

ISAIAH

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

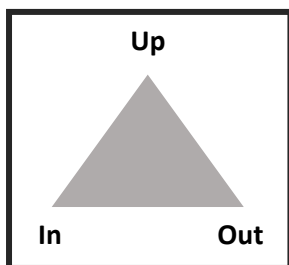
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

By the time of this writing, Israel had been in the Promised Land for almost 700 years. During the first 400 years, Israel was ruled by judges and political leaders whom God raised up as the occasion demanded. Then, for about 120 years, three kings reigned: Saul, David, and Solomon. But in 917 BC, Israel had a civil war and divided into two nations – Israel (to the north) and Judah (to the south). This was the situation in the time of Isaiah.

The first few verses of the book say a lot about the state of God's people. They are like rebellious children who don't appreciate all that their parents have done for them. Isaiah says they have treated God worse than any child has treated their parents. He then goes on to say they are dumber than dumb animals. The ox at least knows its owner, but Judah doesn't know who owns them. The donkey knows who takes care of it, but Judah doesn't know who takes care of them. No animal has ever offended or resisted or rejected or disobeyed God the way every human being has. When I reflect on how I treat God at times, this is challenging stuff.

So, you know the drill by now ... Bible, journal, pen, and a brew. Let's go.

Love you all,
Phil

Read

Isaiah 1

Live

As this book opens, there is a voice calling out to the heavens and to nature, which is interesting. While the heavens know that God's words are true and nature obeys God's instructions, while brute beasts and farm animals know their master and are somewhat obedient, the children of Israel are way down the charts when it comes to knowing their Master and having any form of obedience. They are in a state of absolute spiritual bankruptcy. God must punish and deal with sin; these people need to know there are always consequences to rebellion such as this. The prophet uses the example of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah who were so evil that God destroyed their cities.

Isaiah talks in verse 11 about their multitude of sacrifices. He wasn't complaining about the amount of sacrifices, more about the hollowness of them. These people had gotten into such a religious mindset and mess, they had lost all connection and relationship with God. Isaiah plainly stated that God is not interested in the blood of goats, bulls, and lambs, rather, when offered in this insincere way, they actually pervert the holiness of God. True religion is a relationship of love with God. When this type of religion is in our lives, our love for God will affect our relationships with each other. Alas, the opposite is also true. When our relationship with God wanes, so does relationship with all others.

I find verse 24 alarming and interesting; Isaiah records three different titles for God: *the Lord*, *the Lord Almighty*, and *the Mighty One of Israel*. That is some power in one verse! And it's all about wrath, judgment, and restoration. God promises to purge away their dross and remove all their impurities. This is what I so love about God. He never gives up on us and always seeks restoration for us. Amazing!

Pray

Father, I read this and think how awful these people behaved. Then I think about how I can do the exact same, at times acting like a rebellious teenager. Forgive my waywardness and silliness. Today I re-calibrate my life to obedient living. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 2

Live

I love how we get started today. This is not just a prophetic word being given, but a vision and picture to be seen. It says, *"This is what Isaiah saw"*. He receives a picture of Messiah's reign and all the glory that would entail, but then he challenges Judah to live in that reign right now. I love his exhortation in verse 5 where he says, *"... come, let us walk in the light of the LORD."* This means you enjoy the blessings of the Messiah's reign right now. You don't have to live a dark, depressing, discouraged Christian life. This is how Charles Spurgeon put it: *"You know that, if you were to go to Australia in a good sound ship, you would get there even if you were always to lie down in the hold among the luggage and the rats; but I should like to go in a first-class cabin, and I do not see why you and I, if we are going to heaven, should not go first-class."* What a class statement!

How's your walk with God today, first-class or in the hold? Sometimes the greatest problem for intimacy with God is His blessing. One of the saddest things I come across in ministry is to pray for someone starting out in a business venture, watch the Lord respond and bless them, and then see this person slip slowly away. They stop coming to church because they are too busy, appearing to simply ignore the reality that it was the hand of the Lord on their life that gave them success. Maybe this is what Solomon was thinking when he penned Proverbs 30:7-9 *"Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God."*

Pray

Father, thank You for working all things for my good and for Your glory ... in the things that thrill me and the things that annoy me, in the unanswered prayers and in unexpected gifts and stories. Thank You for being God and thank You for being good – all the time; when I see it and when I don't. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The condition here is quite drastic and really sad. Above all other people, these people should know that true religion with the one true God will produce a true society, but Isaiah saw that actual affairs in Jerusalem were the opposite. God's judgment in the Old Testament often manifested in society's circumstances, luxury changing into lack and human relationships breaking down. It is important to note that this all happens from the top down. When a leader is weak, the family, the business, the church, and the country is weak also. Leaders, take warning and courage from this, please; you will stand before God and give an account of how you led. Weak leadership in our country causes moral failures in words and deeds, and such failures affect both personal life and national life.

I find verses 13-15 the most daunting and challenging ... *"The LORD takes His place in court and rises to judge the people."* When leadership is weak or absent, the Lord steps in to take the reins. This is a pretty solemn time for the nation. God takes His place in court and rises against Judah as their prosecutor and judge. Judah was definitely in trouble here. God's charge against the elders and princes is not that they have failed to help the poor, that would be bad in itself; far worse than that, they have robbed the poor and taken advantage of their poverty to enrich themselves. There is something about the poor that draws God to action throughout the Bible. Even when Jesus was on earth, He was often found among the poorest and the outcasts, so much so that the religious people couldn't stand it. This compassion for the poor is what we love about Jesus, but what about us? How would we stand today in God's court being tried on our love for the poor?

Pray

Father, help me to not get too attached to things that are only of earthly value, things that will rust and corrode as time passes. "Only one life, will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." May my eyes turn outward and always see the need of others, not continually looking inward at my own wants and desires. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I named one of my old homes ‘Ruach’; it means ‘holy wind’ or ‘breath of God’. Isaiah uses it over fifty times in relation to the Spirit, beginning with verse four today.

It was thought to be a curse if a woman was barren. In this chapter, not only do we see the flirting nature of these women who have fallen so far from God, but it also appears that there are so few men that seven women want to marry one man so they can have his name and, perhaps, his child. They are certainly aware that one man cannot afford to take care of seven families, so they offer to support themselves just to be able to use his name. The main point is that disobedience and war take a great toll upon the men.

