

Faithful God in Troubled Times

A study in Isaiah



'... but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.'

Isaiah 40 v 31

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Introduction

Our nation and our world are currently facing great challenges. Our way of life and societal values are being undermined and shaken. Ecologically, socially, morally and financially our world is facing fundamental changes and for those with no concept of the true God and His sovereignty, this can feel both frightening and hopeless. In our city today many people have no belief in the God of the Bible and no solid ground on which to live out their lives.

In 680 BC, around the time Isaiah was writing these chapters, the people of Israel were also facing devastating times. For decades Isaiah had been preaching and prophesying, calling God's people back to Him. Sadly they were not listening and as Isaiah had warned in chapter 39 v 5 - 7 they were eventually invaded and taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 605 BC. (You can read the full account of this in 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25) Isaiah had died by this time. When he wrote these chapters he was prophetically writing a message for those that would be living through the destruction of their nation bringing them a message of comfort and hope.

Our city today is lost without God. As the unreliable pillars of our society wobble and collapse we have our faith in God to hold us up. As we study these chapters of Isaiah listen as God speaks to you again whatever your situation. Take to heart the messages of hope and promise of security in Him. Share it with your neighbours, friends and work colleagues that are facing crises. God has never and will never abandon His world or His people. There is hope.

There are some wonderful promises in these chapters of the Bible. We suggest you learn by heart at least two or three of the verses from these studies over the coming weeks to help you in what you face but also to have ready to share with those around you.

You may find the following websites useful in understanding an overview of the book of Isaiah.

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/isaiah_1.shtml

www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/isaiah.htm

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Isaiah

Or have a look at “The message of Isaiah” by Barry Webb, part of “The Bible speaks today” series.

I S A I A H

God, our Comforter



Connect

1. Share anything you already know about Isaiah, the prophet.
2. Can you describe a time you have experienced God’s comfort in your life? What form did this take? (Was it a word from the Bible, in a prayer, some form of practical help offered by another?).



Discover - Read Isaiah 40 v 1-11

“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” v 11

3. What do you know of how an Old Testament shepherd would have tended his flock? How does this show how God leads his people?
4. Why do you think he pays special attention to the lambs and those that have young? What does this mean for the rest of the flock?
5. Share one thing that this verse especially means to you today?



Apply

6. We are Jesus' hands and feet today. He lives through us. Who and how could you offer comfort or support to this week?
7. What can the group pray for you today?



Extra questions

Isaiah reminds the Israelites of four truths in this passage:

Firstly that they are his people (v 1)

Secondly that they are forgiven (v 2)

8. How do you think the promise of comfort and forgiveness would have been received by the Israelites once in exile? How would you have felt on hearing these words.

Thirdly that he will lead them home. (v 3-5)

9. What momentous event is expected?
10. How can we "prepare"? v 3 **NB** Note the slightly different position of the quotation marks in Isaiah to John 3 v 23. Why do you think this is?

Fourthly that God's word can be relied upon. (v 6-8)

11. What evidence did the Israelites have and what do you have of this truth?

Finally a promise (v 10-11)

12. What are the different uses of the Lord's arm in verses 10 and 11? What does this reveal of God's nature?
13. How did the Israelites see these verses fulfilled in their time and what does Jesus add through his life and death?



On your own

Please read **Isaiah 40 v 12-31** before next week.

God, the Creator and Sustainer



Connect

1. How much time did you spend thinking about God this week? What triggers your thoughts?
2. Many prominent scientists are insistent that the Earth and the Universe began with an enormous explosion and the resulting dust particles clung randomly together solidifying into the stars and planets as we understand them today. How much is this based on evidence and how much on faith?



Discover - Read Isaiah 40 v 12-31

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” v 29-31

3. What is the connection between hope and strength?
4. Sometimes just doing life can make us weak and weary. How can we move from living with weariness to ministering in God’s strength and power?



