

The Francis Asbury Society



ISAIAH

**BIBLE STUDY
WITH DR. JOHN OSWALT**



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ISAIAH OUTLINE

- I. Introduction: the Problem of Servanthood (1:1–5:30)
 - A. Charges against Rebellious Israel (1:1–31)
 - B. The Nations Will Come to Jerusalem (2:1–5)
 - C. Israel's Pride Brought Low (2:6–4:1)
 - D. Zion Purified by Fire (4:2–6)
 - E. Bitter Grapes from the LORD'S Vineyard (5:1–30)
- II. The Call to Servanthood (6:1–13)
- III. Trust: the Basis of Servanthood (7:1–39:8)
 - A. Ahaz' Refusal to Trust (7:1–12:6)
 - B. Lessons in Trust (13:1–35:10)
 - C. Hezekiah's Willingness to Trust (36:1–39:8)
- IV. Grace: Motive and Means of Servanthood (40:1–55:13)
 - A. Introduction: Gracious Deliverance (40:1–31)
 - B. Israel Graciously Chosen to be the LORD'S Servants (41:1–48:22)
 - C. The Servant: Gracious Means of Israel's Servanthood (49:1–55:13)
- V. Righteousness: Character of Servanthood (56:1–66:24)
 - A. Righteous Foreigners and Eunuchs (56:1–8)
 - B. Israel's Inability to Do Righteousness (56:9–59:21)
 - C. Light to the Nations (60:1–62:12)
 - D. Israel's Inability to Do Righteousness (63:1–66:17)
 - E. Righteous Gentiles (66:18–24)

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BACKGROUND

Time: 739–701 BC

Situation

- Chs. 1–39: Empire of Assyria entering its climactic century of world dominance
 - It already ruled all the known world except Egypt and that was its final goal
 - Standing in the way were the eight little nations in the Canaanite strip: (Tyre and Sidon), Syria, Israel, Judah, Philistia, (Ammon, Moab, Edom)
 - Syria fell in 735; Israel in 722, the last Philistine city in 701; only Judah survived.
- Chs. 40–55: Assyria fell to an alliance of Babylonia and Media in 605; King Jehoiakim of Judah accepted Babylonian overlordship, but then revolted; Jerusalem was captured in 598. Jehoiakim's brother Zedekiah was put on the throne, but he revolted and the city was captured and destroyed in 586. The leading citizens were taken into exile in Babylon.
- Chs. 56–66: Although we know of no captive people ever returning home, Isaiah and the other prophets predicted it, and it happened in 539 when the Persians captured Babylon. The Judeans returned home in a flurry of excitement, but quickly succumbed to discouragement and disillusionment.

Structure

Why speaking to (not merely about) people in the future? The glorious vision of Yahweh revealed in chs. 1–39 would have been invalidated in the minds of the exiles unless the materials of 40–55 had also been revealed in advance.

Even though God would not deliver them from Babylon as he had from Assyria, that did not mean either that he had been defeated or that he had abandoned his people. The materials of 56–66 were necessary in order to harmonize the call for righteousness in 1–39 with the promise of undeserved grace in 40–55.

CHAPTER 1

Background

Most scholars believe that chapters 1–5 are intended to be understood as introduction at least to chapters 1–39 if not to the entire book. It seems likely that they were written after Isaiah's call recorded in chapter 6. While there is a broad chronological order in chapters 6 to 39, the materials are primarily grouped according to the author's literary/theological intent.

- The kings mentioned in 1:1 ruled in Judah between about 780 and 690 BC. According to 6:1 Isaiah's call occurred in 739, the last year of Uzziah.
- We know almost nothing about the life circumstances of Isaiah, arguably the greatest of the prophets.
- v. 8: Israelites did not live on arable land; it was too valuable. They lived in villages at the edge of the farmland. During harvest, they would live in temporary shacks in the field to save travel time.
- vv. 9–10 the artful transition (Sodom, Gomorrah) from one passage to the next (1–9, 10–15) is characteristic of Isaiah's writing.
- vv. 29–31 trees were often worshipped in the ancient world. They were seen to be sources of stability and life. So they were often a feature of pagan shrines and gardens. Trees are a recurring metaphor in Isaiah, both positive and negative.

Read these chapters and note the contrasts. What are they and what question do they raise?

1:1–9

1. How is the book described in 1:1? What is the significance of this?
2. Why call on the heavens and the earth in v. 2? See Deut. 32:1, 4–6. Also see v. 3 here.
3. Note the verb used to describe Israel's attitude toward God and see 66:24. How is rebellion more than mere disobedience?
4. See the verbs in v. 4 as a further explanation of rebellion and its effects.
5. What do vv. 5–8 describe? How is Isaiah making his point?
6. There are two important titles for Yahweh in this stanza. What are they? What is their significance?
7. Why the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah in v. 9?

1:10–15

1. What is the topic of this stanza? What are some reasons the prophet may have brought this up at this point?
2. If they were faithfully performing all the religious rituals prescribed in the law, how could they have been called “rebels”? What is the danger with religious ritual? See Amos 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–8. If God doesn’t want rituals, why does he command them?
3. See the final phrases of vv. 13 and 15 for an explicit statement of the problem.
4. How does all this relate to us?

1:16–20

1. What is the relationship of this stanza to the preceding one?
2. Does righteous living (16–17) produce forgiveness (18)? Why or why not? See v. 27, but also 64:6. So what is the relationship between them?

1:21–27

1. Note the contrasts in these verses. What are they?
2. Note the introduction of a third title in v. 24. What is the impact here?
3. In the context of this stanza, who are the “enemies” of Yahweh in v. 24.
4. Verses 25–27 express a key truth of this book. What is God’s intent when he brings destruction on his people?

1:28–31

What is the relationship of this stanza to the previous one? Why do you think Isaiah ends on this note after the promises of 26 and 27 (which are a reversal of vv. 21–23)?

CHAPTERS 2:1–4:1

Background

In ancient times the gods were thought to live on mountain tops. Thus to say that Jerusalem was the highest mountain (2:2) was a way of saying that Jerusalem's God was the true God.

- Note how 2:12–17 is a poetic illustration of the point made in 9–11.
- 3:6–8 describe the situation when a city has been destroyed and all the capable leaders either killed or exiled.
- 3:8 literally “defying his glorious eyes.” This relates to 2:1 and 5:15.
- In OT times, a woman had to be connected to a man in some legal way, either as a daughter to a father or as a wife to a husband. This explains 4:1: in the coming destructions so many men would be killed that the remaining population would have a ratio of seven women for every one man.

2:1–4:1

What is the relationship between 2:1–5 and 2:6–4:1? How is Jerusalem described in 2:1–5 and in 2:6–4:1?

2:1–5

1. Why do you think Isaiah's authorship is mentioned again (2:1)?
2. Why do you think that Yahweh is referred to as the “God of Jacob (2:3)?
3. See the background note above. Why is the “mountain” of God's house so important that all nations will come there? Is it magical power to control the weather, and illness, and other people? What is the significance of what is said?
4. Notice the same verb in vv. 3 and 5. What does this say about God's intent for us? See also Gen. 17:1.

2:6–4:1

Look for a common theme running through this diverse material. What is the problem with humanity? What is the most deadly sin according to church teaching? Why?

2:6–22

1. Look for the common word in vv. 6–8. What are the four topics? Compare to 6:3. What is the problem?
2. How are vv. 9–11 the logical result of 6–8? How do we find worth and significance? See Luke 14:11.
3. Why does the worship of humanity (which is what idolatry amounts to) necessarily humiliate us (vv. 18–22).
4. What is the point being made by v. 22?

3:1–15

1. There are three stanzas in this section (1–5; 6–8; 9–15); what is the repeated theme among them?
2. According to this passage, what things happen when we idolize our human leaders? What should we do?

3:16–4:1

1. Look back at 1:5–6, 9. What literary device is Isaiah using to make his point in this passage?
2. What is the relationship between vv. 16 and 17, and between 18–23 and 24? How does this relate to what has been said ever since 2:6?
3. Why does the prophet “pick on” the women here?
4. Why the “overkill” in the list of finery in 18–23?

CHAPTERS 4:2–5:30

Background

In Jer. 33:15 and Zech. 6:12–13 “the branch” clearly refers to the Messiah.

- Heb. poetry is characterized by a device called “parallelism” in which the second main clause of the sentence in some way is synonymous with the first, as in: “The Lord stretched out the heavens; the earth was founded by God.”
- In Judea the major crop was grapes. So imagery relating to grapes would be very telling for Judean listeners. The process of planting a vineyard (5:2) was long and involved. The first year was spent clearing the rocks from the land and using those rocks to build walls and watchtowers. The second year the vines would be planted and tended and a wine-press dug. Only in the third year could a crop be expected.
- There is a wordplay in the Heb. of 5: 7: the words for justice and bloodshed sound very much alike, as do the words for righteous and distress.
- There is no good contemporary equivalent for the Heb. word translated “woe” (‘oi as in ‘oi vay). The best translation is the archaic “alas.” It is a word of grief and regret, one used in a funerary setting.
- “banner” (5:26) is a favorite term of Isaiah’s.

4:2–5:30

What is the relationship between 4:2–6 and 5:1–30? How is Jerusalem described in 4:2–6 and in 5:1–30?

4:2–6

1. In the light of Background above, what is the question about the identity of the branch in 4:2?
2. Compare the condition of Jerusalem in 2:6–4:1 with the condition described in 4:3–4. Specifically, what is the difference? See Ex. 19:5–6; Deut. 28:9–10.
3. How will the cleansing occur (v. 4)? Reflect on what has been said about God’s intended purpose in judgment.

- What does the imagery in v. 5 remind us of? Why do you think that imagery is used here?
- Notice the order here. When can we expect Yahweh to shelter us?
- Reflect on some ways that Yahweh has been a “shelter” and “shade,” a “refuge” and “a hiding place” in your life.

5:1–7

- Why do you think Yahweh is called the “beloved” in this context?
- Notice the shift between 3rd person in vv. 1–2 and 7, and 1st person in 3–6. What do you think this shift says about the relationship between God and the prophet?
- In terms of rhetoric (the art of persuasion) why the address in vv. 3–4?
- Compare 5:5–6 with 4:5–6. What is the significance of this?

5:8–25

- What is the relation of these verses to vv. 1–7? Look especially at the last sentence of v. 7.
- Find each occurrence of “woe” here. List each of the behaviors or kinds of behaviors that is mentioned. Do you see any kind of progression? What would the opposite “good grapes” be in each case?
- What does it mean to have “regard for the deeds of Yahweh” (v. 12)?
- Notice “therefore” in vv. 13, 14, 24, and 25. This word introduces the effect of a prior cause. What is the cause and what are the effects? How are they related in the context of the vineyard imagery?
- Note vv. 15 –16 and compare them with 2:11,17. Where is true human glory to be found?
- Compare 5:25 with 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4. What do you think the significance of this is?
- How does what is said in this section relate to America and the West today?

5:26–30

- What are these verses saying about Yahweh’s lordship of history? Why is Assyria coming?
- How do these verses relate to vv. 5–6?
- What effects is the imagery designed to convey? What is Isaiah seeking to convey?
- Compare 5:30 and 8:22.

CHAPTER 6

Background

After King Solomon died, his kingdom broke in two. The southern kingdom took the name of Judah because that tribal territory described the approximate boundaries of this kingdom (the territory of Simeon was contained within the larger territory of Judah). The northern kingdom, comprised of the other ten tribes, took the name Israel. It extended from Dan in the north, just below Mt. Hermon, to Bethel in the south. Over time Judah was able to capture most of the territory of Benjamin, just north of Judah. The capital of Judah was Jerusalem, and the eventual capital of Israel was Samaria. The two kingdoms existed together from ca. 930 to 722 BC when Israel was finally destroyed by Assyria. Israel was much the more powerful and wealthy of the two.