The ‘Branch of the Lord’ is the Messiah Himself. I love this because in the middle of his warning of judgment, Isaiah reveals a glorious promise of the future coming of the Messiah. He sees ahead to the millennial kingdom when once again the cloud of glory shall rule by day and the pillar of fire shall lead by night. *“Over everything the glory will be a canopy, a shelter and a shade, a refuge and a hiding place.”* Isaiah talks about the ‘Branch of the Lord’ being beautiful and glorious. Jesus used similar language in John 15 when He said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches”*. Where this is true, holiness reigns.

I wondered as I read this today, how holy am I? Being holy doesn’t mean sinless perfection, nor does it mean being spiritually superior; it means a life, a heart, a mind, and a body that is genuinely separated unto the Lord. It is a life lived apart from the thinking and heart of this world, this flesh, and the devil, lived apart to the Lord. It would be good to put in the thermometer today and check the temperature of your God-life.

Pray

Father, thank You for Your great love for me. You made me, chose me, bought me, reconciled me, and You delight in me. Through the hardest parts of life, and the most joyful ones, may Your praise be continually on my lips, to the God who does wonders. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is entitled 'The Song of the Vineyard' and takes us into what I think is Isaiah's unique style of poet and prophet. You will need to recognise right away that "*the one I love*" in the first line is referring to Yahweh, and "*His vineyard*" is speaking of His chosen people, Israel and Judah. The prophet describes this very special vineyard that had many advantages. It belonged to a loving person; it was planted on a fertile hillside; the ground was carefully prepared and planted with the choicest of vines; there was a watchtower built in it so it was protected; provision was made with a wine press for the fruit to be processed. Is it any wonder the master was expecting a good crop and was desperately disappointed when a bad one came forth? When I think of God's investment in me through Christ and grace, I wonder what sort of a return I am giving. Sobering thought or what? Here, instead of being an example of God's love and kindness through them, the vineyard produced idolatry and injustice. Because of this, we will see later how God would allow pagan hordes to invade them. History and Scripture record how Israel fell to Assyria and Judah fell to Babylon.

In verses 8-30, six woes are announced. It's good to note what they were announced for: verse 8, self-indulgence; verse 11, drunkenness; verse 18, deceitfulness; verse 20, a twisting of God's order for self-gratification; verse 21, pride and arrogance; and verse 22, perverting justice. Now there is a pretty brutal list of the misdemeanours of God's people. We would do well to read and study these verses because I think these sins all ring pretty true in today's society, don't you agree? Now, back to the vineyard; you can see how the yield had gotten corrupted. It wasn't bearing the fruit that was expected, hence God's judgment.

Pray

Father, when I don't sense Your heart and hand, I'm left to the shallow waters of my own counsel. But this I know for sure: Your steadfast love for me in Christ is unquestionable. Thank You that the Spirit is praying in me and for me when I don't know what to pray, do, or say. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Uzziah reigned for 52 years and for most of his reign he was a good king, Scripture recording that beautiful statement, *“he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”* (2 Chronicles 26:4). However, his life ended tragically. 2 Chronicles 26:16 tells us he allowed pride (one of the previous chapter’s woes, you will remember) to enter his heart. In response, God struck him with leprosy; he was an isolated leper until his death.

In this year that Uzziah died, Isaiah had great reason to be discouraged and disillusioned; a great king’s life had ended tragically. I imagine that Isaiah had a great relationship with this man and maybe he wondered, like we do when someone we love dies, where is God in all this? Have you ever wondered where God is when tragedy hits? Read on in the chapter and you will see exactly where God was. I absolutely love this ... He was still high and lifted up, still in charge of creation, fully and wholly.

To prepare Isaiah to be the prophet who would proclaim the coming judgment, God gave him a vision of His majestic holiness so overwhelming that it devastated him and made him realise his own sinfulness. He saw seraphim in the near presence of God with six wings (six in Scripture speaks of mankind). I find it fascinating that two wings were to shield their face. When God appears to man or to one of His creatures, there must be some kind of shielding to keep them from the direct view of the Lord’s face. Sometimes there is a smoke around God to keep Him somewhat hidden. Our God is a consuming fire and this cleansing of Isaiah’s mouth symbolically cleansed the source of iniquity. The heart is the source, but out of the heart the mouth speaks. In this chapter, we see the most beautiful call to minister, and the answer to that call: *“Here am I, send me!”*

Pray

Father, as I read passages like this it reminds me of Your covenant faithfulness throughout my life. You have cared for me when I couldn’t have cared less for You, and You have carried me when I thought I couldn’t carry on. Thank You for the grace You drop into my life at just the right time. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the titles of these chapters in my Bible and today is no exception: 'The Sign of Immanuel'. This prophecy will run through to the end of chapter 12, talking about the hope of the future in the midst of impending doom. You have got to love this! While Uzziah's son Jotham was a decent king, Uzziah's grandson Ahaz was a wicked king, worshipping other gods and even sacrificing his son to the god Molech. Ahaz was cowardly and superstitious and quite possibly one of the worst kings Judah ever had. He made an ungodly alliance with Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, even giving him silver and gold from the house of the Lord to win his favour and protection. After this alliance was formed, Ahaz began to model the Assyrians' pagan practices almost to the tee. Ahaz is a powerful example of someone who enters into an ungodly alliance and is thoroughly corrupted by it. You can read about this in 2 Kings 16. It is good to re-examine who you are aligning yourself with.

Isaiah is sent by the Lord to warn Ahaz not to form an alliance with Assyria, but instead to trust Him to rid the land of its enemies. Accompanying the prophet was his son Shear-Jashub, meaning 'A Remnant Shall Return'. The prophet predicts that the threatened invasion will not succeed and that within sixty-five years the northern kingdom will fall into captivity. Isaiah urges Ahaz to ask God for a sign but the king says that he would not ask for such a sign nor tempt the Lord. Upon hearing Ahaz's refusal, the prophet speaks to the people as a whole; the nation was guilty of wearying God. I love verse 14 which indicates that since Ahaz refused to choose a sign, the Lord chose His own sign, the implementation of which would occur far beyond Ahaz's lifetime – a prophecy reaching forward to the virgin birth of the Messiah. Beautiful indeed.