Apply

5. What do you personally know of the truth of these verses?
6. What difference does knowing that God has created you and continues to sustain you make in your life?



Extra questions

7. What qualities of God are revealed in verses 12-26?
8. Using these verses as a guide, what metaphor would you use to describe God’s majesty. Can you write it down either as a group or individually?
9. Look back at question 2. How does Isaiah’s account of God’s involvement with creation compare with the world view of random existence?
10. Have you examined a rose closely? How does what you see fit with both views?



On your own

Please read **Isaiah 41 v 8-20** before next week.

God, our Helper



Connect

1. How did reading the passage for this week encourage and strengthen you during the week?
2. During this time of economic uncertainty where do you go to find help, courage, strength and security?



Discover - Read Isaiah 41 v 8-20

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” v 10

3. What are the two commands in this verse? What is your reaction to them?
4. What are the five reasons for us not to fear? Can you think of times any of these have helped you in the past?



Apply

5. Would you tend to draw on just one or two of these “fearbusters” more than the others? Why is this?
6. Is there anything you will have to face this week where this

verse will help? Spend time praying for current concerns of the members of the group.



Extra questions

7. **Vs 8-9.** Why does Isaiah first remind the Israelites who they are? On what are they to base their standing and significance?
8. **Vs 10-20.** What, then, did God mean when He called His servant, His chosen one, His beloved a worm? See v 14 and also Job 25 v 4-6 and Psalm 22 v 6.
9. How does being a “worm” help us to understand more about God’s grace and righteousness?
10. What are God’s promises in these verses?
11. What reasons would the Israelites have had to be fearful and what reasons does Isaiah give for them to not be fearful?
12. What fears are holding you captive and how can you break free of them?



On your own

Please read **Isaiah 44 v 24 - 45 v 25** before next time.

No small groups next week as it is **World Night** on 13th May. Do come along and support this event.

God, our Sovereign Lord



Connect

1. How has God surprised you this week? (Through your Bible reading, prayer or circumstances for example).
2. How do you think/feel when you don't understand what God is doing? For example when evil seems to be flourishing.



Discover - Read Isaiah 44 v 24 – 45 v 18

“I form light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster, I, the Lord do these things.” 45 v 7

3. Why does God “bring disaster” and “create prosperity”...
 - For his people? See also Deuteronomy 6 v 1-3, 8 v 19-20
 - For those outside the kingdom?
4. Which aspects of God's sovereignty do you struggle with the most? How can you reconcile this with what you know of God's character?



Apply

Pray for any issues that have come to light today.



Extra questions

- 44 v 24 - 45 v 8.** Cyrus was a pagan Persian ruler who overthrew the Babylonians in 539BC. He then instigated the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem in 538BC (see Ezra 1 v 1-4). He did not acknowledge God (45 v 4-5) and yet God used him to fulfil his purposes.
5. Why do you think God used Cyrus, a pagan, to fulfil his purpose at this time? What does this say about how God sees unbelievers today?
 6. Why does Isaiah refer to Cyrus as a “shepherd” in 44 v 28, and God's “anointed” in 45 v 1 and talk about him having “a title of honour” in 45 v 4? What connection is there to the New Testament?

45 v 9-13

7. From these verses what do we learn about the probable reaction of the Israelites to God's choice of deliverer? Were they justified to feel like this?
8. What is God's response to their objections?

45 v 14-25

9. What can you pick out from these verses that declare God's sovereignty?

10. What were God's promises to the Israelites? v 14 and 17

11. What are the promises for us today? v 23-25

12. Go back to question 2. Has this passage changed how you would now answer this question?



On your own

Please read **Isaiah 52 v 1-12** before next week

I s a i a h

God, our Saviour



Connect

1. Has the present state of global insecurity affected you personally this week? (Think about redundancy, drop in income, fear for the future, increased criminal activity etc).
2. How has God upheld you? Do you feel He is in control?