- King Uzziah ruled in Judah from ca. 791 until 739, one of Judah's longest rules. Although he was confined to the palace with leprosy after about 750 while his son Jotham acted as co-regent, Uzziah was still very much in charge. He was a capable and effective ruler. Until near the end of his reign Assyria was rather quiescent.
- “seraphim” a Heb. plural noun, probably meaning “burning ones.” They evidently looked like flames.
- One way in which Heb. expresses the superlative is by repeating something three times.
- “holy” describes the “otherness” of deity and everything connected with deity. Israel learned that there is really only One who is holy; thus, it is his character that defines holy behavior.
- “glory” in the Old Testament is not an ephemeral, evanescent glow. It is reality, solidity, significance.
- There were two altars in the temple: the altar of sacrifice in the court, and the altar of incense in the Holy Place.

6:1

1. Notice that there are very few dates elsewhere in the book. In the light of Background above, why might Isaiah have dated his experience in this particular way?
2. What does “sitting upon the throne” convey? Compare this with the previous statement, and with the final statement of v. 5. What principle do you draw from this?
3. High and lifted up might describe either the throne or the Lord. In any case look up 52:13 and 57:14. What does this say about the identity of the Servant in 52:13?
4. If the hem of his robe filled the temple, how big was the Lord? Note that this is the only description of God in the poem. Compare to Exodus 24:10. What are your conclusions?

6:2

Why do you think the seraphim covered their faces and feet? What is the appropriate attitude of worship?

6:3

This verse says two things about Yahweh. One has to do with his essence: The Holiest One. The other has to do with his relationship to creation. What is the point of this latter statement?

6:4

1. How loud was the cry of the seraphim? On the other hand, compare Psalm 19:1–3.
2. What affect does “filling with smoke” convey?

6:5

1. Why do you think Isaiah reacted in such a strong way? What does seeing the King have to do with it?
2. Why doesn’t he say “a man of unclean heart”?
3. Why does he include the people?
4. Why does he repeat “Lord of Hosts” (Lord Almighty, Lord of Heaven’s Armies) from the cry of the seraphim?

6:6-7

1. What is the significance of a coal from the altar touching Isaiah's lips?
How hot was the coal?
2. What is the part of fire in all of this? What kind of an experience was it?
Fun?

6:8

Why does Isaiah only now hear God speak? Why doesn't God speak directly to Isaiah? Why does Isaiah respond so readily?

6:9-10

Why would God say such a thing? Does he not want the people to be healed? Look at v. 13b; what does it add to this discussion? What kind of message would Isaiah's own generation like to hear so as to "become more religious"? (Think about the descriptions in chs. 1-3 and 5.) What would be the likely impact of the truth?

6:11-13a

1. What does Isaiah's question say to us about the level of his commitment?
(What kinds of questions might you and I have asked?!)
2. Why was the destruction to be so thorough?

6:13b

What is God's intended last word? Look up Job 14:7-9.

CHAPTERS 7:1–9:7

Background

In about 735 B.C., when Assyria was moving aggressively southward into Canaan, the kingdoms of Israel and Syria decided that the small countries in the path of Assyria should form a military coalition to stand in Assyria's way. For reasons that are now unknown, King Ahab of Judah decided he did not want to join such a coalition. So Syria and Israel attacked Judah to try to force them to join. In response, Ahab sent money to Assyria asking Tiglath Pilezer, the emperor, to attack Israel and Syria (see 2 Kings 15:29; 16:5–9).

- Calling Pekah “the son of Remaliah”(1, 4, 5) is a way of saying he was not from any royal line. In fact, he seems to have been a warlord from east of the Jordan who had usurped the throne of Israel.
- The careful locating of Isaiah’s encounter with Ahab (7:3) was important because of what would happen on that very same spot some 35 years later (36:2).
- In 7:9 there is a wordplay in which “believe” and “stand firm” come from the same Hebrew word. Modern translations attempt to capture this in various ways.
- There is a Heb. word meaning “virgin” and there is another meaning “young girl.” Neither of those is used in 7:14. The word used here means “a young girl of marriageable age” with the clear implication of virginity. The best English equivalent is the archaic “maiden.”
- “refuse evil and choose good” (7:15–16) refers to the age of accountability—age 12.
- Damascus was destroyed by the Assyrians in 732, and Israel was reduced to essentially the territory of Ephraim. Samaria was destroyed in 722 and there was a further deportation in ca. 687 (735–3=732[8:4]; 735–12/13=722 [7:16]; 735–65=670[7:8])

7:1–9

1. Why did Yahweh want Isaiah to take his son, whose name means “It is a remnant that will return” with him to this encounter? Was the outcome already determined? Why or why not?
2. Look at v. 2 and v. 6. What was Ahaz really afraid of? Tabeel was not from the house of David as far as we know. What kind of a problem did this constitute for God? (See 2 Sam. 7:12–17).
3. Note v. 4. What is the frequent cause of sin? What was God calling upon Ahaz to do in this situation?

7:10–25

1. How great a sign was this intended to be?
2. What was Ahaz’s real reason for not wanting a sign? How can piety become a cover for untrust?
3. What “day” is being talked about in vv. 17–25 (see v. 17)? How does this relate to the Immanuel sign (see vv. 15–16)? When will the promised child be born? So why use a word with implications of “virgin” for the child’s mother?
4. What do vv. 17–25 tell us about the results of Ahaz’ choosing to trust Assyria rather than God?

8:1–10

1. Compare what is said in 8:4–8 with 7:15–25. What are your conclusions about the relationship of Immanuel and Maher–halal–hash–baz?
2. But how do vv. 9–10 relate? (Note that “God is with us,” v. 10 is Heb immanu–el.)

8:11–22

1. What do the people fear, and what should Isaiah fear (vv. 11–13, cf. Ps. 34:4–7)?
2. In this context, what is God calling for Isaiah to do when he says “him you shall regard as holy”? How then should we make God holy in our lives?
3. How can Yahweh be a sanctuary and a stumbling block at the same time?
4. What is the great contrast in vv. 16–20? Where is the true source of guidance for life? What is the result if we refuse that source (vv. 20–22). Any examples of this in contemporary life?

9:1-7

1. How does 9:1–2 relate to the preceding and what does that tell us about God's ultimate intent?
2. According to 9:3–5, why is the nation rejoicing?
3. Who is responsible for this deliverance according to v. 6? What is the irony here? In a segment dealing with oppression and brutality (7:1–9:7) why the recurring emphasis on children?
4. Some scholars believe that this is a human child, perhaps Hezekiah. Why not?

CHAPTERS 9:8–12:6

Background

Isaiah's ministry began in 739; the northern kingdom fell in 722. So for the first 17 years of Isaiah's ministry Judah and Israel were coexisting. For the entire period, Israel's territory was being steadily pared down by Assyria.

- Judah was not even a twentieth of Assyria's size and importance. This makes the assertions of 10:5 and 15 all the more shocking.
- The place names in 10:28–32 refer to villages on the central ridge north of Jerusalem. They are given in order from north to south and depict an enemy army's implacable march right up to the edge of Jerusalem. No known historical event conforms to this.
- The Assyrians experienced the kind of sudden and devastating destruction described in ch. 10 when much of the army died in one night during their attack on Judah (Isa. 37:36–37).
- Most translations are too concerned with delicacy to translate 11:5 literally. We are not talking about a belt or a sash, but a loincloth. Righteousness and faithfulness are the Messiah's most intimate apparel.

9:8–10:4

1. This is a poem in four evenly-balanced stanzas: 9:8–12; 9:13–17; 9:18–21; 10:1–4. What is the refrain that closes each stanza and what is its significance?
2. What is the different issue in each of the stanzas? What possible progression do you see among them?
3. Why is God angry about these? What is wrong with each of them?
4. Judah has felt that it must find a way to cope with Israel and Syria? What is this poem saying about the location of their focus?

10:5–34

1. According to vss. 5 and 15, what is Assyria? Suppose I were to say this about Islam; how would you react? Why?
2. What is Assyria's understanding of what it is doing? What is the problem with this according to v. 12. What is wrong with that attitude? Think about "glory" (16, 18) in relation to 6:3.

- What does the imagery of “forests” and “trees” (18–19; 33–34) connote here?
- Verses 10:20–27 seem to say two things about Judah in relation to the future. What are the two things and how do they relate to each other? (To a certain degree the issue revolves around the use of “Israel” here. Does it refer to the northern kingdom only or to the nation as a whole?)
- What are the two or three primary lessons we should draw from this segment?

11:1–5

- Compare 6:13b with the language of 11:1. Now compare with 10:33–34. What is the point being made? Why use “Jesse” and not “David” (also in 11:10)?
- Why the repeated emphasis on the Spirit in v. 2? What characteristics are emphasized here and how do they relate to the Spirit’s work?
- “But” at the beginning of v. 4 signals a contrast between vss. 3 and 4–5. What exactly is being contrasted? How will this king be different from others?
- What kind of a “rod” (4) would ordinary kings use? What is the significance of this kind of rod? See Revelation 19:15.

11:6–9

We need not think that this is a literal prediction to appreciate the point being made. What is it?

11:10–16

- Compare the use of “signal” here (10, 12) with that of 5:26. What is the difference? Compare also to 2:1–5. How large is the Messiah’s ministry?
- What are the three primary things that are said to happen as a result of Messiah’s coming?

12:1–6

- What is the cause of trust (vss. 1 and 2)? (Compare 2b to Ex 15:2 and the two circumstances.)
- What will be the results of deliverance according to 4–6?
- If joy (3, 6) is not characteristic of our lives, what might some of the causes be?

CHAPTERS 13-14

Background

With these chapters, Isaiah begins a series of messages concerning the nations. This series runs through chapter 23. Ezekiel and Jeremiah have similar series, and where they are placed in each of the books is significant. Here, it seems that Isaiah, having shown the foolishness of Ahaz' dependence on Assyria in chs. 7–12, now expands this point to talk about the foolishness of depending on any human nation. In these chapters Yahweh shows again and again that all nations are under judgment from him. And in several cases, he shows that the nation will one day come to trust in him. Why then would the Judeans put their trust in any of these?

- 13:1–14:23 is dealing with Babylon and its king. 14:24–27 addresses Assyria, and 14:28–32 speaks to Philistia. There is no clear explanation for this sequence; possibilities will be discussed in class.
- During Isaiah's lifetime Babylon, although a rich and cosmopolitan city, was under Assyrian control. They were Judah's ultimate enemy, however, as Isaiah revealed to Hezekiah in ch. 39.
- The kind of violence described in 13:16 was typical of ancient Near Eastern warfare.
- The Medes (13:17) were a very warlike people who lived in the Zagros Mountains in what is now Iran. They joined the Babylonians to defeat the Assyrians, but they later joined Persia to defeat Babylon.
- 14:4–21 is a very carefully crafted poem in 4 stanzas. It is in the literary form of a lament. But it actually a mockery, because everybody is glad that this mighty king is dead. There is no indication that Isaiah was thinking of Satan. This connection was popularized by John Milton in his poetic work “Paradise Lost.” Isaiah utilizes language that was common in the mythical literature of his day. But he is not talking about gods; he is talking the extreme foolishness of our creaturely presumption. Look at the end of chapter 2.
- The OT has no clear teaching on the afterlife. “Sheol” seems to have been an existence, but not much more.

13:1–16

1. Notice the level of language used here. Is Isaiah talking specifically about Babylon, or about Babylon as representative of the world? Why would he do this?
2. What are the particular sins for which judgment is coming? Notice especially v. 11. How does this relate to what has already been said in the book?
3. Is there a difference between pride and self-respect? If so, what? What is the source of each, Biblically speaking?