Pray

Father, You continue to beckon us thirsty ones to come to You for relief and refreshment. The whole of the God-story and all of Your promises find their fulfilment in Jesus. I desperately don't want to make wrong alliances but to seek first Your face. May I keep that the quest of my one life here on planet earth. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Many of the names in the Old Testament have huge significance, often relating to the current climate or something going on in the nation. Many of you will recognise the name Methuselah, the oldest man ever. He reached 969, pretty cool! His name means ‘when he is dead it shall happen’. I absolutely love this. It was when Methuselah finally died that the judgment of the flood came, and so we realise that his name shows us the reason he lived for so long, to show the longsuffering of Almighty God. This is just one of many significant names we could talk about.

It isn't often that the prophets are commanded to write, but here is one instance. Isaiah will write concerning his son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means ‘speed to the spoil, hurry to the plunder’. Through the birth and naming of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, the Lord who planned out Isaiah's ministry in the first place gives a timeframe for the invasion of Assyria. For those who trust Him, the Lord will be as a sanctuary, but for those who don't, He will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. Instead of finding protection from the Lord, they will ‘trip’ over Him, falling to destruction. This is the same idea behind the statement of Simeon when he held the child Jesus, recorded in Luke 2:34. *“Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against.”*

Lastly, I feel I should mention the reference to familiar spirits which refers to tarot cards, fortune tellers, witches, and wizards. In times of distress people often turn to these things instead of to God. The prophet warns them not to seek these mediums; it is wrong in God's eyes and that still stands today. God brings life; these ambassadors of darkness bring only death!

Pray

Father, don't let me ever forget that Jesus was my substitute and also my example. He suffered in my place on the cross once and for all, and now I follow You into the fellowship of suffering in the world. If anyone ever had a right to get defensive and vengeful, it was Jesus. His sufferings were entirely unjust, and yet, they fulfilled the demands of perfect justice for me, forever. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Verse 6 is one of my favourite verses in all of Scripture. It carries the fourfold nature of the Messiah. *Wonderful Counsellor* shows us His ability to guide and lead, and more than that, He is the source of all guidance, carrying the government on His very shoulder. *Mighty God* displays the hero of our faith, the divine warrior of heaven and earth. *Everlasting Father* speaks of our omnipresent, all-knowing, all-loving, all-attentive Father. *Prince of Peace*, Shalom, represents prosperity, health, happiness, and completeness in every possible way. This is the Child that is born and the Son that is given.

This glorious prophecy reminds Israel that the victory-bringing Messiah would be a man. To be our Saviour and High Priest as Jesus was, a Child had to be born and a Son had to be given. What amazing mystery! There is nothing more helpless, more dependent than a child. Theoretically, the Messiah could have come as a fully-grown man, created as an adult as Adam was created, but for Jesus to fully identify with humanity, He had to make Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7).

Leaders today trade their influence for money but God so loved that He gave His only Son. His government shows its workings in wonderful ways. Whenever I see someone who miraculously leaves a life of drugs or alcohol and is restored to their family and work, I can see that they are now governed by Him. Whenever I see loving Christians gently care for orphans and those rejected by their family, I know I am watching people governed by Him. Whenever I see people eagerly learning the Bible and worshipping their King, I know who the Governor is. So, indeed, the government is alive and working today, often silently, mostly unseen. Let's choose this governing body where justice, mercy, and grace all amazingly coexist. I like this Kingdom. The borders are open for ALL to come in.

Pray

Father, the government will be upon His shoulder. I wonder what such a government might look like. First of all, it would look like its King, Jesus. In His strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 10

Live

From the beginning of chapter 7 through to verse 4 of this chapter, we see how Assyria was used by God as an instrument of judgment against Syria, Israel, and Judah. That is why God refers to them as *“the rod of My anger”*. However, it would seem that Assyria was even more wicked than Syria, Israel, and Judah combined, and so verse 5 makes a shift with the words, *“Woe to Assyria”*, showing us that one cannot play fast and loose with God. Scripture reminds us, *“God is not mocked for whatever a man sows he will reap.”* (Galatians 6:7) It is also interesting to note that God can use anyone and any circumstance to fulfil His plan. He can bring beauty out of ashes and use a donkey to speak to a prophet. He could use the dog next door if He so desired, after all, He is the God of all eternity! God was jealous over His people so when they strayed, as they often did, He would do whatever He needed to get them to repent.

These people are hilarious as they actually say they are God's people but they are not living like God's people. The judgment of God is against them to get them to repent and live right. This is very much like those whom God will address in the Last Days, those who thought they were Christians; He will tell them to get away from Him because He never actually knew them. They said they were Christians, but they did not act Christ-like. They did not feed the hungry, visit the sick, etc.

The strength of the Assyrian will last long enough to carry out the wrath of God upon the Hebrews. The minute this task is finished, God will turn on the Assyrian and show them where their strength came from. As Hebrews 10:31 reminds us, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

Pray

Father, I'm fascinated by how You use desperate and seemingly out-of-control circumstances to fulfil Your master plan, none more so than at Calvary. What seemed a win for the enemy was actually his utter eternal defeat; it was Your plan weaved through the eternal ages to redeem man back to Yourself. How can I not love You? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I have to say (yet again) I love this chapter. It is entitled 'The Branch from Jesse'. In the previous chapter, the Lord was bringing judgment by chopping down the proud trees; now He promises that a branch will come from one of those stumps. The Davidic Dynasty appeared to have been decimated by the Assyrian army. When Jesus came, there had been 600 years of silence and nothingness. The royal line of David had produced nothing for that long; it seemed like the authority was all but gone, but then this beautiful prophecy came true with the arrival of Jesus. In this chapter, we read of the magnificent spiritual empowering of the Messiah and also His perfect character. Read and celebrate this amazing passage today and you will conclude with the hymn writer, 'Hallelujah, what a Saviour!'

Here is something to get you studying: count the attributes of the Messiah in verse 2. I think you'll find seven. Many theologians suggest that this passage is behind the term "*the sevenfold Spirit of God*" used in Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 4:5 and 5:6. It isn't that there are seven different spirits of God, rather, the Spirit of the Lord has these different characteristics, and He has them in all fullness and perfection.

The time of Messiah's coming was undoubtedly a puzzle in Old Testament times. We have both hindsight and the wonderful knowledge of Scripture, but they had to depend on the voice of the prophet. The prophet predicts that a Branch will come forth from the stem of Jesse. I love the words of Jeremiah 23:5 "*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*" Scripture leaves no doubt that this Branch is speaking of Jesus Christ. He is more than just a Branch to us but is actually the Tree of Life. You have just got to love chapters like this!

