than forty human authors who came from different backgrounds. Together they produced a unified Love Letter that communicates without error God's affection, grace, direction, truth, and wisdom. He did this so that we would not be left without access to his mind and heart (Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 23).

THE INCREDIBLE BENEFITS OF BIBLICAL LITERACY

Earning a quality education changes us. It makes us literate and alters our future. Many of us sacrifice years, money, and energy to educate ourselves because we understand education's benefits and rewards.

Biblical literacy is even more valuable than secular education! But just like with secular learning, becoming biblically literate requires serious investment. However, the life-changing rewards and benefits far outweigh a diploma and increased lifetime earnings from the most prestigious Ivy League university.

A few benefits to Bible study include

- a more intimate relationship with Almighty God;
- an understanding of the way the world works and how to live well in it;
- a supernatural ability to love ourselves and others;
- insight into our own sin nature along with a path to overcome it, and when we fail, a way to wipe the shame slate clean, pick ourselves up forgiven, and move on with renewed hope;
- meaning and purpose;
- relational health experienced in community;
- support through struggles;
- continued growth in becoming a person who exhibits the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23); and
- contentment as we learn to trust in God's providential care.

Every book of the Bible provides another layer in the scaffolding of truth that transforms our minds, hearts, attitudes, and actions. What truths wait to be unearthed in Isaiah's prophecies, and how will they change us?



Why Study Isaiah?

Do you yearn to live in a place where justice, peace, unending goodness, and joy are the “normal” state of affairs? The Bible talks about a kingdom where these things are normal. If you have placed your trust in Christ, you are already a citizen of that glorious place. The Bible calls it the millennial kingdom because it’s going to last a thousand years (Revelation 20:6). And one day, possibly not that long from now, you will dwell there with his other followers. But every triumphant kingdom requires a qualified monarch, and our perfect sovereign is none other than King Jesus himself!

Enter with me into the wonder of this ancient text for a new vision of our Messiah, King Jesus, and his future kingdom.

TO INFUSE US WITH COURAGE WHILE DWELLING IN A WEARY WORLD

Twenty-seven centuries ago, Isaiah prophesied about our magnificent King and his kingdom, providing details to brighten our days when we are disheartened. Can you imagine? Isaiah’s descriptions of our new country are designed to help us want to make space in our busy lives for our soon-coming King. After all, you can’t have the kingdom without the King.¹ Not only is Isaiah quoted in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament prophet, but his message is also meant for us today.

TO INCREASE OUR CONFIDENCE THAT THE BIBLE IS TRUE

Biblical promises provide comfort and courage, but how do you know that God’s Word is trustworthy? One of the amazing facts about Scripture is that exact details concerning Jesus and his future kingdom were predicted by prophets with astounding accuracy centuries before their fulfillment. Isaiah, named by some as the prince of prophets, was one of those prophets (Jensen, *Isaiah & Jeremiah*, 27). Andrew M. Davis writes,

Only Christianity has this gift of predictive prophecy so clearly

1. *Some Christians today want the kingdom without the King* is a concept based on a sermon series by the author’s senior pastor, Neil Tomba, Northwest Bible Church, Dallas, Texas, fall 2020 through fall 2021.

fulfilled in the pages of history. There are no such Hindu prophecies, or Buddhist or Muslim. None of those competitors in the marketplace of ideas can point to verifiable prophecies that have been fulfilled in space and time. But Isaiah the prophet, empowered by the Holy Spirit, made hundreds of such predictions, telling things before they happened, “so that when it does happen you may believe” (John 14:29). (Davis, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 4)

Around 760 years before the birth of Christ, the preincarnate Son of God called Isaiah to instruct Israel about God and his truths, to warn those who had walked away from their faith, and to comfort those who were trusting and following God in the midst of a hostile pagan culture. Interwoven into Isaiah’s sermons and writings are beautiful predictions of the coming Messiah, King Jesus, and his thousand-year reign on the earth (the millennial kingdom), as well as prophecies about the new heavens and the new earth. Many of Isaiah’s predictions have already been fulfilled, but some are still future. The amazingly accurate, already fulfilled prophecies give us confidence that future predictions of a loving, joyful kingdom are also true.

THE AUTHOR’S PERSPECTIVE ON END TIMES

Respected Bible scholars and pastors hold different views about how to interpret the Bible related to end times. Should we interpret these particular passages literally or figuratively? When will these events occur? How do all the pieces fit together?