13:17–22

1. How does the focus change here from vv. 1–16?
2. How is Babylon described in v. 19? How might this explain Babylon's standing at the head of the list of nations? How do our previous discussions of "glory" enter in here?
3. Clearly, vv. 19b–22 are in stark contrast to 19a. Why do you think the contrast is expressed in this particular way (the use of animals, etc.)?

14:1–4

1. What is the significance of this promise in the context of this situation (the fear of captivity and the tendency to trust other nations to protect them from that danger)?
2. How are we tempted to trust humanity in our anxieties? What would God say to us?

14:4–8

Who or what is happy that the king is dead? (Assyrian kings boasted at how they had cut down great forests.)

14:9–11

Who rejoices over the king's death here? Why do they rejoice? Why is human pride foolish?

14:12–15

1. We have gone from earth to the underworld. Where is location now?
2. What is the king guilty of, figuratively speaking (see 14b especially)? In what ways can we be guilty of the same thing?
3. What is the final destination of pride?

14:16-23

1. What is the location of this stanza? What is the final humiliation of the King's pride?
2. What is the final punishment? Why was it so devastating?

CHAPTERS 14–16

Background

If it is correct that 13:1–14:23 is something of an introduction, then in 14:28 we come “back to earth” in addressing the concrete situation facing Judah after Samaria’s fall. In 14:28–17:11, the nations of Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria and Israel are spoken to.

- It seems probable that Ahaz died in 516 BC (14:28).
- The Bible does not record any victories of Ahaz over the Philistines (14:29). According to 2 Chr. 28:18, the Philistines had actually captured some Judean villages on their border. Perhaps the Philistines thought they would be able to expand their conquests farther now that Ahaz was dead. But the Philistine cities were directly in the way of Assyria’s drive toward Egypt. They would be fully occupied in defense.
- Moab was located on the east side of the Dead Sea. In times of low water, the South end of the Sea would dry up, making access from Judah to Moab relatively easy (Naomi and Ruth?) Thus while there was often hostility between Judah and Moab, there were also times of mutual reliance.
- The places mentioned in 15:1–9 are generally from north to south, suggesting refugees fleeing southward from the Assyrians coming from the north.

14:24–27

1. Notice a repeated word/concept in vv. 24, 26, 27. What is Isaiah saying about Assyria and the threat which she poses to Judah?
2. In regards to v. 25, look up 37:36–38. Look back at chapter 10:5–19.
3. How should what is said in this paragraph shape our thinking and attitudes as we think about history and world politics?

14:28–32

1. See the notes above.
2. What is said about the future of Philistia (28–31) and what is said about Judah’s future (32)? What is the truth here for us? Think about the world and the church today.

15:1-9

1. What is the dominant tone in this poem? Why should Judah not trust them?
2. What does v.7 say to us about our human acquisitions?

16:1-5

1. Who is sending what to whom in 16:1-2? Why are they doing this?
2. Who do you think is being addressed in vv. 3-4a? What is Moab asking?
3. What is being referred to in 4b-5? Who is being talked about? (Notice the four qualities in v.5.) Why should Judah not trust Moab?

16:6-12

1. Why is Moab going to be judged? What is wrong with her attitude? What is wrong with that?
2. What do the images of vv. 8-10 convey? Why might Judah be tempted to trust Moab? How does this relate to us?
3. Notice the language of v. 12. What does this suggest about false religion?

16:13-14

What are the two contrasts in v. 14? How do these relate to what we have said previously in the study?

Summary

Why should Judah not trust Assyria? Philistia? Moab?

CHAPTERS 17-18

Background

Although Damascus has never been totally abandoned as Babylon was, it did suffer terrible devastation at the hands of the Assyrians in 732 BC (17:1–2).

- Cush is the name for Ethiopia which was considered to be the southern extreme of the world.
- It is possible that “deserted because of the children of Israel” in v. 9 is recalling the cities that the Canaanites deserted when Israel conquered Canaan.
- “the Valley of Rephaim” was a fertile valley leading up toward Jerusalem from the southeast. It was one of the few places where grain could be grown in Judah. The Philistines often used it for access up into the Judean highlands (e. g. 2 Sam. 5:18)

17:1–3

1. Who is this judgment oracle addressed to? But what is happening in vv. 2–3; who is also addressed there? Why do you think the two nations are being addressed together? (Think about chapter 7 and which nations were threatening Judah there.)
2. How does the issue of God’s people not trusting human nations come into play here?

17:4–8

1. Now the focus has shifted completely to what nation? Why do you think this is?
2. Notice again the issue of “glory.” Why is it counterproductive to seek our own glory? What is the proper motive for achievement (see Philippians 3:8)?
3. Notice that verses 7–8 are in prose form suggesting that Isaiah has joined them to the previous poem for some reason. How do they complete the thought of 4–6? What is the intended outcome of the judgment recorded in vv. 4–6? Has anything like this ever happened to you?
4. What titles are given to Yahweh in v. 7? What is the contrast with v. 8? How does this relate to us?

17:9–11

1. Once again we begin with a prose verse. What is the relationship between what it says and what verses 10–11 are saying?
2. Why will what we have planted not grow? Is this an arbitrary punishment from God? Why not?

17:12–14

What is the contrast between what is said in 12–13a and what is said in 13b–14? How is this conveyed in the images used? What should this say to us in times of political uncertainty?

18:1–7

1. Compare v. 1 to 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1. What is missing from 18:1?
2. Now compare the content of vv. 3–6 with that of 17:12–14. What do you observe? (Remember that the chapter divisions were put in sometime after the 5th century AD).
3. Now compare 18:2 with 18:7. Compared with what is said about (and to) other nations in this series, with what is not said about (or to) Cush?
4. What is the message of 17:12–18:7 about Yahweh and the nations of humanity?

CHAPTERS 19–21

Background

In both Canaan and Egypt the storm god was depicted as riding on a cloud (19:1).

- At least twice in Egypt's history a period of total political breakdown followed a period of absolute monarchy. 19:2 seems to reflect knowledge of this tendency.
- Egypt was easily the most idolatrous nation in the ancient Near East. Only surpassed by modern Hinduism.
- Egypt was famous for its ancient wisdom. The first known collection of proverbs comes from Egypt (1900 BC?)
- The (Philistine) king of Ashdod fled to Egypt for protection in about 707 BC. But the Assyrians threatened Egypt and demanded that they give up the Philistine, which they did. So much for Egypt's protection.
- Ch. 20 tells us how little we know about the life of Isaiah. Evidently he had been wearing burlap (garment of mourning) for some time previous to 707, but then took even that off. It seems likely that he had on still a loincloth, but nothing else, imitating the dress of captives who were carried off into exile.
- At this time the ruling dynasty in Egypt were Ethiopians (Cushites).
- The Persians (Elam) and the Medes captured Babylon in 539 BC, ending the Judeans' exile in Babylon (21:2)
- The meaning of the imagery in 21:7–9a remains a mystery.
- Dumah (21:11–12) was an oasis deep in the Arabian desert where Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king lived.
- A caravan route came across the northern Arabian desert to Dedan, Tema, and Kedar, sites in Edom.

19:1-4

1. According to both 19:1 and 4, what would the Egyptians be inclined to turn to in a crisis?
2. What about America in a time of crisis? (Think of the aftermath of 9/11.) What does this say about us and our faith?

19:5-10

1. What was the source of Egypt's wealth and power? What is going to happen to it?
2. But as far as we know this prophecy was not literally fulfilled. What is the enduring theological truth being taught by these statements? Why should we not put our trust in natural abundance?

19:11-15

1. What is the reason for trusting Egypt in this stanza? What will their wisdom be unable to tell them (v. 12)? What is the significance of that?
2. What should the proper attitude of Christians be toward their leaders? What should we do, and what should we not do?
3. In vv. 1–15 three possible reasons are given why Judah might trust Egypt—what are they and what will they amount to? What is the lesson for us?

19:16-25

1. How many times is the phrase “in that day” repeated in this passage? What do you think is the significance of the phrase, and what is the significance of its repetition?
2. What are vss. 16–17 saying about the meaning of the historical events that are going to overtake Egypt?
3. What are vss. 18–25 saying about Egypt’s future? What does this say about the wisdom of trusting Egypt for deliverance from Assyria? What should the Judeans be doing in regards Egypt in the light of this message?

20:1-6

Why would God ask Isaiah, who was apparently educated and cultured, to undergo such humiliation as this?

21:1-10

1. Look at v. 9 to see what nation “the wilderness of the sea” is referring to, and remember what we said about the glory of this land earlier. What might be some reasons for calling it by this term?
2. If God has brought down Babylon (v. 2), why is he grief-stricken in vv. 3–4?
3. To understand v. 5 see Daniel 5.

21:13–16

1. What is happening on the caravan routes according to vss. 14–15?
2. Vs. 16–17 seem to swing back to Isaiah’s own lifetime when perhaps the Assyrians devastated Edom’s trade. Why might this have been included with a prediction of events in the far future?

CHAPTERS 22–23

Background

It is not clear what event is being referred to in 22:1–3. Perhaps it is the temporary lifting of the siege of Sennacherib in 701 BC, when the Assyrian officer withdrew his army to support the emperor at the time when the Egyptians came out to battle (37:8–9). It is also possible that it refers to the final lifting of the siege after the death of the Assyrian army.

- Elam and Kir (22:6) are both locations in extreme south Mesopotamia.
- It is not specified to whom the “you (sing.)” in 22:8–11 refers, but the actions referred to were done by Hezekiah.
- “the steward...who is over the household” (22:15) almost certainly is a term for “the prime minister” of the country. Note that in 36:3, it is Eliakim who is “over the household” as per Isaiah’s prediction in 22:20–22. Isaiah 22:17–18 suggest that at some point Shebna would be taken as a hostage to die in a foreign land.
- The cities of Tyre and Sidon were the two dominant ports on the coast of Lebanon. They seem to have been the places where Canaanite culture and religion chiefly survived after Israel took over Canaan proper. These are the people whom the Romans knew as the Phoenicians. These cities largely controlled trade to the west around the Mediterranean Sea. “Tarshish” (23:1, 6, 10, 14) was probably located in what is today Spain.
- In 23:15–18, prostitution is apparently being used as a figure of speech for being a trans-shipper of merchandise. Tyre is selling her services to the various nations, like a prostitute would. But clearly there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this since the wages are to be dedicated to the Lord (18).

22:1–7

1. To find out who is being addressed in this oracle of judgment look at vss. 8–10. Why would this country be included in this list of untrustworthy nations?
2. What is the irony in the label “valley of vision”? Where do we normally go to see a long distance? Why might Isaiah be using this label?

3. Why does Isaiah not share in the general jubilation (vv. 5–7)? What does this say to us about short-term and long-term vision? But suppose we are called “killjoys” and “spoilsports”?
4. A title for God appears in v. 5 and in one form or another 5 more times in the chapter. What is it and what is its significance in this context?

22:8–11

1. What is the central problem addressed in the verses? What did Hezekiah do and not do?
2. Should he not have made defensive preparations? So what is the problem?
3. What exactly does 11b mean? How would a person behave who did these things?

22:12–14

1. Why should the people be “weeping and mourning” (v. 12)? Is there never a time for celebration?
2. What was wrong with this celebration? What is the proper Christian attitude towards heaven?
3. Verse 14 seems very harsh. Why will this “iniquity” not be “atoned for”? What is the unpardonable sin? (See Heb. 10:26–29; 1 John 5:16–17)

22:15–19

How does this narrative function as a graphic illustration of what was said in 22:1–14, and especially in v. 13? What is Shebna “looking to” and what should he be looking to?

22:20–25

1. What does this paragraph say about a guarantee of success (from a human perspective) if we are faithfully doing God’s work?
2. Isn’t this unfair? Shouldn’t doing things God’s way always enjoy God’s evident blessing?
3. What does v. 24 suggest might be one reason for Eliakim’s eventual failure? What is the message for us?

