discover **SAIAH**

Chapters 1-12

STUDY GUIDE

discover ISAIAH Chapters 1-12





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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you "do it yourself" and discover together what the Bible says.

Questions are the key to Bible discovery. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this study guide are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they uncover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1.

Read through each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about the meaning of the passage.

Step 2.

Answer the questions in the "What does it say?" section of the study guide lesson, drawing your answers from each passage. Write answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries, Bible handbooks, or Internet sites, do so only after completing your own personal study. Answering the questions before the group meets enables you to remember what you have discovered and to prepare for the group conversation.

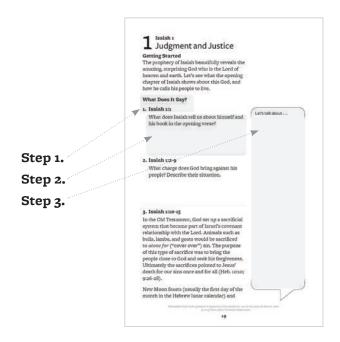
Step 3.

Fill in the "Conversation" boxes with your questions and thoughts. Include questions that you would like to discuss with the group, topics that you would like to learn more about, and ideas from the passage that have made an impact on you. For example, in the "Conversation" boxes, you might include answers to questions like these:

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me?
- Is there a promise I can claim?
- For what can I give thanks?

Step 4.

Have fun talking with others about what you have discovered!



Introduction

A study of the book of Isaiah can be challenging and rewarding. It can be a challenge because it is a long prophetic book with images and historical events that may be unfamiliar to you and your group members. In addition, the prophecies in this book can be about events occurring in the writer's lifetime, or hundreds of years afterward, or even deeper into the future. Further, some of the prophetic descriptions are about events that took place in a certain way at one time and may take place in another way in the future.

Studying Isaiah can be rewarding because you may find that in the middle of an unfamiliar and hard to understand passage, you suddenly come upon familiar phrases. Even if you are new to the Bible, some verses in Isaiah may sound familiar. That's because the words in many Christmas carols and in the well-known Handel's *Messiah* contain images and texts from Isaiah. If you have studied other books of the Bible, a number of passages in Isaiah may also sound familiar because Isaiah is one of the most quoted Old Testament books in the New Testament.

The book of Isaiah has two main sections. The first section (Isa. 1-39) covers what happened during Isaiah's lifetime. The second section (Isa. 40-66) focuses on later events after God's people went into captivity (exile) but anticipated deliverance and restoration from the Lord. These divisions have caused some scholars to question whether the entire book was written by the prophet Isaiah. They suggest that the second section may have been written by disciples of Isaiah under the authority of the prophet. The second section is characterized by a somewhat different style of writing and vocabulary. Nonetheless, some distinctive expressions and significant verbal parallels have been noted in both parts. And God could certainly have inspired Isaiah with prophecies about the future (see Deut. 18:21-22). The New Testament, in quoting Isaiah, seems to assume a single author, as does the book itself.

This study will cover chapters 1 through 12 of Isaiah, along with passages from the historical books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles for understanding parts of the background story. Also included is a Historical Snapshot to summarize the background and context in which Isaiah lived and prophesied. Though it includes many historical references, this is not a study of ancient civilizations and events. Rather, it is a study about God's relationship with his people and how his kingdom of righteousness is

above all other kingdoms. It presents the God who judges justly but also forgives and welcomes freely.

As you read and study the wonderful book of Isaiah, allow it to "read" and "study" you. Ask God for help in applying its message to your life. Doing this with a group will help you discover things that you may not discover on your own. Your efforts will be richly rewarded as you listen to God's voice through the prophet Isaiah.

Historical Snapshot for Studying Isaiah

As a prophet, Isaiah was called to preach God's Word with regard to many events—in the past, in Isaiah's present day, and in the future. As a result, the book of Isaiah includes many historical references. The glossary can help with identifying many names and places. The following historical summary will provide some additional information, offering a brief history of the people of Israel and of significant places and events in the time of the prophet Isaiah.