I hold a premillennial, pretribulation view. That means I believe the end-time events will really occur in the future. Isaiah wrote about real future events. This approach consistently interprets the Bible literally, attempting to understand first what the original author was communicating to the original audience and then what that text means for us today. I hold that if the original author seemed to be using figurative language, then we should take that into account, but otherwise I believe the passage means what it says.

Some Christian doctrines are central to the faith—for example, the virgin birth, Christ’s atonement, and the return of Christ—but others are disputable. That means that respected godly scholars who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible disagree on some of the details. Christians should not break fellowship with other believers on these disputable matters.

That said, prophecies about what will happen in the future are all through the Bible, and I have found them to be indescribably comforting and life giving as I navigate the complex maze of living in a fallen world. When I’m discouraged and need hope, looking ahead to the glorious future my Jesus has planned for me enables me to look up and push forward. I so desire that you experience that magnificent hope too.

THE AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE TERMS "HEAVEN" AND "THE KINGDOM" IN ISAIAH

In this study, I will use the terms "heaven" and "the kingdom" in light of my premillennial, pretribulation view. Thus, when I say "heaven," "the kingdom," or the other end-time terms below, here's what I mean:

Heaven: This word in Hebrew refers to the sky as well as the space beyond our atmosphere. It also can mean the unseen celestial places, God's dwelling place. The Greek term is similar and speaks of the air or sky. Where is this "heaven"? It is always referred to as "up," so we can assume it's an atmospheric place beyond our physical reach. However, many Christians envision heaven as a place where we will be floating on clouds, playing harps for eternity—but that's not a biblical concept. The Bible teaches that those of us who die before the rapture will not cease to exist. At that moment our physical body and our spirit separate. Our physical body stays on earth, but our spirit immediately goes to "heaven." In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul describes us leaving our physical bodies, our "earthly tent," and moving into a heavenly dwelling—thus the term "heaven," where our spirits are in the presence of God.

Believers alive at the rapture will enjoy a different experience. The term "rapture" means *caught up, snatched suddenly*. First Thessalonians 4:15–17 provides details:

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive [at the time of the rapture], who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

At the rapture, those of us who have already died physically will experience the uniting of our physical bodies with our disembodied spirits that have been waiting in "heaven" for this day. After that, living believers will immediately receive their glorified resurrected bodies and will also be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Read 1 Corinthians 15:42–58 for the incredibly exciting details.

After the rapture, we wait back in "heaven" in the presence of the Lord for the consummation of earth's history as we know it, including the tribulation, a seven-year period of horrendous chaos and judgment on the earth (Revelation 4–19). However, out of God's divine love and mercy, followers of Jesus won't suffer through this tribulation period (1 Thessalonians 1:8–10).

During their wait, believers in their glorified resurrected bodies will experience spectacular events like the judgment seat of rewards, known as the bema seat (2 Corinthians 5:6–10; 1 Corinthians 3:10–15; 4:4–5), the marriage celebration, and the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6–9).

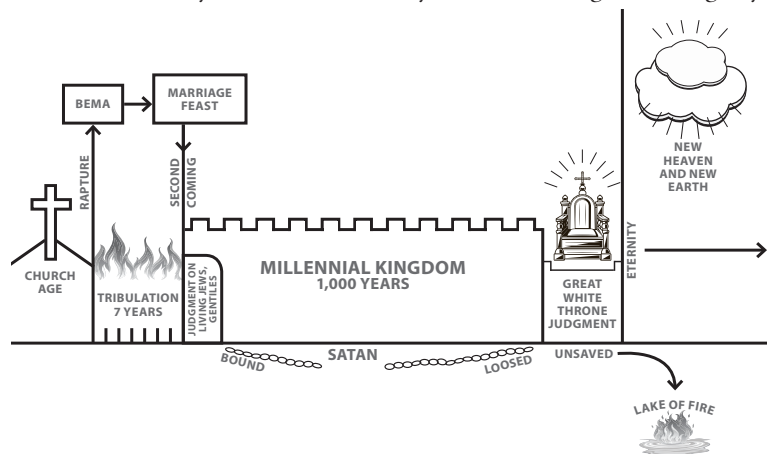
At the culmination of the tribulation, King Jesus returns to earth for a second time, also known as the second coming, and he brings us back with him to set up his millennial kingdom (Revelation 19:11–16).