23:1-14

1. In this poem, what has happened to Tyre (and Sidon) and what is the response of her/their trading partners?
2. What question are they asking and what is the answer (vv. 8–12; cf. 14:24–27)? What truth should we draw from this?

23:15-18

If 1–14 says not to trust in Tyre and Sidon because of their coming destruction, why do these verses say there is no reason for Judah to put her trust in them?

CHAPTERS 24–25

Background

- Ch. 24:14–16 use synonyms to talk about the whole earth: west (14), east (15), coastlands (15), and ends of the earth (16).
- “The host of heaven” (24:21) refers to both the stars and to the gods. It is not either/or, but both/and. The same is true for the Moon and the Sun (24:23). There is no distinction between physical and spiritual.
- It is sometimes said that because the Biblical writers imagined that the heavens had windows and the earth rested on a foundation (24:18), their theology is just as fanciful. First, this is poetry and poetry uses images; and second, if the writers had a false understanding of the nature of the physical world, it is not necessary for God to correct every understanding of a writer if that mistaken understanding does not affect the theological truth being taught.

24:1–6

1. In the previous chapters, the nations might be seen as the primary subjects, with Yahweh merely the one who reacts. In vv. 1 and 3, who is the actor? This sets the stage for this section.
2. What is the point of the repeated comparisons in v. 2?
3. What is the structure of thought in vv. 4–6 (notice the “for” in v. 5 and the two “therefores” in v. 6.)? Why is judgment coming? What is being referred to in v. 6? Does this apply to us? How?

24:7–13

1. There is a contrast depicted in these verses. What is it?
2. What had been the cause of joy in this city? What are your reflections on this fact? What is joy, and where does it come from?

24:14–16

1. How do these verses relate to what has just been said? Why is the destruction of “earth city” a cause for rejoicing (cf. 25:2–3; 26:5–6)?
2. How is “the majesty of Yahweh” a cause for joy? An atheist would call this “hokum;” why isn’t it? Compare this song with the ones in vv. 7–13. Which has more substance?

3. Assuming that Isaiah is the “I” of 16c, why is he not sharing the joy that he predicts people will be enjoying in the future?
4. Who might the “traitors” of 16d be referring to? (For one possibility, see 21:2 and 33:1.)

24:17–23

1. How would you describe the language in this stanza? What level of judgment is it connoting? What are the implications of this for Yahweh’s identity?
2. Notice Yahweh’s title in v. 23 as compared to what is said in v. 21. What is the point?
3. Compare Isaiah 24:23 with Exodus 24:9–11 and Revelation 4:4. What is being said?

25:1–5

1. Where else have we seen reference to God’s plans (25:1)? How does this relate to pagan thought?
2. Compare v. 3 with 24:15–16. What are your reflections?
3. Who is being contrasted with whom in vv. 3–5? How does this relate to the theme of trust (and also of self-exaltation)?
4. Notice “song” in this stanza and reflect on the contrast in songs in this section (24–27) so far.

25:6–9

1. Compare 25:6 with 24:23. Where will the banquet be and who will be the guests? But didn’t God destroy everybody but Israel?
2. What will be the central event of the banquet according to v. 7? Where will it take place and for whom will it be?
3. What is “the reproach of his people”? (Look up Dt. 28:37; 1 Kgs 9:7; Ps 44:14).
4. Remember that “wait” is a synonym of “trust” and compare the response here with that of 12:1–3. What conclusions do you draw?

25:10–13

1. How do you explain this stanza in the light of the previous? (Remember vv. 1–5.) But didn’t v. 6 say “all peoples”?
2. What is the sin, and what is the result? Reflect on what we have seen of this issue so far.

CHAPTERS 26-27

Background

- “Perfect peace” in 26:3 is shalom in Hebrew, i.e. “total wholeness.” Yahweh can put us together in such a way that our lives are not torn to pieces by worry, indecision, and fear. That is “a strong city.”
- “Judgments” in vv. 8 and 9 is the word mishpat. It refers to the creation order that God designed for the world. For him to put things in their proper order can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on our relation to him.
- “Wait” in v. 8 is not merely to pass time. It is to live in confident expectation of what God will do on our behalf, refusing to run ahead of him seeking to solve our problems in our own ways. It is not passive, but active, much like “hope” in the NT.
- “Leviathan” (27:1) is the Canaanite name for the chaos monster in one of the standard origin myths of the ancient world. All these myths agreed that chaos, in the form of watery matter, had always existed. In the various stories, the chief god of that time and place, who was actually a descendent of that chaos, defeated the chaos monster and produced the present creation. The myths were retold on each New Year to ensure that chaos would not take over again this year. Faithful Israelites did not believe this, but they sometimes alluded to it, as here, to talk about Yahweh’s power, much as we might call a strong man “a real Hercules.”

26:1-11

1. For a connection with the previous two chapters, look at 24:9 and 14, and 25:5. Which song do you see here? Look also at 12:2. What is the theme of the song here? How does it correspond to 12:2? Why does this result in song?
2. What is the theme of the entire division from 7–39? How does this segment, especially vv. 3–4, relate to that theme? Why is this attitude so important to servanthood?
3. What are the three characteristics of those who come into the city in vv. 2 and 3? What do these terms mean and how do they relate to each other?
4. Why do the singers trust God? Notice the “for” beginning v. 5; what does that tell us about the relationship between what is said in vv. 1–4 and what is said in vv. 5–8? How does this divine action (vv. 5–8) result in trust?
5. What is the difference between the two cities of vv. 1 and 5? See also 24:10 and 25:2.

- What are the petitioners of vv. 8–9 really concerned about? How should this attitude shape our prayers?
- What is the point of vv. 9–11? Put it in your own words.

26:12–15

What had happened to the people in the past because of their refusal to trust God (v. 13)? But what has he done (vv. 12, 14–15)? Relate this to the whole movement of thought in chs. 7–12. Why should he be trusted?

26:16–21

- Verses 16–18 describe the helplessness of the people. What have they been unable to do?
- Verses 19–21 are Yahweh’s response to their cry. What will he do for them? Look at the theme of death in 25:7–8; 26:14; and here. What are your reflections?

27:1

Why do you think the allusion to the defeat of the chaos monster (see the background above) is brought in here?

27:2–6

Where have we seen Israel compared to a vineyard earlier in the book? What is the difference? What is never God’s intended last word?

27:7–13

- What is the point of vv. 7–9? What were the people evidently likely to claim about their discipline by God? But what is Yahweh saying about the intended outcome of what is going to happen to them? What is the lesson for us? See Hebrews 12:5–11.
- What does the latter part of v. 11 seem to say about the identity of “the fortified city” in vv. 10–11a? It is always easy to think of God’s opponents as “them,” but see ch. 1:24–26. What is it that these people do not discern or understand (v. 11, see 1:2–4). What is the lesson for us?
- What does God promise for the remnant that comes through his discipline purified? (See vv. 12–13).

CHAPTERS 28-29

Background

- Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel sat on the top of a very symmetrical hill in the center of a rich valley. Its crenelated walls would look like a crown on the top of the hill (28:1, 4).
- The word translated “justice” and “judgment” in 28:6 is Heb. mishpat which refers to the order of life as God designed it.
- The words translated “precept” and “line” in 28:10 and 13 are very possibly nonsense syllables spoken by children. Alternatively, they are rhyming couplets used to teach children reading and writing
- The people of “strange lips” (28:11) are the Assyrians.
- The “scoffer” is the most serious sinner – the person who not only does wrong, but mocks the right and those who do it.
- The “covenant with death” (28:15,18) might refer to an alliance with Egypt (which is discussed in detail later in this section), but it may also be a covenant with the Canaanite god of Death. In either case it won’t work!

28:1-6

1. Why will Yahweh send one to trample the crown of Ephraim (Israel)? Two issues are mentioned.
2. How are the two issues related?
3. Observe that the relationship between vv. 1-4 and 5-6 is one of contrast. Exactly what is being contrasted? Why are these things being contrasted? What does such a contrast imply?”?)
4. What is “a spirit of justice”? (See background above.) What is meant by this statement?

28:7–13

1. The verses are a particularization of the general statement in vv. 1–4. What are the particular manifestations of the “drunkenness” of the leadership. How does this relate to our own situation? Why call this behavior drunkenness?
2. If we won’t listen to God, what are some of the “strange lips” he may use to speak to us?
3. Doesn’t God want his wayward people to be healed (v. 13)? Think of our discussion of 6:9–10.

28:14–22

1. In contrast to 28:1–13 (addressed to Ephraim—n. Israel) to whom are these verses addressed? But to what class of people are both addressed?
2. What lies (v. 15) are we tempted to take as our refuge in difficult times?
3. What is God’s antidote to the lies of this world (v. 16; cf. Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6). How will that work to accomplish what v.17 promises? (Remember the connection between “the truth” and “being true” in Biblical thought.)
4. What are some of the ways that life (as God orchestrates it) demolishes the lies behind which we tend to take refuge?

28:23–29

An extended poem speaking of the way God has organized the world. What does an “ignorant” farmer know that the sophisticated scoffers seem not to know?

29:1–4

1. Note the opening word (cf. 28:1). What does Ariel (Jerusalem) think will protect her (v. 1)?
2. What does v. 4 tell us about their attitude? Why might they have felt that way? What about us?

29:5–8

What does the first word of v. 5 tell us about the relationship with vv. 1–4? What? Why? What?

29:9–14

1. When thinking of the tone of this section as compared with the previous one remember what I have said about Isaiah's typical approach to promise.
2. Compare this section to 28:7–13. What similarities do you see?
3. Compare v. 13 with Matt. 15:3–9. How does this apply to us?
4. What is ironic about v. 14? Compare to 28:21.

29:15–22

1. Notice the first word in v. 15. What brought sorrow in 28:1–13, and in 29:1–14 (espec. 9–14)?
2. What brings sorrow here? How does it relate to those?
3. Notice the proportion of condemnation to promise here as opposed to the proportions in 28:1–22 and 29:1–14. Keep this in mind in the next four chapters.
4. What is promised and how does it relate to the problems detailed thus far in chs. 28–29?
5. What is the predicted response to conviction, repentance and redemption? How do we do that?

CHAPTERS 30-31

Background

- Remember that “to be shamed” (cf. 31:3, 5) in OT context is to be disgraced, often by a failed trust.
- The Negeb (30:6) is the northern edge of the Sinai wilderness, progressively more hostile as one goes farther south. Perhaps the coast road to Egypt was blocked by the Assyrians so that communication with Egypt had to be round about through the desert.
- Although the name Rahab (30:7) has not yet been found in any of the myths, it is apparent that this was another of the names for the chaos monster. Here Isaiah mocks Egypt with an oxymoron: a helpless monster.
- “Inscribe it in a book” (30:8) suggests again that Isaiah’s words were not for his own generation, which would not listen (cf. 6:9–10), but for generations to come (cf. 8:16–17).

30:1–5

1. Compare this “woe” with the previous three (28:1; 29:1; 29:15). How is it similar to and different from those?
2. Why call them “stubborn children?” What are some of the implications of calling them this? (See also v. 9.)
3. According to vv. 1–2, what have they done wrong? (Think twice; don’t get trapped by the obvious.) What does this say about our decision-making? Under what circumstances might Egypt have been an acceptable choice?

30:6–7

1. What would you call the literary device used in these two verses? (We have seen it before in 3:16–4:1; 5:1–6; etc.) What is its function?
2. What are the donkeys carrying? To where are they carrying it? In the context why are they doing this? What do Isaiah (and God) think of this? What things are we tempted to try to buy (futilely)?