Discover - Read Isaiah 52 v 1-12

“The Lord will bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.” v 10

3. What does “bare His holy arm” mean?
4. What will be the result? Who is going to achieve it?
5. Who is to be saved (v 1) and who will see it?



Apply

6. What are the implications for us of v 10?

7. How should we be living in the situation we face today? (see v 1, 8 and 11).

8. Is there anything in your life that is hindering you in your walk with God? Pray for each other.

9. How should the promise in v 10 encourage us?



Extra questions

10. Compare the state of Zion in this passage with our nation and us as believers.

11. How does God see Zion?

12. What should we do to be as God sees us? (v 1, 6 and 11)



On your own

Please read **Isaiah 52 v 13 – 53 v 12** before next week

Jesus, the Suffering servant



Connect

1. What has encouraged you this week in your walk with God?
2. Are your concerns less burdensome because of what Jesus has done?



Discover - Read Isaiah 52 v 13 – 53 v 12

As you read this verse aloud stress the pronouns (he, our, we, him).

“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But he was pierced by our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” v 4-6

3. What does this passage say about our natural state?
4. What is our status before God as believers?
5. How was this achieved?



Apply

6. What difference should this make to our lives and how we should live? (52 v 9)
7. Is there anything in your life that prevents you from living in God's peace? Are we too busy trying to solve our problems our way?



Extra questions

8. Show from the New Testament how this chapter is a perfect picture of Jesus the suffering servant. Use scripture to back up what you say.

Pray with thanksgiving for what Jesus has achieved for you.



On your own

Please read **Isaiah 55 v 1-13** before next week

I s a i a h

Jesus, the One that Satisfies



Connect

1. Thinking back over the past week, when have you felt the strongest sense of 'spiritual thirst'? (i.e. a need to pray for someone, read the Bible, have some quiet time, cry out to God for forgiveness or in desperation or anger etc.) What prompted this?
2. Do you see a 'spiritual thirst' in those around you? What gives it away?



Discover - Read Isaiah 55 v 1-13

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.” v 1-2

3. Who is the invitation to 'come to the waters' open to? Who are these people who are thirsty and who have no money to eat?
4. What do you think God is offering when Isaiah describes 'your soul delighting in the richest of fare' (v 2)? What do you think people are 'spending money on' (v 2)?

5. The banquet that Isaiah talks about here is previously mentioned in Isaiah 25 v 6-8 and the invitation is clearly extended to all but evidently requires a response from those wishing to take part – they need to come (v 1). Given this fantastic description why do you think people may choose not to come? What can we do in light of your answers to this question?



Apply

6. How do you receive this free nourishment that God offers in this passage? (See verses 1, 2 and 6).

Pray for each other in response to what you have been discussing. Pray that you will recognise that God is the one that satisfies in **all** areas of your life. Ask Him to highlight for you parts of your life where you are resisting allowing Him to satisfy you. Pray that He will provide you with opportunities to extend the invitation (v 1) to your friends and those who aren't yet coming.



Extra questions

7. Verses 8 and 9 describe the ways and thoughts of the Lord in comparison to ours. Do we acknowledge this in the course of our lives (as a world, country, church and as individuals)? What do you think the appropriate response on our part is given what Isaiah prophesies here?

8. Verses 10 and 11 describe the word of God and its relationship to God. What do you think verse 11 looks like when it happens? Can you think of times when you have experienced this in your life?

9. Verses 12 and 13 give us a glimpse of the new creation where we will enjoy this banquet (55 v 1-2, 25 v 6-8). Spend some time reflecting on this, fix your eyes on Jesus and allow Him to help you live as one destined for Heaven. Share any thoughts with the group that you feel are helpful in aiding you to do this. You may wish to pray for each other in response to this.



On your own

Please read Isaiah 58 v 1-14 before next week.