The Kingdom: Whenever I refer to “the kingdom” in this study, I mean the “millennial kingdom” described in Revelation 20. The term “kingdom” has several nuanced meanings in the Bible. In one sense, when Jesus came to earth the first time, he brought aspects of the kingdom with him. We know about his righteousness and holiness that characterize the kingdom. But the Bible also reveals another kingdom that Isaiah tells us about—a glorious future kingdom that Christ will inaugurate on the earth. This is a literal one-thousand-year kingdom led by King Jesus, a place of yearned-for justice and peace.

While we are in “heaven” during the tribulation on the earth, Revelation 5:9–10 records a song we will sing to Jesus:

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.

The Bible teaches that a grand future awaits God’s children. This passage reveals that believers will rule and reign plus serve and lead with Christ in that glorious millennial kingdom for one thousand years. After the millennial kingdom, the Bible explains that the earth will be cremated and replaced with “a new heavens and a new earth.” Read the last two chapters of the Bible for insight into our final destination, a place almost beyond comprehension. These marvelous passages are meant to encourage and inspire us. That’s why in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul urges all Christians “to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”



HOW TO DISAGREE AGREEABLY

Ultimately, each of us is responsible to study the related texts prayerfully and carefully and then determine what we believe the Bible teaches about our future. Some of the passages are beyond our ability to fully grasp, and we may find when we get there that none of us were 100 percent correct. However, we can know that whether our ultimate destiny is in “heaven” or in the “millennial kingdom” and then the “new heavens and the new earth” that God is good and eternity with the triune God will be glorious and forever.

Therefore, if you work through this study with others, they may express different opinions. Allow them the freedom to articulate their ideas. Listen with respect to everyone. Create a safe place where honest dialogue thrives. Trust the Holy Spirit to teach each of us as we gather to learn and encourage one another. Don’t be afraid to gently disagree, but focus on the ideas and don’t allow these differences to elevate into personal disputes. Love one another and refuse to sacrifice your unity over disputable matters. At the same time, speak up kindly concerning what you believe the Bible teaches and why. As we say in our seminary, “Teach truth; love well.”

THE NATURE OF DIVINE PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Biblical prophets, empowered by the Holy Spirit, testify to the majesty of an all-knowing, powerful creator God who stands outside of time and moves history through a preordained, Trinity-created plan to ultimately restore the heavens and the earth to a place of peace, joy, and justice. These prophets didn’t know when their prophecies would come to pass. In fact, some prophecies had double meanings—they were fulfilled in some sense quickly, and in another sense they will be fulfilled in the future.

He [Isaiah] stood as if he were on mountaintops and looked ahead over misty mountain ranges, peak upon peak of future events. As one looks out over such peaks, they appear as if they were layered right on top of each other, though they are separated by dozens of miles. So also Isaiah could see distant future events on top of each other as if they were side by side, though they were separated by many years. (Davis, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 3)

Isaiah’s greatest prophecies pictured details concerning the key figure in history who would make the Godhead’s plan possible—a member of the Trinity, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Centuries later many of Isaiah’s prophecies came true. The Messiah was born to a virgin, lived a sinless life as a common carpenter, spent three years teaching and modeling perfect love, compassion, and justice, and died on a wooden cross to atone for the sins of all who would humble themselves and ask to be a part of his forever family.

This unfathomable sacrifice opened the door for sinful humankind to enter that family and enjoy the priceless privileges of intimate fellowship with their Creator. In addition, God's family will enjoy eternal life in Messiah's renewed millennial kingdom and the new heavens and the new earth. Also, God gave Isaiah glimpses of the splendid new homes the Lord will create for us. Although a more complete understanding of what Isaiah saw only comes through other prophecies, like puzzle pieces, revealed through the age, we are privileged to have access to thousands of these pieces in Scripture. As we put each puzzle piece into place, we gain a clearer picture of the God who loves us and the future he created for us. And as the picture becomes more complete, we enter into a deeper relationship with God, giving us the courage to release to our perfect king the anxiety and overwhelming expectations we face. God expects us to take the time to work the puzzle, and this study will be a part of that endeavor.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What We Know About the Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah's name means "the Lord is salvation." He was a gifted poet, statesman, preacher, and writer who lived in Jerusalem. He displayed a sharp intellect, and because he had easy access to the king, we know he grew up in a prominent family (7:3). He exhibited a bold faith, a fearless authenticity, and a masterful creativity.