30:8–14

1. Why were they unwilling to hear the instruction (*torah*) of Yahweh? Why are we?
2. How do vv. 10–11 relate to our own time. Can you be specific?
3. What is Isaiah’s opening response in v. 12 saying to us about the nature of reality?

4. “Perverseness and oppressions” (v. 12) is probably a reference to the practices of the Egypt on which they were tempted to rely. How might this apply to us?
5. What are the points of the images in vv. 13–14? Can you think of anything in recent history that bears this out?

30:15–18

1. What does God plead with them to do, and what are the two results (note the two “therefores” in vv. 15 and 18)?
2. So what should we not do and what should we do when faced with a threatening situation?
3. What are the four things Yahweh wants to do for us according to v. 18? What prevents him from giving them to us?

30:19–26

1. Note the changing proportions of hope and judgment the farther we go into chapters 28–33.
2. What will be the characteristics of the remnant in vv. 19–22? Relate to 6:9–10.
3. What is the point of the imagery of vv. 23–26?

30:27–33

1. Why don’t the Judeans need to enter into an alliance with Egypt?
2. Why say that Yahweh’s “name” comes from afar (v. 27)? What does “name” refer to in the OT?
3. What is the setting in which God’s judgment on the nations (as represented by Assyria) is placed (vv. 29, 32, 33)? Why is this?

31:1–9

1. “Substantiation” occurs when the effect is stated first and the cause second. Notice the “for” beginning v. 4. What is the effect and what is the cause in these verses?
2. Notice the title in vv. 4 and 5. What is its significance here?
3. Why should the people turn to God (vv. 6–7 substantiation)? How does this apply to us?
4. Look at the events reported in 37:36–38 and compare to the prediction here in v. 8. Trust Egypt?

CHAPTERS 32–33

Background

It is not entirely clear who “the betrayer” is in 33:1. It is probably a reference to Egypt, who was paid a lot of money to protect Judah (30:6–7) but who, after one half-hearted effort, scuttled back behind the Nile delta. (See also 20:4–6; 24:16; and 29:7.)

- Lebanon, Sharon, Carmel and Bashan (33:9) were all places noted for their fertility and lush vegetation.
- The interpretation of 33:23ab is very uncertain. Perhaps the safest conclusion is to relate it to v. 21: even though Yahweh is a broad safe river, we cannot dare to think that we can navigate that river on our own.

32:1–8

1. Notice what is missing here in v. 1 as compared with the first verse of the other chapters in this section. Now look at 30:27 and remember that chapter divisions are not original to the writing.
2. Is this stanza negative or positive? Sum up its message in a sentence. Compare this theme with that of chapter 28 and 29:9–13. What is the teaching for us?
3. How do the promises of vv. 3–4 work out in the lives of believers, or how should they?

32:9–14

1. What is the literary relationship between vv. 1–8 and vv. 9–14? Why does Isaiah do this? (Remember what is characteristic of him after a promise.)
2. What is the condition that concerns Isaiah (and God)? How does this manifest itself in our attitudes and behavior?
3. Verses 13–14 tell us how to understand vv. 10–11. Are we to take 10–11 literally or metaphorically? Think about how we have seen these two themes elsewhere in the book.

32:15–20

1. What will make the difference from barrenness to abundance? How does this relate to our lives?
2. List the four results of the Spirit's coming in vv. 16–17. How does this relate to the teaching of many in the Pentecostal or charismatic groups today? What is the difference between “gifts” and “fruits”?
3. What is the literary relationship among vv. 18–20. What is Isaiah saying? (Look back at 26:1–8 for a similar treatment.)
4. Look back at 11:1 and forward to 62:1. What will the Messiah make available to the world? How is this related to his ministry?

33:1–6

Skim the entire chapter. What is its tone? Compare this to chapter 28 and remember what I said earlier about changing proportions. (What was the problem there and how does that relate to the promise here?)

1. What was the focus of the first five “woes” in this section? How is this one different and how does it relate to what was driving the subjects of the first five (see Background above)? What does this say about the way in which we should address our problems?
2. How are vv. 2–6 different from 30:15–18? What is the lesson? What are some ways that you can practice this in your life?

33:7–9

What is Isaiah doing here that is typical of him?

33:10–16

1. What happens when humans are exalted (2:6–22) and what happens when Yahweh is exalted?
2. Verses 14–16 make no mention of grace. Are we talking about an OT teaching of salvation by works here? Why or why not? (See 33:24.)

33:17–22

1. How does the promise of v. 17 relate to the last statement of 6:5?
2. Relate the promise of vv. 18–20 to 28:11 and 29:14. What does this say about God’s purpose in judgment?
3. What do the three roles in v. 22 tell us about Yahweh and our relationship to him?

33:23–24

Whatever v. 23ab means (see Background above), what do 23cd–24 promise to us?

CHAPTERS 34–35

Background

In 34:2 “devoted them to destruction” (ESV) or “totally destroy” (NIV) are translations of a single word that means *to give over completely to God so as not to be available for any other purpose*. It is the term commonly used to talk about the destruction of the Canaanites. Something has become so corrupt that there is nothing else to do with it except “devote” it to God. Here the entire earth is in that condition.

- Edom lay to the south and east of Judah. Edom’s territory stretched around the south end of the Dead Sea. There was a long history of hostility between the two going all the way back to Jacob and Esau. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and later, Edom assisted the Babylonians.
- “Revenge” is self-serving and destructive; “vengeance,” (34:8) is judicial and impartial.

34:1–4

1. Compare the statements in this stanza to those of 13:1–16. How are they similar? What might that say about the function of this chapter in the larger section of Lessons in Trust?
2. What two things does “the host of heaven” refer to in v. 4? (Remember the previous discussions.)
3. Why does idolatry corrupt our lives? (See the first point under Background above.)

34:5–10

1. What is the literary relationship between vv. 1–4 and vv. 5–10? Note that the same relationship is found in chapter 13 between vv. 1–16 and vv. 17–22. Why does Isaiah do this? What point is he making?
2. Why do you think that Edom is used here?
3. Notice the language of vv. 6–7; what kind of activity is being described? On “sacrifice” in v. 6, see the first note in Background above. How do we avoid becoming a sacrifice ourselves? See 53:10.
4. If we know that God can be trusted to take vengeance (34:8; see also 47:3; Rom. 12:9), what can our attitude be?

34:11–15

1. Once again, compare these verses to 13:20–22. Why these particular descriptions?
2. If we are going to trust the nations, what are we going to end up in?

34: 16–17

What is the point of these two verses? Why are they included here at the end of this chapter?

35:1–4

1. What is the literary relationship between chapters 34 and 35? What is the point being made?
2. Why specify “the wilderness and the dry land?”
3. On 35:2, see 32:9 and the note there.
4. Relate v. 2 to 6:3. What is being said? Now relate it to “glory, glorified,” etc. in John 17.
5. Why is v. 4 good news?

35:5–7

1. Relate the promises here to 6:9–10 and also to both leaders and people in the previous section? What does this mean for us?
1. Compare v. 7 to 34:13. What is the point? What does God promise and not promise concerning “haunts of jackals” and “deserts” in our lives?

35:8–10

1. Why does the promise of redemption include a highway?
2. What are the characteristics of this highway? Why do you think each is included?
3. What is the relation of redemption to holiness?
4. What emotions will be missing from Zion? Why?

So, in the end, why should we not put our trust in humanity and human nations?

What does trust look like, and what does distrust look like?

CHAPTERS 36-37

Background

The fourteenth year of King Hezekiah was 701 B.C. This is the fourteenth year of his full reign. I believe he was co-regent with his father, Ahaz, for several years before that. This is about 35 years after the events reported in chapter 7.

- “Rabshakeh” is an Assyrian military title. It refers to the third highest office in the Army—a very important person.
- Lachish was a major fortress standing between Jerusalem and the Philistine plain where Sennacherib’s army was encamped. 2 Kings tells us that this was the last fortress in all of Judah that the Assyrians had not captured at this time. It had fallen by the time the events of 36:36 occurred.
- The officer has clearly done his homework on recent Judean history (36:7), but his paganism prevented him from understanding the reasons for Hezekiah’s choices.
- Aramaic (36:11) was the common language used for diplomacy and trade in the Assyrian empire.
- “Eat their own dung and drink their own urine” (36:12) refers to the horrible conditions inside a city suffering from a long siege.
- (In re. 37:5–7 and 37:37–38) after the failed attack on Jerusalem, Sennacherib didn’t campaigned in the West again for 19 years. At the end of that time he was murdered by two of his sons in a temple in Nineveh.
- (in re. 37:30–32) because of enemy troops running freely through the land, no planting had been possible the previous fall. They would still be present during the coming fall season. But a year hence, they would be gone.

36:1-3

1. Compare v. 2 with 7:3. What do you think is the importance of this?
2. For the people here in v. 3, compare to chapter 22. Do you see what has happened?

36:4-10

1. How many times does the Assyrian refer to trust (in one form or another) in this speech? How does this relate to the point of chapters 7–39?
2. What kinds of trust does he ridicule? With which ones do you agree?

3. What about v. 10? Is he right or wrong? (Look at 5:26–30.)
4. Is there a logical progression in his arguments? What is he doing?

36:11–22

1. Why does the Assyrian say that if Hezekiah would say that Yahweh would deliver the people he would be wrong?
2. Now look back at v. 10. In the light of what the Assyrian says here, did he really believe that? Look at 10:6ff for a better understanding of what the Assyrians really thought. Then why v. 10? What does this reveal about our enemy's tactics when he tempts us?
3. Who claims he will destroy Yahweh? Is it the god of Assyria? What is the significance of this in the light of the theme introduced in 2:6–22?

37:1–4

What is especially right about Hezekiah's reactions here?

37:5–7

See the background on these verses above.

37:8–13

Compare Sennacherib's words here with those of the Rabshakeh in 36:18–20. What would you say is the “bottom line”?

37:14–20

1. What are the important points of Hezekiah's descriptions and titles for Yahweh in v. 16?
2. What is the difference between God and the gods according to Hezekiah?
3. Why does Hezekiah ask for deliverance and what is the importance of that?

37:21–29

1. What are Sennacherib's sins according to this announcement?
2. Compare 37:26 with 14:24–27. What is it Sennacherib does not understand?
3. Ch. 37:29 describes how the Assyrians took their captives into exile. What is the principle of life here? Cf. Prov. 22:8.

CHAPTERS 38-39

Background

There is some question about the date of the events of chs. 38–39, because the Babylonian leader mentioned in 39:1 is not believed to be in power after 701 B.C., when the events of chs. 36–37 occurred. If that is so, then the most likely time for these things to have occurred would be about 710 B.C. Ch. 38:6 gives some support to this idea. That would mean that Isaiah has intentionally reversed the order. Possible reasons will be discussed.

- Chs. 36–39 are largely duplicated by 2 Kings 18:13–20:19. There are some interesting differences, most of which relate to these two chapters. They will be noted below.
- A “whole heart” is a heart that is has been “put together” so that it is one and undivided for Yahweh. (KJV “perfect”)
- The sun-dial (38:8) was apparently a two-sided staircase with a post on the top to cast a shadow. As the sun went up in the sky, the shadow would climb up the steps on the side away from the sun. Then as the sun declined, the shadow would go down the steps on the other. There is no way of telling whether the miracle involved an optical illusion or an actual alteration of cosmic phenomena. In any case the apparent lengthening of the day would correspond to the promise of lengthened life.
- Some scholars say that Israel had no concept of the afterlife at all and that “Sheol” is simply the grave. But others, I among them, believe that Sheol did refer to an afterlife, but just a kind of gray and dusty one where everybody—good, bad, and indifferent—went. The revelation of heaven and hell, the next world, had to wait until the reality of this world was fully established in Israel’s understanding.
- Although Babylon was nominally under Assyrian control at this time, it was still a very rich and powerful city.