Abraham was the father of God's chosen people. God called Abraham to trust and follow him, and Abraham was promised a land that his descendants would inhabit. That promise was not realized in Abraham's lifetime; instead, it was realized after the people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years and God miraculously delivered them under the leadership of Moses. After establishing his covenant with the people at Sinai, in which the people agreed to obey the law of God given through Moses (Ex. 19-24), God led the people to the land he had promised them, but most of the people's leaders were afraid to go in and drive out the nations that lived there, as God had commanded. For disobeying God, the people were punished to wander in the desert for forty years. After that time, Joshua led the next generation of Israelites into the "promised land." This was the land of Canaan, in the area of the present-day state of Israel. Members of the twelve tribes, named after the twelve sons of Jacob, Abraham's grandson (also called Israel), were allotted sections of the land.

Conquering the promised land was not an easy task, and it was made more difficult by the constant disobedience of the people and some of their leaders. Because the people were often unfaithful to their covenant with the Lord, God sometimes punished them by allowing other nations to oppress them. But when the people cried out for God's help, he raised up judges (spiritual and military leaders) such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors.

Because the nations around them had kings, the people of Israel wanted a king as well. Saul became the first king of Israel and initially led the nation to military victories. But he turned away from God, so God chose David, described as "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), to be king in Saul's place. David, the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, was a shepherd from Bethlehem. During a standoff between Saul's army and

the Philistines, David killed the giant Goliath, the Philistines' champion. Years later, after Saul died, David became king and led Israel in military victories and in establishing Jerusalem as the city where God's temple would be built. In the Old Testament David became regarded as the greatest king in Israel's history. Though he committed some grievous sins in his day, he confessed and repented of them before God, and the Lord forgave him. David was also a musician and wrote many psalms that show the close relationship he had with God. God promised David that the royal line in Israel would remain with his descendants (2 Sam. 7).

David's son Solomon succeeded him as king and built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Solomon became renowned for the wisdom he asked for and received from God, but unfortunately he also violated many of God's commands. He made alliances with nations around him and built up a large harem of wives and concubines, falling into pagan religious practices in the process. Although Israel gained significant power and territory as a nation led by Solomon, the kingdom broke apart during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel split away to form a northern kingdom, and the remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, became the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel (or sometimes Ephraim, after its leading tribe), and they adopted Samaria as their capital; the southern kingdom became known as Judah, and Jerusalem remained their capital. The kings of Judah tended to be more faithful to God than those of the northern kingdom (Israel, Ephraim), but eventually both kingdoms were punished for their unfaithfulness to God and sent into exile.

The people of Israel and Judah were often tempted to adopt the religious practices of the nations around them instead of following the one true God. They mixed the spiritual practices God had given them with idol worship and the sexual immorality of local fertility religions. Some of them even sacrificed their children to idols.

God appointed prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha to minister to the people during the time of the early kings. After them came a number of prophets over the next few hundred years, and Isaiah served as a prophet of Judah from about 740-681 B.C. One major purpose of all the prophets was to call the people back to God and to their covenant promises. The prophets were to sound the alarm that punishment was

coming if the people did not change. Often the prophets were ignored and even killed for the messages they brought.

Isaiah prophesied about the rise of three empires in Israel and Judah's history: Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. Four kings of Judah are mentioned in the opening lines of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah's prophetic ministry began in the year that King Uzziah died (c. 740 B.C.). Isaiah then continued to prophesy during the reigns of Jotham (740-732 B.C.), Ahaz (732-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.).

Jotham's reign was brief, but he managed to build towns and fortifications and to defeat the nearby Ammonites, strengthening the nation of Judah as he generally "walked steadfastly before the LORD" (2 Chron. 27:6). Toward the end of Jotham's reign Tiglath-Pileser III became a powerful military and political ruler in Assyria, and Jotham's son Ahaz sought an alliance with Assyria for protection after being attacked several times by closer neighbors—from the north by Israel, which had joined with Aram (Syria today), and from the south by the Edomites and the Philistines. In 2 Chronicles 28:3-6, 16-20 we learn that God had punished Ahaz through these attacks because Ahaz had engaged in "detestable practices" of idolatry, even sacrificing "his children in the fire" to the false gods of other nations. Isaiah warned Ahaz against making an alliance with Assyria, but instead of trusting in God to protect him, Ahaz looked to Assyria for military help. He paid heavily with silver and gold to maintain this relationship with Assyria. The alliance helped Judah for a while as Assyria wielded great power in the region. The Assyrians conquered Aram (c. 732 B.C.) and later routed the northern kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.), taking many of the people into captivity.