Pray

Father, what a beautiful description of Jesus our Messiah. It floods my soul with a fresh confidence in You and in Your awesome plan of redemption, a plan we are told was wrought before time began. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the earth. In Your strong name, Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 12

Live

The title 'Songs of Praise' gives me fond memories of my dad and mum, both now at home with the Lord. It was as if everything around them had to stop for 'Songs of Praise' at 5pm on Sunday evenings. Actually, it was the only reason the television got turned on at all on a Sunday. This short chapter of praise comes from the heart of the one who has surrendered to the Messiah as King. Here, they are praising God, regardless of His anger. I am ever thankful that the wrath of God against us was poured out upon Jesus on the cross. With this being true, there is no more anger from God towards us; His anger has been spent. Yet the Bible does say, "*whom the Lord loves He chastens*" (Hebrews 12:6), which is more the discipline of a loving Father.

This chapter is a song of triumphant praise and serves as a dramatic climax to the Immanuel prophecy which began in chapter 7. We know that there were many occasions, such as the crossing of the Red Sea, that brought songs of praise. God's anger is seldom forever. After all, He is a forgiving and a restoring God, and when He turns His anger away, He comforts and sets His people upright to live again. I remember learning as a boy from Romans that "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*". We are not sinless, but we are forgiven. In fact, we are totally pardoned, as if we had never sinned. Jesus paid the price in full for our sin, bearing the judgment and wrath of God forever, finishing the work of redemption. Faith and trust come when you rest in the knowledge that Jesus is acting on your behalf in every situation, and you know all is well. The fact that we know we are saved through Jesus should put a song of praise in our heart today.

Pray

Father, Your grace is sufficient for every story; Your love is powerful above all else. I think today of the times I have been the recipient of Your discipline. Thank You for Your patience and assurance that You are at work. And should I be tempted to pull out before Your work is done, grant me grace and power to resist doing so. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 13

Live

The Bible reminds us that judgment starts in the house of the Lord, so up until now, all the prophecies and judgments have been against Israel and Judah. Now God begins to speak to the other nations as well, starting with wicked Babylon. *“The day of the Lord”* in verse 6 is an important phrase, used some twenty-six times in the Bible. It speaks not of a single day of judgment, but of the season of judgment when the Lord will set things right. Today is man’s day, but the Lord’s day is coming and as we look around, it seems more and more imminent. James reminds us of this when he says, *“Be you also ready, establish your heart, for the coming of the Lord draws near.”*

The next eleven chapters group together prophecies against foreign nations. Though Babylon was not yet a world power at the time of this prophecy, Isaiah foresaw a time when they would overthrow the current dominant nation of Assyria and be an international force. We can be dead sure of this, that God is in control of all nations. He is calling those nations to battle on the side of the Lord to bring judgment against Babylon.

Isaiah’s reference to *“the day of the Lord”* is both immediate and for the future. The prophecy looks beyond the approaching conquest of the city to a greater day of the Lord and anticipates the final destruction of Babylon by the personal intervention of the Messiah King. You see, this destruction does not come from the devil. This destruction comes because the judgment of God has come. Luke 21:26 puts it like this, *“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”* Man can fight against another man, but there is no way to win against the wrath of Almighty God. He will have the final say.

Pray

Father, today we look to the sky awaiting Your soon return. Those of us who love You can declare, “Hasten the day!” But I am reminded of my neighbour who hasn’t found You yet, of loved ones who are still afar off. I pray that Your grace will extend to them also and that I will be bold enough to tell them of Your matchless love. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

As this prophecy continues from the previous chapter, it is important to remember that Isaiah has two aspects of prophetic fulfilment in mind. First, there is the immediate and partial fulfilment regarding the empire of Babylon and its king. Second, there is the distant and ultimate fulfilment regarding the spiritual empire of Babylon (the world system) and its king (the devil). Sometimes we get so weary and discouraged from the devil's attack, as if we think his day will last forever. If we remember that one reason he works so hard is because even he knows his time is short, it is an encouragement to us. You need to hang in there; with God's help you can out-last the devil.

In verse 12, the scene suddenly shifts from the underworld to heaven to emphasise the unbridled pride of Satan. *Son of the morning, the devil, or Satan* was named *Lucifer* in heaven. He was proud and arrogant, and his desire was to be God. He is a counterfeit who tries to impersonate and copy all that is good. Here we see the real power behind the evil kings we have been reading about. Originally created as one of God's highest angels possessing all angelic attributes, Satan led angels in a rebellion. He is described as the "*originator and chief practitioner of sin*" (1 John 3:8), "*that wicked one*" (1 John 5:18), "*a thief and destroyer*" (John 10:10), "*a deceiver*" (Revelation 12:9), "*a murderer and liar*" (John 8:44), and "*the accuser of the brethren*" (Revelation 12:10).

We find five 'I wills' in verses 13 and 14, emphasising the arrogance of the king of Babylon and of Satan from whom the king takes his cue. See if you can identify them all. Satan had so much lust for power that he wanted to be as God, but he forgot that God was God, and he wasn't.

Pray

Father, it's as simple and real as this: You have forgiven all of my sins. Help me to love You with ever-growing awe. Only Your love is better than life; only Your love will never let go of me. It is so good to know that You have already triumphed over the devil. He is defeated and set at naught. This excites me a lot. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

When God's judgment comes, it comes quickly and severely. In today's chapter, we see it even moving the heart of Isaiah as he prophesies and witnesses it. God announces coming judgment on the cities of Moab. Most of these sites were originally part of Israel's territory when Moses and Joshua defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites. All the cities north of the Arnon River once belonged to the tribe of Reuben. However, throughout the years, the Moabites persistently pushed the Israelites out of these regions. I struggle with writing about some of these Old Testament prophets as God's judgment seems so final and harsh. Again, I need to make a note to self that one cannot play about with or bully the Holy One who inhabits eternity. God is God and is not mocked.

The demise of Moab taught Israel to not depend on that nation (or any other nation) but to depend on the Lord. The mourning was not just the leaders, but everyone in the community; it mentions weeping also in the street. It is unusual for a prophet to sympathise with those being destroyed, but that is the case here. It is impossible for people or animals to survive where there is no water. The flowing waterway from the springs had provided so much water in the past there was an abundant crop of hay and plenty to drink. Now with the water dried up, they have no prosperity at all and the waterways run with blood (perhaps from those who died of thirst and starvation). All this draws me in to hug tightly to the God I love and to love Him more than just serve Him. I don't want to hear Him say when I stand before Him, *"I have this against you, you have forsaken the love you had at first."* May His beauty be alluring, His love compelling, and His grace transforming in my life.