38:1-8 (21-22)

1. Note that the prediction in v. 1 leaves no opening for change, yet it was changed. Does this mean that God’s promises are not reliable? Think about the experience of Jonah. What does this say about our place in God’s scheme of things?

2. Since Yahweh responded so favorably to Hezekiah's plea, this must mean that what Hezekiah claimed met with Yahweh's approval. What are the elements of a life that pleases Yahweh? What does this look like in our daily life?
3. On a "whole heart," see the note above, and then look up the following references: 1 Chr. 28:9; 29:19; 1 Kings 8:57–61; 11:4; 15:14; 2 Chr. 19:9. Is it possible for a human to have "a perfect heart" in this sense? Hezekiah seems to have had.
4. KJV has for v. 5: "Behold I will heal you and after three days you will go up to the house of the Lord, and I will add...." There is no simple textual explanation for the difference.
5. The material here in vv. 21 and 22 appears immediately after v. 6 in Kings.

38:9–20

1. Read this material quickly a couple of times. What would you say is the emotional tone? Excited and praising? Somber and reflective? Is this what you would expect? Why or why not?
2. Express the main thought of vv. 10–15 in a sentence or two. What is Hezekiah saying about his life? Why do you think Isaiah has recorded this?
3. What is Hezekiah's advice as we contemplate our mortality?
4. According to vv. 16–19, why did Hezekiah want to be delivered from death? How does this apply to our lives, even while we believe in heaven?

39:1–4

1. Why did the Babylonians come to visit? In that light, what should Hezekiah have done (look at 2:2–5 and 12:5–6)? Why do you think he didn't?
2. See the note on Babylon above and reflect on the irony of Hezekiah's display (vv. 2–4). What happens when we try to outdo the world?

39:5–8

1. Why do you think Isaiah mentions the Babylonian conquest (125 years in the future) here? Is he saying that Hezekiah's boasting caused it?
2. Hezekiah's response (8a) can possibly be seen as submissive, but what do his inner thoughts say?

What do 38:9 – 39:8 say to us about Hezekiah? Why is he not the promised child" of chs. 7–11?

What questions do chs. 36–39 answer, and what questions are still left to be answered?

CHAPTERS 40–41

Background

Most students of the book of Isaiah agree that chapters 40–55 were written to the Judeans who were exiled to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Most, doubting that Isaiah could have written this material approximately 150 years in advance, think that an anonymous prophet, who was a devotee of Isaiah, wrote the material about 550 B.C. The book makes no reference to such a thing. It seems to want its readers to believe that it is all the work of Isaiah. God's possible reasons for inspiring Isaiah to do this will be discussed in class.

- The theme of chs. 40–55 is Grace: Motive and Means for Servanthood. Chapter 40 is the introduction; chs. 41–48 is part A, Motive, and chs. 49–55 is part B, Means.
- “Comfort” is no longer a good translation for the opening word of 40:1. The idea is to encourage, strengthen.
- In re. 40:13–14, in the myths the gods were always taking counsel with one another to decide what to do.
- In paganism the stars are considered to be the visible representation of the gods. “The Host of Heaven” is an expression for “the gods.”
- “The one from the East” is Cyrus the Persian who would capture Babylon in 539 B.C. and free the Judeans.
- Prior to 539 we know of no people who returned home from exile. It was quite shocking to predict this.

40:1–5

1. What attitude requires encouragement? Why would the exiles be experiencing this emotion?
2. What would be some of the questions the exiles would be asking?
3. What kinds of encouragement does the prophet offer here? How would these be encouraging?
4. Compare v. 3 to Mark 1:1–3. In that light, to what are vv. 3–5 referring? How does that event fulfill these promises? Compare also to the promise of 7:14.
5. What do these verses say about Yahweh’s desire to deliver?

40:6–11

1. If the goal here is encouragement, how could vv. 6–8 be understood as encouragement?
2. Compare the final clause of v. 5 with the final clause of v. 8. What is the point of this repetition?
3. Jerusalem (Zion) and the cities of Judah (v. 9) have been destroyed. How can they be the heralds of deliverance? And to whom are they speaking?
4. What is the good news Jerusalem is to declare (vv. 10–11)? What are the two different uses of “arm” in the two verses, and how do they relate to the message of good news?

40:12–26

1. What is the expected answer to the rhetorical questions in vv. 12–14? What is the point?
2. Relate vv. 15–17 to the points made in chs. 13–23.
3. What is the point of 18–20? Is it only that Yahweh has no idol? Compare 46:1–7.
4. What is the point of 21–24? Who is Yahweh being compared to here? How is he different?
5. Who is Yahweh being compared to in vv. 25–26 (see Background).
6. What do verses 12–26 say about Yahweh’s ability to deliver?

40:27–31

1. Relate these verses to the theme of trust.
2. What do these verses say about Yahweh’s intent to deliver?

41:1–7

1. What is Yahweh claiming to have done in vv. 1–4? (See Background above.)
2. What is the significance of Yahweh’s terms for himself in 41:4.
3. What is the response of the nations to the news of Cyrus’ coming?

41:8–20

1. What should Israel’s response be (vv. 10, 13, 14)? Why?
2. Does the exile mean that Yahweh has cast Israel off? What does he call them? What is the significance of that?
3. What will their special relationship mean for them (vv. 11–12; 15–16)?

4. What ideas and feelings is the poem in vv. 17–20 conveying?
5. Notice that “the Holy One of Israel” is repeated three times here. Why do you think this is?

41:21–29

1. This is the first of several court cases against the idols. What are the charges?
2. Why would ability to predict the future be a problem for the pagan gods?

CHAPTERS 42–43

Background

The “coastlands” or “islands”(42:10, 12) are the far ends of the earth.

- Kedar and Sela (42:11) are desert cities.
- The exchange mentioned in 43:3 probably refers to Cyrus, the Persian emperor who freed the Judeans, being able thoroughly to conquer Egypt, something neither the Assyrians nor the Babylonians had been able to do.
- “The former things” (43:9) refers to specific predictions of the future that have been made in the past (see 41:26).

42:1–9

1. What is the attitude of this servant?
2. What will be the function of this servant?
3. What will Yahweh do for, and with, this servant?
4. Compare this servant to the one in 41:8–20, especially in regard to the three questions above. What are the similarities and differences? Are they the same servant?
5. For further insight into the identity of this servant, compare 61:1–3.

42:10–13

1. What in the surrounding context might account for this outburst of praise?
2. Notice the various parts of the earth mentioned. What is the point?

42:14–17

1. What was Yahweh’s feeling about the exile? Was he grimly glad that the Israelites had finally gotten what was coming to them? How eager was he to deliver them?
2. What is the point of the reversals in these verses, especially in relation to the idols mentioned in v. 17?

42:18–25

1. What are the characteristics of this servant?
2. In the past God had given them his glorious instructions for life (“law”) to share with the world. But what has become of them? Instead of blessing

them, what has it done to them? How does this relate to us? What will make the difference?

3. According to vv. 23–25, why are the Israelites in captivity? Was it because of Babylon’s superior power? What would this mean about their deliverance?

43:1–7

1. In spite of the situation of the previous stanza, what will God do for his people? What divine quality is this an expression of?
2. 43:1 gives us the third reason for not being afraid. What are the first two (41:10 and 13)?
3. The promise to restore the exiles from all over the earth is similar to that found in 11:11.

43:8–13

1. This is the second court case against the idols. Verse 8 refers to God’s witnesses (see 43:8). How confident is he of his case given witnesses like these?
2. What is the function of “witnesses” here? What knowledge were they supposed to have? What is their testimony supposed to accomplish? How does this relate to us? See Acts 1:8.
3. List the assertions made about God in vv. 10–12. What does his saving power have to do with any of these?

43:14–21

1. Remember that “holy” refers to Yahweh’s absolute otherness from this world. Why is this stressed twice in vv. 14 and 15?
2. What event is vv. 16–17 referring to? Why did God remind them of it if he wants them to forget it (v. 18)? What does he want them to remember and what does he want them to forget?

43:22–28

1. One thing the Israelites had done was to bring offerings, so of what is God accusing them?
2. When do we weary God with our sins?
3. Of what were the Israelites apparently accusing God (v. 26)? How does God respond?
4. On what basis does God forgive us?

CHAPTERS 44–46

Background

- “Abomination” (44:19) describes something that is disgusting. Those things that are disgusting to Yahweh are things that are contrary to his creation order (Lev. 18:22; Deut. 7:25; 18:10–12; 22:5).
- 44:7 has caused some people concern for in its most literal sense it seems to make Yahweh the author of evil. What the Old Testament (OT) is combatting is the belief of paganism that one set of gods does the good things and another set does the bad things. No, says the OT, there is one God and he accepts ultimate responsibility for the world as it is. This is not to say he causes moral evil; but by making a world where that is possible, he is the ultimate cause of it.

44:1–5

1. Here is the fourth reason why servant Israel should not be afraid. What is it? How does this relate to us?
2. What fears about Israel’s future did the exile produce, and how does this promise address that fear?
3. What will be the response of Israel’s descendants and what is the significance of that response? Why is that the work of the Spirit?

44:6–8

1. This is a brief recap of the case against Babylon’s gods. List Yahweh’s claims.
2. Isaiah likes to pile up names and titles for God, as here in v. 6. What is the point of this particular group?
3. 44:8 gives the fifth reason not to be afraid. What is it?

44:9–20

1. This long prose diatribe may be inserted at this point because it is an appropriate place for it. If you were going to sum up its point in a sentence or two, what would you say?
2. Why is an idol particularly disgusting to Yahweh (see Background above)?

44:21–22

1. If vv. 9–20 are an insertion, then the “these things” (v. 21) might refer to what was said in vv. 6–8. How would remembering those things relate to what 21–22 say?
2. How would these assertions motivate Israel to trust Yahweh?

44:23–28

1. Compare v. 23 to 42:10–13. How are they similar?
2. What is the particular evidence of Yahweh’s uniqueness given in vv. 25–28? Why is that important as evidence?

45:1–8

1. Why is Yahweh going to give Cyrus the privileges of vv. 1–3a (3b, 6)? Why is this important?
2. What is the point of vv. 7–8 when taken together?

45:9–13

1. Why might the statements of 44:24–45:8 cause “heartburn” for some readers?
2. What is Yahweh’s response to their concern? Think of the last chapters of Job.

45:14–19

1. What is Yahweh’s response (vv. 18–19) to the statement of the nations (and perhaps Israel as well), that he is a God who hides himself (v. 15)?
2. But a lot of the world is in darkness. Could he not have revealed himself more fully to the world?

45:20–46:7

1. Look at the verbs for carrying and lifting in this segment. What is the difference between the idols and Yahweh? What does this mean for you?
2. Verses 20–21 are another statement of the case against the gods. Review the points.
3. Repeatedly it has been said Yahweh is the only Savior (e.g. 45:21–22). On what basis is such a claim made? Are there not many ways to heaven?

46:8–13

1. Refer to 43:16–19. What are we to remember and what are we to forget?
2. Review the “I Am” statements of Yahweh in chs. 42–46 in the light of the summary here in 9a–11.
3. List the things we have learned.

CHAPTERS 47–48

Background

“Chaldea” (v. 1) refers to extreme southern Mesopotamia. It appears that the father of Nebuchadnezzar came from that area. But the Bible often uses Chaldea as a synonym for Babylon.

- Instead of fine voluminous garments, Babylon will be wearing scanty rags that barely cover her “nakedness.”
- The learning of Babylon (v. 10) was legendary. Their collection of omen interpretations runs to 70 volumes.
- Babylon was a great commercial center. 47:15 probably refers to Babylon’s trading partners who were of no help in the crisis hour.
- Probably “the former things” (48:3) refers to the prediction of the exile which had been predicted as far back as Moses, whereas the new things (48:6) would be Isaiah’s prediction of Cyrus and the deliverance from exile.
- 48:22 could be Isaiah’s typical way of not letting a beautiful promise for the future obscure darker present realities. However, it is also possible that this verse has been inserted from the end of ch. 57 where it fits more naturally. As it stands now, the phrase divides 40–66 rather neatly into 3 9-chapter segments. Too neat?