Hezekiah became king in 715 B.C., and he turned to Egypt for support instead of Assyria. But this didn't help him when the next Assyrian king, Sennacherib, and his army besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah turned to Isaiah for advice. Isaiah prophesied that Sennacherib would not take Jerusalem. In a remarkable fulfillment of prophecy, the Assyrian army was devastated by a plague, and they left Judah (2 Kings 19; 2 Chron. 32).

Hezekiah ruled Judah for nearly thirty years, and his rule saw significant spiritual reforms. Unfortunately, his son Manasseh, who succeeded Hezekiah as king, reverted to rebellion against God and idol worship, undoing much of the spiritual rebuilding his father had accomplished (2 Kings 21; 2 Chron. 33).

Eventually, about 100 years after Isaiah's ministry, Judah was conquered by Babylonia, a new superpower that had overthrown Assyria, and the people of Judah were taken into captivity and exile. Then, after about seventy more years, Babylonia was conquered by Persia and Media, and the Persian King Cyrus freed the people of Judah to return to their land. Those who chose to return worked to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). During the next four hundred years, the reconstituted people of Israel, who then became known as the Jews, came under the power of the Greek Empire and then later the Roman Empire. Leading up to and during the time of Jesus and the New Testament period, Rome controlled the territory while giving the Jews some authority to rule among themselves.

Glossary of Terms

Ahaz—a king of Judah when Isaiah prophesied; Ahaz rebelled against God.

Aiath—possibly the town of Ai in Israel.

Ammonites—enemies of Israel to the east of the Jordan River, located where the land of Jordan is today; their main city was Rabbath Ammon. Jordan's capital, Amman, is on the same site today.

Anathoth—a town about five miles (8 km) northwest of Jerusalem.

Aram—a kingdom directly north of Israel; much of its land is in present-day Syria; the capital city was Damascus.

Arpad—a city about fifty miles (80 km) south of Carchemish.

Assyria—a powerful empire north and east of Judah. Nineveh was its capital.

atone, atonement—from the Hebrew word meaning "to cover over," atonement implies a sacrifice to make amends for wrongdoing. In Old Testament times an animal was sacrificed to atone for sin (Lev. 16). Christ's death was the final sacrifice, providing atonement for all who believe in him.

Babylonia—a nation east of Assyria; Babylon was its capital. The Babylonians overtook Assyria in 612 B.C.

Bashan—a land north and east of Israel known for its impressive oak trees.

Branch—a name describing the faithful remnant of God's people; also a name for the Messiah.

Carchemish—a city on the upper Euphrates River.

coastal lands of the sea—area west of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea.

Cush—the upper Nile River region, where Ethiopia and Sudan are today. **Damascus**—capital city of Aram (present-day Syria).

Edom—a kingdom south of Judah; its people were descendants of Jacob's brother. Esau.

Elam—a country east of Assyria and Babylonia.

Ephraim—one the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel; this name is often used to refer to the entire northern kingdom.

Euphrates—a major river running through Assyria and Babylonia.

Everlasting Father—a name of the Messiah, describing him as an eternal, caring provider and sustainer (Isa. 9:6).

exile—removal of God's people from their homeland after being conquered by the Assyrians and, later, the Babylonians.

Galilee—a region in the north of ancient Israel.

Gallim—a town neighboring Anathoth in Judah.

Geba—a town between Mikmash and Jerusalem.

Gebim—unknown place assumed to be near Jerusalem.

Gentiles—any people who are not Jewish.

Gibeah—a fortress town close to Jerusalem.

Gideon—an Israelite judge and military leader who defeated the Midianites.

Hamath—a city about 100 miles (160 km) north of Damascus.