He was married to an unnamed prophetess (8:3), and we can imagine that they shared a fervent passion for ministry. They had two sons, and God instructed them to give each boy an unusual name. Each name embodied major aspects of Isaiah's prophetic messages, reminding hearers of Isaiah's sermons whenever they saw the boys.

One son was named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Ma-hair-shah-la-hash-bahz), which means "quick to plunder, swift to spoil." This boy served to constantly warn Israel that if they continued to rebel against God, they would bring God's discipline upon themselves and he would allow a foreign power to take them into a harrowing seventy-year-long exile. That exile began in 701 BC, when Assyria devastated the land and carried the Jews into slavery.

The other son was named Shear-Jashub (Share-YA-shube), which means "a remnant will return." This son reminded the Israelites that even if God disciplined them by sending them into exile, a remnant of God's people would remain faithful and always return to the land of blessing.

Isaiah's World

After King Solomon died, civil war ensued, and Judah broke off from Israel to form a divided nation. The northern part of the nation kept the name "Israel," and the southern region adopted the name "Judah."

Isaiah's primary audience was Judah, especially Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, Isaiah's hometown. He ministered during the reigns of four different kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The political upheaval and chaos that accompanied the rise and fall of these four kings would provide fodder for a dramatic Netflix special, full of intrigue, sabotage, and unsuccessful attempts to ally with foreign nations instead of turning to the Lord for help.

During these tumultuous years, internal resentment built as the rich oppressed the poor and the religious leaders exploited the common people until many allowed their authentic faith in God to dry up into hollow ritualism. Into this crumbling society, God sent Isaiah to wake the people and call them back to a relationship with him and a lifestyle that reflected that genuine faith. If the Israelites turned a deaf ear, God would allow serious consequences to gain their attention and provoke repentance. In the first five chapters of the book, God, through Isaiah, describes Judah's putrid state of affairs.

Within Isaiah's recorded sermons and writings, glimpses of hope shine not only for the Jews but for the whole world for all time. In our study, we will focus on these magnificent prophetic signs and pictures of a glorious Messiah and our eternal future. Let's get started.



Your King Commissions Isaiah—and You

LESSON 1

What helped Isaiah stay strong in his faith, despite being misunderstood and enduring various trials? What helped New Testament Christians persevere through similar adversity? In both the Old and the New Testaments, we see that God peppered truths about our glorious futures in eternity to inspire and encourage us to persevere. But many Christians today are unaware of the magnificent eternal rewards and blessings that await us as we honor God regardless of disappointment in this fallen world.

As you work through this study, you'll uncover truths and treasures that will fuel your days with joy and expectation. So look up. Your King is coming for you, and he's bringing his kingdom with him. When he comes, your earthly home will be transformed, as will your physical body and your daily life. It could be tomorrow. It could be the instant after you take your last earthly breath. All creation waits. Come and discover your new home in Jesus's millennial kingdom and beyond.

ISAIAH'S ADVERSITY

Isaiah experienced discouragement over the miserable state of affairs in his country. The reign and death of King Uzziah in about 740 BC caused Isaiah even more grief. Uzziah ruled for fifty-two years, and for most of those years he had been the most righteous Judean king since Solomon. However, during his later years, Uzziah turned away from God, and the Lord judged him for his disobedience and pride by striking him with leprosy. This horrific infectious disease caused extensive nerve damage resulting in the loss of part of his extremities. He was declared "unclean" and lived alone, isolated from public life, friends, and family, until his death, requiring his son Jotham to reign in his place. King Uzziah's life and death was a tragic picture of Judah's fall. Initially, Judah loved and followed God, but later she became an unfaithful nation worshipping other gods.

At this critical time in history, God sent a vision calling Isaiah to speak truth to God's people. This throne-room vision colored Isaiah's view of

OPTIONAL

Memorize Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

What Michelangelo is among artists, what Beethoven is among composers, what Lincoln is among presidents, what Spurgeon is among preachers, what Lombardi and Wooden are among coaches, Isaiah is among the prophets. He is the best educated. He is the most prolific. And if quotations in the New Testament are any guide, he is the most influential. . . . But, as is true of most of the prophets, he lived a misunderstood life.