Pray

Father, may this chapter make me realise that doing the right things for You is not the same as spending life-giving time with You. Thinking great thoughts about You is not the same as vital communion with You. Helping others understand the gospel is not the same as drinking deeply from the wellspring of grace for myself. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Isaiah paints a stirring picture of the confused state of Moab under the hand of God's judgment. He declares they are, *"like fluttering birds pushed from the nest"*, confused, weak, and vulnerable. Their only recourse is to submit themselves to Jerusalem and its King again. Because God's mercy is always present, even in judgment, there is a beautiful plea to receive one another – Judah to receive the outcasts of Moab and vice versa (very appropriate as we watch the refugee crisis unfold around the world). I think of Jesus when He wept for Jerusalem: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"* (Matthew 23:37-39) When Jesus saw the desolation to come upon the city that rejected Him, He did not rejoice. Rather, He set His face as a flint to go to the cross. What an example!

It is not often we see a time scale put on prophetic words but today we see God declare swift judgment to come within three years. He sees it like a binding contract that cannot be broken. These people had overstepped the mark and were now at the total disposal of the hand of the living God. On the one hand, that is a fearful thing, but I was drawn today to the story in 2 Samuel 24. David made the mistake of ordering a census and God was angry with him because of his pride. God gave him a few choices of punishment and David chose to fall into God's hand rather than into man's hand. I love how David knew that even in judgment, he could trust God; he knew the tension of God's judgment and mercy.

Pray

Father, I think of the writer to Hebrews who encourages me to fix my eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, to consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners. So, I lift my eyes to heaven today to my Saviour and King, my Author and Finisher. What an example! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Damascus was, and is, the capital of Syria. It was one of the most beautiful cities of the ancient world. However, the coming Assyrian judgment would reduce it to a heap of ruins. As is often the case, the northern kingdom of Israel is referred to by its dominant tribe, Ephraim. It is interesting to note the reason for this judgment. Verse 10 says, *“You have forgotten God your Saviour; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress.”* Satan does not need to make us bank robbers or murderers to destroy us. It is enough to simply make us forget God and he will create all kinds of diversions to do so. We can forget because of laziness, we can forget because of a lack of attention, we can forget because we are distracted, we can forget because of busyness. It really doesn't matter to Satan as long as he deters us from following after God. Failure to remember God had left Israel unprotected.

I had the amazing privilege one summer of driving along the Golan Heights, a potential hot-spot for future conflict. It is a strategically placed high plateau above the whole region of Galilee and when Syria occupied it, Israel was under constant threat of invasion and shelling. But when Syria eventually made a full-on invasion of Israel from the Golan in 1967, Israel miraculously beat them back and captured the Golan Heights; we know this as the 'Six Day War'. Syria insists that this strategic region is theirs and must be given back. The Israelis are adamant that they will never give back land that belongs to them and is necessary for their security. In the meantime, Syria fights Israel through terrorism and their support of militia groups in Lebanon. The dream of a "Greater Syria" encompassing Syria, Lebanon, and parts of northern Israel is a powerful influence in the Syrian leadership. Chapters like today's are a true reminder of just how current Scriptures are!

Pray

Father, the words written in Hebrews long ago are in my mind today ... how will I escape if I neglect Your great salvation? This wasn't written to the unbeliever; it was written to the church for me to take account of. Holy Spirit, would You convict any way in me that is neglectful? Help me to love You more fully and to obey You completely. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 18

Live

Most theologians agree that this is a strange chapter, probably one of the most obscure in all the Bible. Perhaps it was more understood by the people at the time than by us now. It would seem that God didn't want Judah to make an alliance with Ethiopia but rather to lean on Him as He is well able to deliver. It is interesting to note there is no rebuke or judgment against Ethiopia. It wasn't as if God was going to judge Ethiopia for their offer of an alliance, instead, Judah was to trust in God. Now that is a great lesson today. Who are your alliances with and where could you trust God more?

God gives assurance to His prophet, and by him, to His people. Zion is His rest forever and He will look after them. He will look after their needs, He will provide for them, and He will deal with His and their enemies. I'm not sure what the "*wings*" are, referred to in verse 1. Some reckon it could be Ethiopia's strong armada of ships, their sails stretched out like an eagle.

You may remember how Sennacherib sent his supreme commander to besiege Jerusalem while he himself went to fight the Egyptians. The commander met with Hezekiah's officials and tried to make them surrender, hurling insults so the people of the city could hear, blaspheming Judah and particularly Jehovah. When King Hezekiah heard of this, he tore his clothes and prayed to God. Isaiah the prophet told the king that God would take care of the whole matter and that the enemy would return to his own lands. That night, the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. Sennacherib soon returned to Nineveh in disgrace and some years later, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, two of his sons killed him and fled. The point is this: God is always in control ... always!

Pray

Father, I am stirred today to look at the people and things that I make alliances with. Even though they may not be bad or sin, sometimes I rely on them more than on You. I want to know You better and trust You more this season, Lord. I want to seek first Your kingdom, Your hand, and Your face. I love You, I really do. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 19

Live

Egypt was a superpower of their day and one to be reckoned with. It lay to the south of Israel and posed a constant threat. The Egyptians worshipped all kinds of things from cows to the sun and the moon. The 'spirit of Egypt' is the spirit of evil in the world which is downright worldliness. These were a sinful people seeking power and fame and if we were to go through the list of all the sins that Egypt committed, we would find the same sins people are committing today. Instead of going to God who is the true source of help, they went to fortune-tellers and wizards, caught up in worldliness with no thought of God.

At the time of Moses, there were hundreds of false gods in Egypt and the ten plagues were directed at these false gods. The people were so deceived and entrenched that even the plagues did not stop them from worshipping their false gods. God will not always look the other way. Verse 4 speaks of the day of punishment which comes upon these idol worshippers: no water, no crops, no fish, no industry, with even the making of flax disrupted. The River Nile was the source and strength of this great land but again we see God in control of the elements. God was to remove the foundations or pillars on which the working class depended. God is saying to them through Isaiah, 'If they are so wise, let them advise you now.' The wise men of all the ages put together are no match for the wisdom of God.