Hezekiah—a king of Judah who turned to God; during his reign Jerusalem was saved from an Assyrian invasion.

holy—set apart, often for special service to God; in reference to God, this word means "pure, faultless, perfect."

holy seed—refers to the remnant of God's faithful people (Isa. 6:13; see also 4:3).

house of David—any members of King David's family, especially rulers. Immanuel—a name meaning "God with us"; ultimately this name refers to Jesus, the Messiah.

Israel (northern kingdom of)—a majority of Israelites (ten tribes) that split away during the reign of King Rehoboam; Judah and Benjamin remained with Rehoboam and became known as the kingdom of Judah. Earlier, Israel was the name of the entire nation of God's people.

Jacob—The patriarch of God's people who was renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28); Jacob was the father of twelve sons whose descendants became the twelve tribes of Israel. In the Old Testament, the name Jacob is often used to refer to all of Israel.

Jerusalem—Judah's capital city, where God's temple was located; it was supposed to be the spiritual center for the whole nation of God's people.

Jesse—King David's father.

Jordan—a river running south through the land of Israel to the Dead Sea.

Jotham—a king of Judah who made an alliance with the Assyrians.

Judah—one of the two tribes in the southern kingdom of Israel (the other tribe in this kingdom was Benjamin); the name Judah is often used to refer to the entire southern kingdom.

Kalno—a city about 50 miles (80 km) south of Carchemish.

Laishah—a town near Anathoth in Judah.

last days—a phrase referring to the coming of the Messiah (Isa. 9:6), as well as to the end times when the Messiah (Christ) will come again to bring about his kingdom fully (see Rev. 21).

LORD (with small capital letters)—In most English translations of the Bible, this name represents the Hebrew name YHWH (Yahweh), meaning "I AM WHO I AM" or "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." God identified himself by this name when he promised to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt and to fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation," said God (Ex. 3:15).

Madmenah—as unknown place assumed to be near Jerusalem.

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz—second son of Isaiah; his name means "quick to the plunder; swift to the spoil."

Manasseh—one of the tribes of Israel. The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim received their allotments of land as the inheritance of their father, Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel).

Mighty God—a name of the Messiah, denoting his strength and power (Isa. 9:6; see also 10:21).

Mikmash—a key pass on the way to Jerusalem.

Midian—a kingdom that often raided Israel in its early days; with God's help Gideon won a miraculous victory against them (Judg. 7).

Migron—a town south of Mikmash.

Moab—a kingdom southeast of ancient Israel. Ruth, an ancestor of David, was from Moab (Ruth 1:4).

Mount Zion—see Zion.

New Moons—special festivals of sacrifice and worship at the beginning of each Hebrew (lunar) month.

Naphtali—a son of Jacob whose allotment of land was among the northernmost in Israel, in the region of Galilee.

Nob—a town about one mile (1.6 km) from Jerusalem.

Oreb—a Midianite leader killed by the Ephraimites on what became known as the rock of Oreb (Isa. 10:26; see Judg. 7:25). Its location is near the plain of Jezreel in northern Israel.

Pekah son of Remaliah—king of the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah.

Philistines—a coastal kingdom to the west of Judah who were often at war with God's people.

Prince of Peace—a name of the Messiah, emphasizing his role as the author of true peace (Isa. 9:6).

prophet—one who speaks God's message; a term generally used to refer to Old Testament preachers of God's Word; at times, prophets also foretold the future as revealed to them by God's Spirit (see Deut. 18:21-22).

pruning hooks—hooked tools used for pruning trees or plants.