God, the Lover of Justice



Connect

“Justice has primarily to do with conduct in relation to others, especially with regard to the rights of others. In a larger sense justice is not only giving to others their rights, but involves the active duty of establishing their rights. Just as with man justice means the relief of the oppressed and needy, so God’s justice is His kingly power engaged on behalf of men, and justice and mercy are constantly joined together” (quoted from International Study Bible Encyclopedia).

1. When last have you been a part of (or witnessed) injustice? How did this make you feel? What did you do about it?
2. What is the difference between social justice and charity?



Discover - Read Isaiah 58 v 1-14

“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” v 6

3. Being tied to a yoke metaphorically implies submission or servitude (bondage). What is the difference between submission and servitude?

4. How should we see the yoke of social justice from “both sides of the coin”?

5. “Yoke” implies carrying a burden. In Matthew 11 v 29-30 Jesus talks about “my yoke”. How does this change our thinking about the burden of trying to “solve” social injustice?



Apply

Think of small practical ways you could as an individual or in your group “spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed” v 10 both locally and internationally. Pray and seek God about which of these you should take up.



Extra questions

v 1-5

6. How and why did the nation of Judah fast?
7. How and why should we fast?
8. What usually accompanies fasting [other than abstinence]?
9. Do you find the act of fasting to be a burden or a joy?

(Helpful passages from Scripture: 2 Samuel 12 v 16, 21-23; Matthew 6 v 16-18; Nehemiah 1 v 4; 1 Corinthians 7 v 5; Luke 2 v 37; Judges 20 v 26-28).

v 13-14

10. Why did God command a Sabbath/day of rest (Exodus 20 v 9-11; Luke 10 v 41-42)?
11. What are the benefits of keeping the Sabbath noted in these verses?



On your own

Please read Isaiah 61 v 1-11 before next time.



Further Study

If this subject has particularly interested you or provoked a desire to find out more:

- Read about and study the principles of Sabbath and Jubilee years (Leviticus 25 and 27). See also how we should treat the land.
- Find out more about how God wants us to treat our fellow beings (Leviticus 19)

Does Isaiah 58 change your attitude about tithing? (Deuteronomy 26).

No small groups next week (24th June) as it is an evening of prayer for the **Wales Mission**

The Lord's favour



Connect

1. Has this week been a week you have found it easy to delight in the Lord? Why or why not?
2. What is the difference between "delighting in the Lord" and delighting in other things?



Discover - Read Isaiah 61 v 1-11

"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels. v 10.

3. How is God our salvation and our righteousness?
4. Why does Isaiah use the analogy of a bridegroom and a bride to describe what God has done for us? How does this make you feel?



Apply

5. How do you delight in the Lord?

Spend some time meditating on the above verse. Pray out of this.



Extra questions

v 1-3

6. What is the year of the Lord's favour
- To Isaiah?
 - To the captives in Babylon?
 - To us?
 - To those who don't know Christ?

See also Isaiah 49 v 8, 63 v 4 and Leviticus 25 v 10

7. Who has the Sovereign Lord appointed to preach good news? Luke 4 v 16-21.
8. What is good news to the poor, the broken hearted, the captives and the prisoners?
9. Can you find the images of the aims of the year of the Lord's favour and which do you best identify with? v 3.

v 4-9

10. In verse 6 we read of the Lord's anointing resting on his people. What were the benefits of this for the people of Israel?
11. Today all believers receive God's calling and anointing to be priests. What are the responsibilities and benefits for us who receive this calling? See 1 Peter 2 v 9-10.



On your own

Think about what the relationship is between righteousness and salvation both in this passage and throughout the book of Isaiah.

The Servant songs

Introduction

There are 4 passages in Isaiah, which have become known as the four servant songs. They were first described as such by Bernhard Duhm in 1892. The songs are four poems written about a servant of God. God calls the servant to lead the nations, but the servant is horribly abused. The servant sacrifices himself, accepting the punishment due others. In the end, he is rewarded.