47:1–4

1. In light of what was said in the previous chapters, why will Babylon have to come down off her throne?
2. Instead of a queen, what will Babylon become?
3. How is vengeance (v. 3) different from revenge? See v. 6 for explanation. What is the practical value for us?
4. What is the significance of what is said in v. 4?

47:5–9

1. What is the point of v. 6? What did God do, and what did Babylon do? Does the punishment seem unfair? Look on at vv. 7–8. What is the underlying issue?

- What is the problem with Babylon's assertion in v. 8 (and 10)? Compare to 41:4; 42:8; 45:18; 46:9; and 48:12.
- Compare v. 9 with 54:1–8.

47:10–15

- Verse 9b provides the lead-in to this stanza. Why are we tempted to engage in magic and sorcery?
- What has led Babylon astray? Is God opposed to learning? When does learning become a problem?
- What can learning not do by itself (v. 14)? What can do that? Why?

48:1–2

- How many times do words for hearing appear in this chapter? What is the point? How related to ch. 6:9–10? Notice how many times reference is made to Yahweh's speaking. Why is this? How does this relate to the first question?
- What are the Judeans depending on for their deliverance? What is the problem with that? How does that relate to us?
- If neither Judah's good behavior nor their obvious repentance is going to cause Yahweh to be gracious, what will? What is the source of God's grace? (See v. 9–11.)

48:3–8

- Why did God predict things in advance? (Remember the case against the gods in chs. 41–46.)
- Why the use of the word "create" in v. 7? What can't the gods do? Why?
- What is the condition of the people (vv. 4, 8b)? What does this say about the nature of sin? (Compare with Deut. 10:16. What is the character of a "circumcised heart"?)

48:9–16

- Why is Yahweh going to deliver them?
- For what reasons is he going to be able to deliver them?
- Why the recurring references to his speaking (see first question on 48:1–2 above)?

48:17–22

1. What is the cause for grief in vv. 17–19? What does Yahweh want to do for us?
2. How do vv. 20–21 sum up chs. 41–48?

CHAPTERS 49–51

Background

In 49:22 the Hebrew word “nes” (ensign, banner, standard, etc.) occurs again. It is used in the same way as here in 11:10, 12.

- 50:1 suggests that the exiles were accusing Yahweh of having “divorced” Judah, or to change the metaphor, of having sold his “children” to clear his own debts, as though their situation were somehow his fault.
- 50:2a–b could be interpreted in a couple of different ways: it could refer to the situation before exile when there was no one to answer God’s call to repent, nor to intercede for a sinful nation. It might also refer to the fact that there is no one else who can redeem us except God. 2c seems to support the latter alternative.

49:1–7

1. Compare these verses to 42:1–9. What similarities do you find? Where is the major emphasis? Is it on the benefits the servant will receive or on his function? What is that function?
2. What will be the apparent outcome of the servant’s work (vv. 4.7)? The servant’s response?
3. Compare v. 2 with 11:4. Who is this servant?

49:8–12

1. According to this message, what will the servant do—for whom?
2. Compare v. 9 to 61:1. Who is this servant?

49:13

Compare this verse to 42:10–12 and 44:23—how are they similar? Why should what precedes in each case produce this kind of response?

49:14–50:3

1. What is Zion’s response in v. 14 to Yahweh’s previous promises? Compare to 40:27 and notice the subtle difference between the two? What is Zion’s concern here? Is it for deliverance or for something else?
2. In 49:15–26, there is one prevailing concern of Judah’s that God is addressing. What is it, and why would it have been a concern?

3. Look at v. 23c and d as well as 26c and d. What thoughts do you find there that we have encountered elsewhere in this study and others? What is God saying to the exiles? What is the significance of such statements for us?
4. On 50:1, see the background above. According to 50:2, whose fault is it if we are judged?
5. Notice the occurrence of “hand” in 50:2, and be alert for its appearance in following passages.

50:4–9

1. What is this servant asserting about himself in vv. 4–5? How does this compare to the nation of Israel (cf. e.g. 42:18–20)?
2. Compare v. 6 to 41:2–3 and 49:4. What progression do you see? Why do you think this progression exists?
3. Compare vv. 7–9 with 49:4b. What can we say about the servant’s attitude? What does this say to us?

50:10–11

1. In the light of Hebrew poetry, what is v. 10 saying about the identity of the servant?
2. What do vv. 10 and 11 say about our choices in life?

51:1–8

1. How many times is “listen to me” repeated here? To whom is it addressed? Why these folks?
2. What does God promise here? Why does he repeat these things in the particular context?

51:9–16

1. These verses seem to reflect the attitude of those addressed in the previous verses. What are some of those attitudes? How about us?
2. What similarities do you see with chapter 40?

51:17–23

1. What are the effects of Jerusalem’s having drunk the cup of God’s judgment?
2. But what is going to happen to that cup? But that is not the end for cup; who will drink it finally?

CHAPTERS 52–53

Background

Before the invention of gunpowder, it was difficult to break into a walled city. The primary alternative was siege. The besieging army would surround the city and prevent anyone from going in or out, hoping to starve out the inhabitants. For those inside, the only hope was to outwait the besiegers. One of the ways for that to happen was for the besieging general to be forced to withdraw his forces because of some event elsewhere in his domain. That is what is described in 52:7–12: messengers can be seen coming with the news of victory in a battle elsewhere that is going to force the besiegers to withdraw.

- The Greek translation of “him who brings good news”(52:7) is the origin of our word “evangelist.”
- One of the clearest indications that the chapter divisions are not inspired is here. The chapter break between chaps. 52 and 53 should occur between 51:12 and 13; the unit of thought is 52:13–53:12, subdivided into five three-verse stanzas.
- The verb translated “deal wisely” or “prosper” (v. 13) also means “to succeed” and I think that is the sense here.
- The verb translated “sprinkle” (v. 15) might also mean “startle,” which would make better sense in the parallelism.
- The correct understanding of 53:5 is “on him was the beating that brought us health (*shalom*).”

52:1–6

1. Compare the opening words of v. 1 to 51:9. What is the point?
2. Contrast 52:2 with 47:1. How does this relate to Isaiah’s repeated point?
3. Compare vss. 3–6 with what was said in 50:1. Why did Yahweh “sell” his people? What does that mean for his capacity to redeem?
4. What does it mean in this context for them to “know Yahweh’s name” (v. 6)? What about us?

52:7–12

1. See the background to this passage above.
2. Compare v. 8 to 40:3–5. In the light of the background why is salvation described in terms of God's coming?
3. What is the tone here? Calm, reflective, contemplative? Why this tone? Compare to 49:13.
4. What is the metaphor in v. 10? What is it describing? (See also 50:2; 51:5, 9.)
5. If chaps. 49–55 are not describing deliverance from Babylon, what are the people going out from in vss. 11–12?

52:13–15

1. This stanza is marked by dramatic contrast. What is the contrast between v. 13 and vss. 14–15? Why such a contrast?
2. According to vv. 14–15, why will kings be speechless when looking at this servant?

53:1–3

1. What is the problem with “the arm of the Lord” as it is described in these verses?
2. Why would people despise such a person?
3. Look at the descriptions of the servant in 42:1–9; 49:1–4, and 50:4–9 and compare with these verses. Do you see a theme? Now look at 11:1–3. Why will Yahweh’s promised deliverer look like this?

53:4–6

Why did “we” think the servant suffered (v. 4)? But what was the actual reason for his suffering? Notice the pronouns.

53:7–9

1. Compare the sheep nature in us (v. 6) vs. the sheep nature in him (v. 7). What is the difference?
2. In that culture, what is the significance of the servant’s being cut off without children (“generation”)?
3. What are vss. 7–9 saying about the fairness of what happened to the servant?

53:10–12

1. How is v. 12 (the servant being treated as a victor, cf. 52:13) a logical conclusion of vv. 10–11?
2. Why did the servant die a substitutionary death? Accident? Who did this to him? Why?
3. When will God's will be successful ("prosper," v. 10)? Why?
4. What kind of "knowledge" are we talking about in v. 11 (cf. v. 12)? How do you relate 52:13–53:12 to 49:1–52:12, especially to the increasing sense of anticipation there?

CHAPTERS 54–55

Background

- Both “everlasting love” (54:8) and “steadfast love” (v. 10) are translations of *hesed*.
- “Steadfast, sure love” (55:3) is literally “the dependable *heseds* of David.”

54:1–10

1. In chapters 49–52:12, the dominant note was Yahweh’s encouragement to believe that he was going to deliver them. What is the dominant note here and in the rest of chaps. 54–55?
2. What is God promising to Israel here and how does that relate to how she had formerly seen herself (vss. 1, 4, 6)? Why would that have been good news?
3. What five things are said about God in v. 5. How should those affect our thinking?
4. What do vss. 7–8 tell us about Yahweh’s anger in contrast with his love and compassion? See Psalm 30:5.
5. To understand what “covenant of peace” connotes, look up Num 25:12; Ezek 34:25; 37:26. Now look up Rom 5:1, 10.
6. How many times does “compassion” appear in vv. 7–10? What does it mean for God to have compassion on someone?

54:11–17

1. What is the use of precious stones signifying here? See also Rev. 21:11, 18–21.
2. What three things is God saying about Zion’s future security in vv. 13–17? There are two possible ways of understanding these promises: 1) They describe the new Jerusalem and are unconditional; 2) They are said of historic Jerusalem—and then what? Surely those promises have not been fulfilled. Does God not keep his promises?
3. The word ESV translates “vindication” in v. 17 is the same word translated “righteousness” in v. 14. What might the promise in v. 14 be saying if we translated “righteousness” there?

55:1–5

1. What is God inviting them to come and receive for free (v. 3)? What is the significance of these?
2. What did God promise David? According to v. 4, why did God call David? What will the covenant God is promising mean for Israel? (Look at 2:1–5.) How will that goal be accomplished (v. 5)? What does this mean for us?

55:6–11

1. What does “...while he may be found” and “...while he is near” imply? Why might this be the case? Does God’s compassion change?
2. Look at “ways” and “thoughts” in vv. 7–9. Why are our ways and thoughts not identical to God’s? Give some examples of our “wicked ways” and “unrighteous [not-right] thoughts.” [Don’t exclude “good folks” from these examples.]
3. How does Yahweh’s scheme of salvation differ from one that we might derive? Why is that a problem for us?
4. Notice that v. 10 begins with “for,” which introduces the cause of a prior effect. How are vv. 6–9 the effect of what is said in vv. 10–11? In this regard, think about “word” (v. 11) in the larger context of God’s means of salvation.

55:12–13

1. Compare these verses to chapter 35. What similarities do you see? What do you think is the significance of these?
2. Look back at 1:2; what is the difference between the statements there and those here?
3. Why should nature rejoice over our reconciliation to God?
4. Why does our “going out in joy” and “being led forth in *shalom*” (v. 12) “make a name—an everlasting sign—for Yahweh” (v. 13)?
5. How are these two chapters the result of 52:13–53:23?

CHAPTERS 56–57

Background

Chapters 56–66 are generally believed to have been addressed to the Judeans in the post-exilic period (538–425 BC). They seem to be addressed to people who believe that they are accepted by God simply because of their birthright, and that righteous behavior does not really matter (a conclusion they might have drawn from their deliverance from Babylon). But there seem to have been others who were sincerely troubled that their return to the land had produced no real change in their behavior (Isaiah seems to speak for them at various points). God encourages these people to believe that he will deal with their problem and will shine through them to be “a light to the nations.”