- Ramah—a fortress town near Jerusalem.
- remnant—the people of God who would return from exile.
- **Rezin of Aram**—a king of Aram who allied with the northern kingdom of Israel against Judah.
- **righteous**—blameless, guiltless; we are declared righteous by God through faith in Christ, who came to pay for our sin by taking our guilt on himself and giving up his own righteous life for our sake.
- Root of Jesse—a reference pointing to the Messiah, related to the image of "a shoot . . . from the stump of Jesse," from whose roots "a Branch will bear fruit" for the flourishing of God's kingdom (Isa. 11:1, 10). This phrasing seems to imply that the Root came before Jesse and has an eternal quality, which would apply only to the Messiah (see also Rev. 22:16).
- Samaria—capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- sabbath—the day of the week for rest and worship of God.
- **seraphs, seraphim**—angelic beings who honor and praise God; the name literally means "burning one." Scholars note that these beings may correspond with the "four living creatures" of Revelation 4:6-9.
- **Sodom and Gomorrah**—two cities destroyed by God because of their rebellious, evil ways (see Gen. 19; Ezek. 16:49-50); the names of these cities became synonymous with judgment.
- **Shear-Jashub**—elder son of Isaiah; his name means "a remnant will return."
- Shiloah—a stream that brought water to Jerusalem; it flowed from the Gihon spring, a water supply that King Hezekiah later protected and rerouted so that the invading Assyrians couldn't take it over (2 Chron. 32:30). In later history Shiloah fed a pool that was called the Pool of Siloam (Neh. 3:15; John 9:7).
- **son of Tabeel**—This person is unknown but would have been a threat to David's dynasty in Judah.
- **stump (of Jesse)**—a term describing the cut-down tree of the dynasty of David, son of Jesse. From this stump a shoot (the Messiah) would grow, illustrating that new growth and goodness among God's people would spring from him.
- **terebinth**—a leafy shrub tree, sometimes described as oak. In Isaiah's day the wood of terebinths and oaks may have been a favorite for making idols (see Isa. 1:29-30; 6:13).
- Upper Pool—water source for Jerusalem.
- **Uzziah**—King of Judah who had a long, prosperous reign. Isaiah began to prophesy in the year that Uzziah died (c. 740 B.C.).

- **Wonderful Counselor**—a name for the Messiah, emphasizing his amazing wisdom and counsel and the wonderful plan God has for ruling his kingdom in righteousness (Isa. 9:6).
- **Zebulun**—a son of Jacob whose allotment of land was among the northernmost in Israel, in the region of Galilee.
- **Zion**—another name for Jerusalem, after the hill in Jerusalem on which the temple of the Lord was built.

Judgment and Justice

Getting Started

The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. Let's see what the opening chapter of Isaiah shows about this God, and how he calls his people to live.

What Does It Say?

1. Isaiah 1:1

What does Isaiah tell us about himself and his book in the opening verse?

Let's talk about ...

2. Isaiah 1:2-9

What charge does God bring against his people? Describe their situation.

3. Isaiah 1:10-15

In the Old Testament, God set up a sacrificial system that became part of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. Animals such as bulls, lambs, and goats would be sacrificed to atone for ("cover over") sin. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was to bring the people close to God and seek his forgiveness. Ultimately the sacrifices pointed to Jesus' death for our sins once and for all (Heb. 10:10; 9:26-28).

New Moon feasts (usually the first day of the month in the Hebrew lunar calendar) and Sabbaths were considered to be holy days of worship in the Old Testament. Appointed festivals and convocations were also religious celebrations, and many were established by the Lord (Lev. 23-25).

a. What is God's feeling toward the religious practices of the people?

b. Why will God not listen to their prayers?

c. What is the difference between "religious performance" and "true spirituality"?

4. Isaiah 1:16-17

Describe what God wanted from his people. What does God want from us?

For conversation ...

5. Isaiah 1:18-20

I wonder about ...

Discuss the choice that God lays before people.

6. Isaiah 1:21-31

a. What is the city like now, and how will God deal with it?

b. What will the city be like in the future?

c. What will it take to be part of the future city?



Taking It Home

What messages of hope do you see in the midst of God's judgment?

The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. As a prophet of God's people in Judah from about 740-681 B.C., Isaiah had the task of calling the people back to God. He was to sound the alarm that punishment was coming if the people did not change their destructive ways of rebelling against God.

From Isaiah we learn that some punishment did come for God's people. Sin has its consequences. But redemption and forgiveness would come too. As God had promised long before, he would send a deliverer to rule in righteousness and with justice for all. This worthy ruler would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6)—and today we know this unparalleled King as the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He came as promised to deliver God's people, including us and people from all nations, from sin and the self-destruction it drags us into.

This study helps us see how we need the one true, amazing God as much as the people did in Isaiah's day long ago.

Discover Isaiah: Chapters 1-12 features 10 lessons from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God's Word.

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