—Charles Swindoll
(*Swindoll Study Bible*, 805)

DIGGING DEEPER

For more insight into Isaiah's world and the sorry state of Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem, read the first five chapters of Isaiah. What common themes run through these chapters? Why was Judah in need of the correcting and encouraging words of the prophet Isaiah?

DIGGING DEEPER

To learn more about King Uzziah, also known as Azariah, study 2 Chronicles 26 and 2 Kings 15:1–72. What can you learn about the priority of remaining loyal to your God throughout your lifetime?

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.

—Jonathan Edwards
("The Christian Pilgrim,"
SermonIndex.net)

God for the rest of his life and ministry. However, as we'll discover in this lesson, Isaiah's vision and his response are far more than just a picture of heaven. They also reveal the steps each of us needs to take if we want God to use us significantly for him.

WHAT ISAIAH SAW



Read Isaiah 6.

1. Who did Isaiah see? How did Isaiah describe him? Who was with him? Where was Isaiah? (6:1–2)
2. The apostle John identifies this magnificent person in John 12:41. Who does John say Isaiah saw?
3. Read Mark 9:2–8, when John was privileged to see the transfigured Jesus. Describe the incident. How did the disciples react? How do you think you would have felt, and what would you have done?
4. Later in his life, John saw Jesus again in his post-incarnate state (Revelation 1:9–17). How did John react this time? What details does he include that Mark left out when describing the transfiguration?

5. Do you think you will ever see the glorious Son and God the Father yourself (Revelation 22:3–5)? How can you be sure (1 John 5:10–12)?
6. Read 1 John 3:1–2. What are your thoughts and feelings as you savor this beautiful promise?

In a very real sense, all Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament is Kingdom prophecy. Even those predictions which deal with Messiah's humiliation and sufferings cannot be separated from the context of regal glory.

—Alva McClain (*Greatness of the Kingdom*, 217)

WHAT ISAIAH HEARD

7. What were the angels calling to one another (6:3)? How loud were their voices? What happened in the temple as a result (6:4)?

His holiness is simply his God-ness in all his attributes, works, and ways. . . . He is not like us. . . . He is in a different category. He is holy.

—Raymond Ortlund Jr.
(*Isaiah, 77*)

ISAIAH'S RESPONSE

8. What did Isaiah cry out as he beheld this vision? What realization caused this outburst? (6:5)

There is something about holiness that scares us, and something about a person who claims to be holy that threatens us. People like that make us feel uncomfortable, inferior, unworthy, guilty, and condemned.

The less holy we think we are, the farther away from them we want to run. . . . But the solution is not to run and hide. . . . It is to acknowledge our sin and to accept the forgiveness He has offered us in His Son.

—Richard Strauss (*Joy of Knowing God*, 127, 135)

In the Scriptures, the holiness of God is the backdrop against which the blight of human sin is mirrored. God's holiness helps us understand our own unholiness, and it should motivate us toward the mercy of God.
—John Bisagno (*God Is*, 42)

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Luke 5:1–11 and compare Peter's and Isaiah's experiences and responses when they understood their own sin and God's holiness.

We all need more help than we think we need.
—Senior Pastor Neil Tomba
(In multiple “Jesus the King” sermons)

9. During the latter part of Jesus's earthly ministry when he was teaching the crowds, some asked him questions about what would happen to people who had recently died. The governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, had murdered some Jewish people, and a tower had fallen on others in Siloam. Jesus used these questions to teach the crowd an important lesson on recognizing their own sin and repenting. What did he teach them in Luke 13:1–5?

10. John the Baptist brought a similar message to kick off his cousin Jesus's earthly ministry. Who did John quote, and what was his main message? (Mark 1:1–4)

11. When compared to God's holiness, who needs help (Romans 3:10)? How can anyone receive God's forgiveness, and on what basis is that help given (Romans 3:21–25)?

12. What do you think it means to repent, based on the passages in questions 8–11?

13. Why do you think repentance is the precursor to receiving God's forgiveness, becoming his child, and living eternally in his kingdom? Why is awareness of our sin needed to become a follower of Jesus? (1 John 1:8–10)
14. Reread Isaiah 6:6–7. What do you think the burning coal in the angel's tongs foreshadows? How do these verses in Isaiah's vision symbolize Jesus's future mission on earth?
15. What is your personal response as you consider God's holiness? Do you need help to overcome your failures, rebellions, and shortcomings? What consequences are you reaping by not asking for help? Why not ask God for help now?