The references to idolatry (57:3–13; 65:2–7) are somewhat surprising if this section is indeed addressed to the returnees, because it is often thought that the exile cured the people of idolatry. However careful study of such books as Haggai and Zechariah (520 BC) and Ezra and Nehemiah (458–445 BC) show us that the religious situation in Judea was very confused for at least 125 years after the return. It is also possible that these references simply reflect the unrighteous behavior that Isaiah knew in his own lifetime, or that the proud orthodoxy of some of the returnees was really no different than the rank paganism of earlier generations (see 66:3–4, 17).

56:1–8

1. What two groups are these verses addressed to? What is surprising about this? Cf. Deut. 23:7–8. Why might those groups have been excluded at first if they were going to be allowed in later?
2. List the kinds of behavior that will make these people acceptable to God. How do these apply to us?
3. What do vv. 7c–8 tell us about God’s ultimate purpose with the Judeans and their temple? Now look at 66:18–23; similar or different? This will be important later.
4. Now go back and look at v. 1. Why are they to keep justice and do righteousness according to this verse? What does this tell us about the place of righteousness in the Christian life?

56:9–12

1. This stanza is part of a larger section that extends to 57:13. Scan the whole section; what is the overall theme? What is its relation to 56:1–8?
2. Who are the blind, sleeping watchmen (9–10) or the dogs/shepherds with big appetites (11–12)? Cf. 28:7–8; Ezek. 3:16–18.

57:1–2

According to these verses, what is a possible reason for the untimely death of righteous people? What do we often accuse God of when such a thing happens?

57:3–13

1. What do vv. 3 and 4 say about the “birthright” of these arrogant people (see Background above)? If they claim that their “mother” was Judah, what is God’s estimate of that mother’s character?
2. Verses 5–10 describe typical pagan practices. But suppose Isaiah is saying that their orthodox religious practices are really pagan in nature, as though they were actually doing those things. What would that mean, for them and us? How can you be orthodox and pagan at the same time?
3. Verses 9–10 describe how hard people work to supply their own needs. Why do we have such difficulty trusting God with our needs (taking “refuge in me”[v.13])? (Look at v. 11.)

57:14–21

1. What are some obstructions that need to be removed from our way (v. 14) if we are to experience the reality of God in our lives?
2. What is the remarkable contrast in v. 15? How does this relate to the theme of arrogance we have seen throughout the book?
3. What do vv. 16–18 tell us about God’s ultimate purposes? Compare to 54:7–8 in the previous week’s study. What is Oswalt’s line: “God’s intended last word...?”
4. Where does the cure for our “backsliding” come from (v. 18)? (Note that there *is* a cure—we do not need to continue to do this!) But we have a part to play; what is it (v. 15)? This is not merely sorrow. The Hebrew word means “crushed.” What does that mean about our response to sin in our lives?
5. What do vv. 19–21 teach us about universalism—the doctrine that all will be saved in the end?

CHAPTERS 58-59

Background

Fasting is not spoken of very much in the Old Testament (OT). It is only commanded in connection with the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29) where it is called “afflicting oneself.” It is urged in Joel 1:13, as an expression of repentance in the face of natural disaster. Nehemiah did it as an expression of repentance when he heard that Jerusalem’s walls were still in ruins more than 100 years after the destruction. The great danger is that it becomes a device for manipulating God and getting him to do what we want, rather than a genuine act of repentance.

- One of the great principles of the relation between the New Testament (NT) and the OT is that of affirmation/adaptation. The NT affirms the essential truth of what the OT said, but then adapts the practices to confirm to further deeper revelation. A classic example is Passover/The Lord’s Supper. Passover celebrated the deliverance from the Death Angel in Egypt as a result of the gracious provision of God. The Lord’s Supper celebrates the deliverance from Death itself through the gracious provision of the Lamb of God. Similarly, the Sabbath was a celebration of the Creator, reminding us that we did not create ourselves nor the provisions for our survival—Yahweh did, and is to be worshipped. The first Christians realized that it is even greater news that God has redeemed us by his grace. So we worship and rest on the day of Resurrection and Pentecost. Like OT believers, we remind ourselves that our life here and hereafter, is a gift.
- It is unclear to whom the promise of 59:21 is addressed: the prophet, the Warrior, or the people. The content is clear, however.

58:1–7

1. What is the problem in v. 2? How does the evidence from the following verses support this judgment? How does this relate to us?
2. What does v. 3 tell us about their reason for fasting? See Background above.
3. What is v. 4 saying about their real reasons for fasting? Do you think they were actually fasting in order to do those things? Then what is the point?

- What is the difference in the focus of vv. 6–7 from that of v. 5? What is the significance of that difference?
- Why is right treatment of others, especially those weaker than we, so important to Yahweh?
- What is the correct balance between expressions of devotion and worship, and righteous living?

58:8–12

- According to this stanza what things can we expect from God if we care for others, especially the downtrodden?
- What is the relationship between those actions and the blessings? Why do those actions have that result?

58:13–14

- On the surface, Sabbath-keeping seems a great deal like fasting: another form of depriving ourselves. Yet fasting is severely criticized, while sabbath-keeping is strongly commanded. Why were the people more likely to fast than to keep the Sabbath?
- What important theological truths does Sabbath exist to teach? How can we today embody these practices in our Sunday behavior? (See background above on Sabbath/Sunday.)

59:1–15a

- List the kinds of things the “righteous” returnees were guilty of in vv. 1–8. Why couldn’t God “save” them from such practices according to v. 1?
- So what is the result, according to vv. 9–15a?
- What does this say about sin in believers? Do we “continue in sin that grace may abound”? Why or why not?

59:15b–21

- What is the solution to the problem? Why is there no one to help?
- Compare the “arm” here to that in 53:1. What is the difference? Why?
- If these verses are indeed addressed to those returned from exile, then who are the “enemies” whom the Warrior is defeating (vv. 17–19)? Think about the immediate preceding context.
- What is the requirement for redemption (v. 20). Why is it a requirement?
- Regardless of who is being addressed in v. 21, what is the result of gracious redemption there?

CHAPTERS 60–62

Background

Tarshish (60:9) was probably in Spain, and thus symbolized the end of the world (as do “islands” in the same verse. Remember that “vengeance” (61:2) is a positive theme in the OT, meaning that God will repay those who have in some way injured his people.

60:1–3

1. Compare these verses to 59:9–11. What is the difference? What has come between that could account for this difference? How would it make the difference?
2. Where does the light and glory come from? Within them? (See vv. 19–20)
3. For what purpose is the light? What is the danger in seeking God’s fullness in our lives?

60:4–14

1. What will the nations—the former oppressors—bring to Zion? Why do they bring these things (v. 9)? Why do they want to do that?
2. “The Holy One of Israel” occurs for the last times in the book in vv. 9 and 14. What does this phrase connote? Look at such references as 1:4; 30:11, 15; 37:23; and 41:14. What has happened?
3. For what will the wealth of the world be used? What is the significance of this?

60:15–22

1. What will be the evidence that the people are truly redeemed (vv. 15–16)?
2. Compare 26:1 to 60:18? What is the point of such language?
3. Compare v. 21 with 58:6–8. Is “righteousness” merely a position that God gives us? Why or why not? How does our righteousness glorify God?

61:1–3

1. Compare v. 1 to 11:1–3. Who is this?
2. List what this anointed one will do? When he has completed his work, what will be the result (v. 3b and compare to 60:21b)? What is the significance of this?
3. In the context of this section, what are the people mourning over; to what are they held captive? In that light, how does this person relate to the Divine Warrior of 59:15b–21 and 63:1–6?

61:4–6

1. 61:4–62:12 is parallel to 60:1–22. Compare the two segments with each other; how are they similar to and different from each other? What conclusions do you draw?
2. If the foreigners take care of the menial work in Israel, what will that free God’s people to become? Look up Exodus 19:5–6; how do the two passages relate to each other? What do these passages say about the purpose of Israel’s election?

61:7–9

1. Who is the speaker in these verses? What things can we say about him from these verses?
2. Compare the “everlasting covenant” in vv. 8 and 9 with that 55:3–5. How are they similar and different? Why does God make this covenant with them?

61:10–11

1. Who is the speaker in these verses? Suggest a reason for this, perhaps in the light of the previous stanza.
2. Why does the speaker delight in Yahweh?
3. Notice with what terms “righteousness” is paralleled in vv. 10 and 11. What is the significance?

62:1–5

1. Who is the speaker in these verses?
2. What is the theme that is continued here from the previous stanza?
3. How are righteousness and the evidence of Yahweh’s blessing of his people related?

62:6–12

1. God has given Israel’s grain to her enemies (v.8) since this time; how understand “never again”?
2. Where else has “highway” appeared? How do those relate to this? “Banner”?
3. How do vv. 10–12 relate to each other in the context of the book as a whole?

CHAPTERS 63–66

Background

- Edom, with its capital Bozrah (63:1) is used as a symbol of hostility to God (cf. chap. 33).
- To make wine, grapes were put into a stone vat with a drain drilled into it. Then the grapes were squeezed in various ways, one of which was simply for people to walk around on top of them (63:2–3).

60:1–6

1. Rapidly scan chapters 60–66, looking for similarities to and differences from chapters 56–59.
2. To what part of 56–59 are these verses similar? In particular, look at 59:16 and 63:5. What do you conclude?
3. Who are Israel’s enemies in 56–66? What are they helpless to defeat? So what “peoples” (v. 6) has the Warrior “trodden down”?

63:7–14

1. This is the opening stanza of a poem that extends to 64:12. Scan the entire poem; what is the theme? What are the people asking God to do? On what basis do they make the request?
2. What is the main theme of this stanza?
3. How many references are to the Spirit? Why this unusual emphasis here?

63:15–19

1. What are the people blaming God for here? Why would they do that?
2. What is their appeal, and what is the basis for it?

64:1–12

1. What is the appeal in vv. 1–5a? What is the basis for the appeal?
2. According to vv. 5b–7, why must God act? What does this tell us about salvation?
3. In vv. 8–12, what is the appeal and what is the basis of the appeal?
4. What are your reflections on 63:7–64:12? What is “take-home” for you here?

65:1–16

1. What is God's response to the people's pleas (vv. 1–2)? Where does the problem lie? If we are sinning and unrepentant, whose fault is it?
2. When we look at vv. 3–5, it is hard to imagine any Jews doing these things. If they were not actually doing such, then what is Isaiah saying? Look back at 64:6–7. How might this apply to us? When could our holiness be "smoke in my nostrils"?
3. What do we learn about salvation in vv. 8–12?
4. What do we learn in vv. 13–16?

65:17–25

1. Notice that v. 17 begins with "For." What does this tell us about the relationship of vv. 17–25 to 13–16? Why are heaven or eternal life necessary in view of what precedes in this chapter and indeed is found in the whole Bible?
2. How do the promises here relate to human desires, and what does this say about those desires?
3. Relate v. 24 to the appeals of 63:7–64:12.
4. Compare 65:25 to 11:6–9. What is the significance of this?

66:1–24

1. This chapter is similar to chapter 1 in its alternations between judgment and hope. Find these two kinds of materials in this chapter. What is the nature of the hope, and what is the nature of the judgment?
2. What are the two different attitudes in vv. 1–4? If Yahweh commanded sacrifices, why are they now useless and disgusting? Look back at 1:10–15.
3. What is the primary imagery in vv. 5–13? What is the significance of this imagery?
4. Verse 17 is reminiscent of 65:3–5. Why do you think this particular language is used in this context of Yahweh judging the entire earth (vv. 15–18a)?
5. Compare 18b–23 to 56:1–8. What do you conclude?
6. Why end the book on such a grim note as 65:24? For starters, compare to 1:2.