I love verse 20: He will send them a Saviour and Defender, and He will rescue them. Spurgeon says about this, *"The text says the Saviour is a great one. Oh! I wanted a great Saviour. A little Saviour would not have answered my turn, for great sin wanted a great atonement, and my hard heart wanted great grace to soften it down."* How beautiful is that.

Pray

Father, I thank You today for a great Saviour. Jesus, thank You that You made such a great atonement for my soul. Holy Spirit, thank You for Your presence and comfort. What a redemption plan. It could never have been dreamt up by mere man and today I declare, "Only God!" In Your strong names. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Whenever our expectation is in something wrong or our glory is in something wrong, God will find a way to make those things disappoint us. Judah set their expectation on Ethiopia and looked to Egypt for glory, but now they are left afraid and ashamed. There is no place of security for the people of God other than that to be found in the rule of God. All expectation not centred in God is doomed to disappointment. It would seem that God allowed Judah to be backed into a corner, caught between the two mighty empires of Egypt and Assyria without being able to trust either one. There was no escape, except in the Lord.

This prophecy is dated in the year when Egypt and Ethiopia would be taken into captivity by Assyria, a nation known for stripping its captives naked, in some cases peeling their skin off while they were still alive. Ashdod was one of the five most important Philistine cities. Tartan was commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army. The Assyrians captured Ashdod in 711 BC and so frightened the Egyptians that they backed away, thus teaching Judah the folly of relying on a foreign power, such as Egypt, for protection.

Isaiah began his object lesson of going barefoot for three years. This seems like a very strange thing to do, but Isaiah did as God told him, going *“naked and barefoot”*. The Lord commanded stripping off all his outer garments as an act denoting disgrace and humiliation. It would seem he was actually naked. Isaiah and his family had been a sign to others, even in their names.

Let's not minimise the wonder of our forgiveness by thinking our sins are less numerous than anybody else's. Let's not ever get used to being forgiven by God. May we be careful in our anger, to sin not; in our pain, to not blame God or others; and in our disappointment, to not sulk. Only God's love is better than life; only His love will never let go of us.

Pray

Father, today I am reminded to lift my eyes to You because it is from You all my help comes. You are my source and resource. By the power of Your Spirit, keep me aware of how much You've forgiven me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This dramatic scene was fulfilled when the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon, but it also has a prophetic application. The same panic and terror felt by the people of Babylon when that great city was conquered will be seen again. When the Lord strikes the world system (both spiritual Babylon and commercial Babylon) the world will be terrified and mourn the same way, but, according to Revelation 18:9-20, God's people will rejoice over its fall. I find it interesting that Isaiah struggled to give this word (see verses 3 and 4). He obviously didn't want to give it as it was pretty rough, but give it he must because that is the job of a prophet; they warn of things to come. The severity of the violence about which he must prophesy caused him extreme agitation. The comparison with a woman giving birth means this attack will come suddenly and without warning. The pain will continue until the entire city is taken with the battle being so fierce and ruthless that Isaiah can scarcely bear to even bring the message.

Many theologians way more skilled than me relate this prophecy to the rule of Belshazzar and especially to the Daniel 5 event where the hand wrote on the wall declaring sudden doom on Babylon. 'Prepare for war,' is what this is saying. 'Watch and be ready, war is coming.' The table being set shows that even though war is coming and men are appointed to watch, the people are still having their wild parties. The fickleness of mankind amazes me, always running after their fleshly feelings and wants. Remember the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem by throwing down their coats and palm branches? This was the same mob that a few short hours later cried, "*Crucify Him, we won't have this man to rule over us!*" And yet, God's longsuffering and *agape* love rains down upon us with a fervour that only gets brighter and brighter. What's not to love about this great God we love and serve!

Pray

Father, open the eyes of my heart. Heal the short-sightedness of my soul. I want to see all things from Your perspective, including the hope to which You have called me. To see with eyes of hope means I will be able to discern Your heart and Your hand at work everywhere. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I could understand all the shocking prophecies against the foreign nations, but I have to admit, I was a bit shocked to now find a prophecy against Jerusalem and Judah. The problem was they behaved just like their neighbours, so deserved the same rebuke from the Lord. We see here the Lord raising up Eliakim who is symbolic of the Messiah. The Lord then warns Shebna that he will be removed like a peg pulled out of the wall and all that hung on it will be lost. Makes me wonder, what peg am I hanging all of me on? If it is my own peg, then it isn't very secure, but if it is on Christ, then all is safe. Maybe we need to ask forgiveness for hanging a lot of stuff on the wrong peg. Maybe we need to ask forgiveness for getting irritated over silly little things like when people don't talk fast enough, when traffic doesn't move along quick enough, when our emails, calls, and texts aren't returned as soon as we'd like.

The weakness of Judah now appeared more than ever because they looked to their fortifications. They made sure of water for the city but did not depend upon God for a blessing on any of their stuff. Of course, we know that Jesus is the key to life. He opens and no man can close; and closes and no man can open. He is Life. He is the only Way. Jesus is eternal. He is our fastened peg and no man can unfasten Him. Jesus is even now seated at the right hand of the Father where we will reign with Him ... if we are believers. All believers in Christ are children of God; we have been adopted into the family of God and we are heirs with Christ. There are vessels of silver and vessels of gold. We are not all the same, except that we are all born again.

Pray

Father, since I do want to be more Christlike in all things and at all times, and I desperately want to hang all of me on the peg that is right, I ask You for a clear and powerful work of Your Spirit in my heart. Make me a person who fully relies on You, for Your glory and for the blessing of a lot of people. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Tyre lay north of Israel and was a mixed bag for Israel. King Hiram of Tyre supplied David and Solomon with great timbers for the building of the temple and other projects. Hiram also gave Solomon sailors so Israel could build their commerce by sea. But later, Tyre gave Israel one of the worst rulers Israel ever had – Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. It seems by this reading today that Tyre had become conceited in their own strength and pride had crept in. Pride is that basic sin which God is always opposed to and man is ever expressing. Oh how we need to be ruthless with the pride monster in our lives. I am so glad God is the God who gives patience and encouragement because we need both. We need patience to enjoy and accept the rich diversity of people and perspectives that surround us where we live, work, and play.

I find the shift from verse 15 very interesting. The reason Tyre had this pride problem was because they had eliminated God from their lives, but when they looked to God again, their whole outlook on trade changed. Praise God, they learned their lesson and instead of using their profits for their own greed, they dedicated their work to the Lord. They had their needs taken care of, but their excess went to God's work. This means that even their transactions in daily business were dedicated to the Lord. Let's not divorce merchandise from holiness to the Lord.