ISAIAH'S CALL

After Isaiah humbled himself and recognized his great need for help, God covered his sins with grace and called him to a life of significant purpose.

16. What two questions did God ask Isaiah (6:8)? What is unusual about the second question? What does this question teach us about the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is three persons in one essence and purpose, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

DIGGING DEEPER

Since Jesus's sacrifice on the cross is required to cover sins, how did God cover the sins of Isaiah? Was Jesus's sacrifice retroactive, and if so, what was required for those who loved God to be saved in Old Testament times? Study Genesis 15, paying special attention to verse 6.

If God were just one person, he could not be intrinsically loving, since for all eternity he would have nobody to love. If there were two persons, God might be loving, but in an excluding, ungenerous way. . . . But when the love of two persons is happy, healthy, and secure, they rejoice to share it. Just so with God. . . . God is a sharing God, a God who loves to include. Indeed, that is why God will go on to create. His love is not for keeping but for spreading.

—Richard of St. Victor

1150 (Quoted in *Delighting in the Trinity*, 31)

17. What was Isaiah’s immediate response in verse 8? Has God called you to serve him in a particular way or ministry? If so, share this calling with your group.

18. If you are hesitant to move forward in your calling, can you discern and explain why? How might trusting mighty King Jesus help you?

In Isaiah 6:9–12 Jesus explained to Isaiah what his ministry would entail and how the people would respond to it. He even explained the devastating discipline that God would need to inflict on the Israelites because of their refusal to repent and turn from their wicked ways. This news disheartened Isaiah. He asked in verse 11, “For how long, Lord?” Imagine God asking you to spend your life in a ministry with little success. Yet, like Isaiah, we are never responsible for the results, only to be faithful.

Regardless of our God-given mission, these verses perplex many readers. The passage reveals that some people are a stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears (Acts 7:51) and choose to reject God’s initial overtures. The more these stiff-necked people hear, the more they harden their heart against God’s message. Finally, it seems God moves to a strategy of discipline—as he did with the Judeans and Israelites—knowing they will not otherwise humble themselves and turn to God for help. Although unfathomable to us, God is not bound by time and knows the outcome of all things.

Old Testament scholar Barry Webb writes,

Sentence has been passed on the nation in heaven; Isaiah's preaching will put it into effect on earth. Verses 9–10 indicate that the very unresponsiveness of the people will be an aspect of God's judgment on them. They have chosen arrogance and indifference; they shall have them in full measure and experience their bitter fruits: devastation and exile (12). Judgment is now inevitable. (Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 61)

However, none of us know when an individual has reached the point of no return. My mother resisted God for ninety-one years. The hypocrites in the town where she grew up, including the uncredentialed and untrained pastors, inoculated her against the gospel. Our family prayed for her for many years and did everything we could to show her God's love. Yet she continued to respond out of bitterness and mistrust—until three weeks before she died. Through a series of events that only God could orchestrate, and in the quiet of a hospital room with my daughter at her side, she softened her heart.

Like Isaiah, we must never give up.

GOD'S HOLY SEED IN THE STUMP

19. The Bible uses the term *remnant* in several prophetic books and also in Romans. From these verses, what do you think this term means in Scripture and how does it relate to the tenth in Isaiah 6:13?

Isaiah 11:11

Jeremiah 23:3

DIGGING DEEPER

Despite the bleak news Isaiah received regarding his future ministry, 6:13 offers hope. The first part of the verse refers to a *tenth*. What do you think Isaiah meant?

DIGGING DEEPER

Who were the initial “holy seed” (Isaiah 41:8–9; 59:20; 65:8–9; 1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11)? Who is the ultimate “holy seed” who would come forth out of chastened Israel and Judah?

20. The second part of verse 13 gives us a glimpse of another hopeful picture. What is the picture, and what do you think it might mean? Who is the “holy seed”? (See also Isaiah 11:1; we will study more about this picture later.)

Isaiah's barrier to freedom was demolished as the angel brought a message that went something like this: "You're free, Isaiah! Your sin is gone! You're clean and ready to be used by God!" Like Isaiah, we all have faults. We may become convinced that those faults disqualify us from the Lord's service. But let me assure you of this: He can use any one of us—broken vessels that we are—for His service.
—Charles Swindoll (*The Swindoll Study Bible*, 813)