The final song from Isaiah 52 v 12 – 53 v 13 we have already studied in the main section of these studies. However, you may want to take another week to further reflect and consider the context. The first three are new to us this for this series.

There will be no small groups for week commencing 19th July for **Hope 09** and the week commencing 26th July as it will be the **church meeting** on 29th July.

Study 1 - The chosen servant

This passage introduces the servant and begins to describe his character and mission.

Read Isaiah 42 v 1-7

Spend a few minutes meditating on these verses. Share anything that stands out to you.

What do these verses tell you about the servant? Who is he and what is he like?

What similarities can you see with the New Testament? Which passages back this up?

What does this mean for you today?

Pray for each other.

Study 2 - The mission of the servant

This passage is written from the point of view of the servant and talks more about his calling.

Read Isaiah 49 v 1-7

Spend a few minutes meditating on these verses. Share anything that stands out to you.

What more do we learn about the servant?

What similarities can you see with the New Testament? Which passages back this up?

What does this mean for you today?

Pray for each other.

Study 3 - The obedient servant

In this passage more is revealed of the reason for the coming of the servant and we begin to see some of the suffering he will endure.

Read Isaiah 50 v 4-9

Spend a few minutes meditating on these verses. Share anything that stands out to you.

What more do we learn about the servant?

What similarities can you see with the New Testament? Which passages back this up?

What does this mean for you today?

Pray for each other.

Study 4 - The suffering servant

Finally the full reason of his coming and the extent of his suffering is revealed.

Read Isaiah 52 v 12 – 53 v 13

Spend a few minutes meditating on these verses. Share anything that stands out to you.

What more do we learn about the servant?

What similarities can you see with the New Testament? Which passages back this up?

What does this mean for you today?

Pray for each other.

Notes

Holland Road Baptist Church
April 2009

Daily Readings in Isaiah

	Mon 20 Apr	40 v 1-5
	Tues 21 Apr	40 v 6-11
	Wed 22 Apr	40 v 12-17
	Thur 23 Apr	40 v 18-24
	Fri 24 Apr	40 v 25-31
	Sat 25 Apr	41 v 1-7
	Sun 26 Apr	41 v 8-16
	Mon 27 Apr	41 v 17-20
	Tues 28 Apr	41 v 21-29
	Wed 29 Apr	42 v 1-7
	Thur 30 Apr	42 v 8-13
	Fri 1 May	42 v 14-17
	Sat 2 May	42 v 18-25
	Sun 3 May	43 v 1-7
	Mon 4 May	43 v 8-13
	Tues 5 May	43 v 14-21
	Wed 6 May	43 v 22-28
	Thur 7 May	44 v 1-5
	Fri 8 May	44 v 6-8
	Sat 9 May	44 v 9-11
	Sun 10 May	44 v 12-20
	Mon 11 May	44 v 21-23
	Tues 12 May	44 v 24-28

	Wed 13 May	45 v 1-7
	Thur 14 May	45 v 8-13
	Fri 15 May	45 v 14-17
	Sat 16 May	45 v 18-21
	Sun 17 May	45 v 22-25
	Mon 18 May	46 v 1-7
	Tues 19 May	46 v 8-13
	Wed 20 May	47 v 1-4
	Thur 21 May	47 v 5-7
	Fri 22 May	47 v 8-11
	Sat 23 May	47 v 12-15
	Sun 24 May	48 v 1-6a
	Mon 25 May	48 v 6b-11
	Tues 26 May	48 v 12-16
	Wed 27 May	48 v 17-22
	Thur 28 May	49 v 1-7
	Fri 29 May	49 v 8-12
	Sat 30 May	49 v 13-21
	Sun 31 May	49 v 22-26
	Mon 1 Jun	50 v 1-3
	Tues 2 Jun	50 v 4-11
	Wed 3 Jun	51 v 1-6
	Thur 4 Jun	51 v 7-11



'They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.'

Isaiah 40 v 31