Perhaps you are asking by now, 'How can this help us today?' We must realise that without God we are bound to fail, but with Christ we can do all things. When we carry on our day-to-day lives selfishly, seeking gain for only ourselves, we are headed for destruction. When all that we do is dedicated to God and we share with others less fortunate than ourselves, we cannot fail.

Pray

Father, forgive me for when I start looking to others or to myself for answers instead of looking to You. I need to stop leaning on my own understanding and in all my ways acknowledge You, being totally assured of Your ever-faithful promise that You will direct my paths. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

All whose treasures and happiness are laid up on earth will soon be brought to destruction. Sin has turned the earth upside down. It has become quite a different place from when God first made it to be His dwelling place among mankind. The world we live in is one of disappointment; it is full of tears; and we can see the power of God's curse, how it lays everything to waste. The earth is polluted by the sins of mankind; therefore, it is made desolate by God's judgments. This passage is a good reminder of the principle that God is greater than His creation. The Bible never teaches the New Age idea that God is bound up with what He has created. God is separate from His creation, and when the earth and the world fade away, the Lord will remain unchanged.

These are challenging scriptures that remind us that the world is God's and that He is in full control with His plans forever sure. We cry, "How long, O Lord, until You return and put an end to all violence?" Whether it's in Syria or Iraq, Belfast or Britain, how long before there's no more warring nations or divisive personalities, no more sexual assaults or abuses of power, no more abortion? When will the dawn break on the Day of no more arguments between friends, pettiness between spouses, and pride in our churches?

In the days of the Great Tribulation, the earth will not be literally empty, but Isaiah's poetic description applies because the earth will seem empty in many places. More than one-third of humanity will die in the judgments of the Great Tribulation, according to Revelation 9, making the areas hardest hit seem as if the earth were empty. Following the judgments meted out on the countries in the previous chapters, there seems to be here a culmination of them all. Specific divine judgments become the general judgment upon the nations as a whole, which will take place when the Lord Jesus Christ, with His Church, will return to this earth.

Pray

Father, how long, O Lord, how long? I yearn for the day when walls won't be built of bricks and mortar, but of grace and salvation. What a beautiful horizon awaits Your children. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 25

Live

Isaiah is suddenly overcome with praise for God – all that He is and all that He does. I love how Isaiah puts it personally, “*You are my God*”. God is not God of the masses; He is God of the individuals in the masses. Jesus purchased our salvation as individuals and our relationship with Him must be a personal one. Worship, first and foremost, is a decision; in this chapter we have it right in the middle of judgment and everything else going on. Whether the feeling is there or not is irrelevant; we must first decide to worship. Even God’s judgment can be given thanks for because He is the righteous Judge who judges fairly.

I love what Spurgeon writes about worship: “*If I did not praise and bless Christ my Lord, I should deserve to have my tongue torn out by its roots from my mouth. If I did not bless and magnify his name, I should deserve that every stone I tread on in the streets should rise up to curse my ingratitude, for I am a drowned debtor to the mercy of God – over head and ears – to infinite love and boundless compassion I am a debtor. Are you not the same? Then I charge you by the love of Christ, awake, awake your hearts now to magnify his glorious name.*” What about that for a piece of writing!

May God intensify our love for Jesus so much that our love for other things will shrink to a proper, healthy size. Whatever happens, even the things we can’t understand, it is so important to trust God always and in everything. Every good gift we have comes from above and we have God’s royal promise that He will never leave us or forsake us. We can praise and adore Him for His faithfulness and generosity. So, may we value a rich relationship with Him more than all the other stuff we tend to put our trust and hope in. May we look to Him instead of looking to other things for peace and joy.

Pray

Father, all You have to do is give our world system a little tap and I’m reminded of how foolish it is to trust in anything or anyone but You. Help me to worship You in spirit and in truth. Some things deserve but a glance, but Jesus must have my gaze. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the way this chapter kicks off, trailing on from the previous one ... *"In that day"*. It poses the question, 'What day?' The previous two chapters point to the day of the Messiah's ultimate triumph when the Messiah will reign over Israel and over all the world. In that day, there will be a lot of joyful singing, such as this song that will be sung in the land of Judah. From the beginning of time when man sinned and cities began to be built, there has never been a truly godly city, the city of God on earth. But in *"that day"*, all will know the strength and glory of the city of God. When the Kingdom of Jesus Christ gets fully consummated on this earth, there will be hosts of redeemed cities and myriads of glorious communities organised under the strength and salvation and righteousness and truth of the Lord. Such a thought should push us to praise Him today. His kindness moves us to repentance like nothing else. Such love compels us to love and serve Him with everything we have.

Verse 3 has always been on my top ten favourite verses list; it was one of my mum's favourites as well. It is all born out of trust. When we trust in the Lord our God, we inherit the peace of God, God's *shalom*. Out of *shalom* we get: wellness, health, prosperity, favour, wholeness, rest, and safety. *Shalom* is one of the greatest words in the Bible; it means wholeness of being; it refers to soundness of mind, divine health, emotional, physical and financial blessing. Everything you could ever want is wrapped up in this word and it is just one of the perks of trusting Him above all else. Jeremiah says this in 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* Let's praise Him today for He is certainly worthy of it!

Pray

Father, thank You that You only deal with me according to Jesus' righteousness with which You have blessed and robed me. And when You discipline me, it's never out of irritation or desperation, but only by the favour and affection You have lavished on me in Christ. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 27

Live

There is a lot of mythology surrounding this passage. If Satan could manifest himself as a serpent to Eve in the Garden of Eden, why not also manifest himself as a dreadful sea-dragon? What do we know about Leviathan from other passages of Scripture? Leviathan is referred to in passages like Job 3:8, Job 41, Psalm 74:14, and Psalm 104:26. These passages reinforce the idea of Leviathan as a mighty, serpent-like creature connected with the sea, who resists God and, most important to note, will be crushed by the Lord. It is most likely linked to a crocodile or alligator type of reptile. The leviathan spirit is alive and well on planet earth and is in the church as well. The mouth of the crocodile takes up a quarter of its whole body with teeth all pointing down. It doesn't have teeth that can rip or tear, so they work in pairs or teams. When they clamp onto their victim, they begin to spin round, going in opposite directions, so ripping the victim asunder.

Does any of that sound familiar to you? When the mouth gets into action, it finds another gossip to work with it and rips its victim asunder! I'm sure you have been a victim to it, as I have been. Let's never allow ourselves to be party to idle talk and gossip. Bind that old leviathan spirit from our lives, homes, families, and churches.

At the end of the chapter we see the re-gathering of God's people. God's plans are not thwarted by the enemy. Take heart in this today, whatever is going on in your world. The old serpent can lie, deceive, mutter and murmur, but that's it really. His biggest arsenal of artillery is deceit. He has already been defeated and rendered powerless by the birth, sinless life, death, resurrection to life, and ascension to heaven of Jesus. However, the serpent's subtle schemes are very much alive, so let's stay alert.

Pray

Father, whatever may come my way in life I can look to You for the ultimate victory. You are still on the throne of heaven and all the powers of hell cannot do anything about that. Help me today to submit to You and resist the devil, knowing that when I do these two things, he will flee from me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 28

Live

The next eight chapters are all judgments against Judah. This is one of several passages of Scripture that speaks to drunkards. It's a massive subject, so let's chat about it today and look at the facts. Proverbs 23:29-35 speaks of the folly of drunkenness. Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be filled with the Spirit instead of being drunk. Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:10, 11:21, Galatians 5:21, and 1 Peter 4:3 each contain commands against drunkenness. Jesus specifically warned against drunkenness in the last days (Luke 21:34-36). A study by the Royal College of Physicians said drink-related health problems could account for up to 12% of total NHS spending on hospitals, about £3 billion. But campaigners said that with the estimated £3 billion lost through absenteeism, unemployment, premature deaths and alcohol-related crimes and accidents, the total cost of excessive drinking is £6 billion.

Beware of the little things that are really big things in disguise. We can kid ourselves into thinking it's a new culture today or 'I'll be able to handle this okay', but there are too many warnings issued for us to ignore. I often wish Scripture would outrightly condemn alcohol, but we know Jesus made wine in John 2 and was even unjustly accused of being a drunkard (Matthew 11). Paul also recommended the use of wine to Timothy, knowing it was purer to drink than the water of that day (1 Timothy 5). So, while the Bible does not condemn the use of alcohol, it does strictly condemn drunkenness. Some may ask, what is drunkenness? Is it when someone falls over? Whenever alcohol impairs our senses, our thinking, our judgment or our reflexes, we are overcome by it and it is sin. Whenever we feel compelled to drink or have difficulty not drinking, we are overcome by it and it is sin. If we have to hide our drinking or are secretly ashamed of our drinking, we are overcome by it and it is sin.

Pray

Father, I am so thankful that You are God and I am not. I am so thankful that You are the Alpha and the Omega and everything in between. I am so thankful You know the beginning and the ending and every other moment as well. I love You and I pray in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 29

Live

It's interesting that the name *Ariel* is used three times in the first two verses. The name means 'Lion of God' and it would almost seem sarcastic in the context of judgment against Jerusalem. We don't find this name used anywhere else. I wonder, was there an idea that Jerusalem thought of herself as 'the Lion of God' but God didn't share that lofty opinion of the city? It may be that the people of Jerusalem had taken to calling themselves by the name *Ariel* to both express and strengthen their confidence or ego. It is really sad when we think more about what others think of us than what God thinks. A deep review of one's soul would be a great exercise today. How dangerous it becomes when we start to rely on our spiritual heritage rather than looking at present realities. It's a bit like depending on your passport and forgetting about your driving licence.

Isaiah likens Jerusalem to the blind and the drunk, and then he likens them to the illiterate. I feel many people today look at God's Word like an illiterate man reads the newspaper. They can pick out a few words here and there; they can look at the pictures and enjoy them; they can sit with an open newspaper and appear to be reading, looking the part, but all the while the truth of the Word escapes them and they are rendered ineffective and powerless. I am often shaken by the passage in Matthew 7 that relates how in the end times some people will knock at the door and not get in. They will say, "Did not we cast out demons in Your name?" I lay emphasis on the "we" as it sounds like they are saying, "I was part of a church that did that! We worshipped You every Sunday, Lord." Then God will say, "But I don't know you". Oh, how easy it is to fall into the 'we' category and get sloppy and lazy. Let's raise our standard and worship Him personally and allow the Word of God to dwell in us richly, as Paul writes in Colossians 3:16.

Pray

Father, I pray today that I will no longer bring shame to You or to Your Kingdom. You are worthy of my adoration, affection, and allegiance. Everything that exists has been created by You and for You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This prophecy was given at a time when the Assyrian army was attacking Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel would be conquered by Assyria and the people taken into exile. The Assyrians would then come against the southern kingdom of Judah and because of this threat, the leaders of Judah looked to Egypt for protection against the Assyrian invasion. In looking to Egypt before even thinking about their God who had delivered them again and again, Judah forsook the Lord. In one sense, it was wise and good for Judah to understand that they needed help outside of themselves. However, in the larger sense, it was foolish and evil of Judah to look to others, especially to Egypt, instead of looking to the Lord. It is a massive lesson for every believer to keep aware of our union with Christ and all the riches of grace that come with it; when we do this, it will become increasingly difficult for us to look anywhere else, no matter the provocation, prodding or personality.

When I was in Jerusalem, this place *Topheth*, mentioned in the final verse, was pointed out to us by the guide. It's an interesting reference as it is literally a place of abomination. Idolatrous Israel had burned to death human victims in this valley just south of Jerusalem. It was an area sometimes called *Valley of Hinnom* and later it became known as *Gehenna* – the place of refuse from the city with constantly burning fires, symbolising hell. The defeat was to be so complete that the fire burns without stopping. This is obviously speaking of the lake of fire, a burning place for the evil of all the world. We are waiting for the breath of Jesus to order the devil and his angels there. The sad thing is that it was created for the devil and his angels, never for mankind, yet, all who do not receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord will be cast into the lake of fire as well.

Pray

Father, forgive me for the moments, even hours, when my default mode is to look to others before I even think about You. You alone are my Source and my Light, and so today I lift my eyes to You alone. You are my King, Commander, and Chief. I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 31

Live

Isaiah speaks to Judah about two sins. First, they had put their trust in Egypt; second, they were not trusting in God, which was worse. They were looking to all the wrong things: the multitude of chariots and strength of the army. They missed the power of God. How much better to have the heart of the psalmist in Psalm 20:7 *“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”* *Our trust should only be in the LORD.* I love how John Trapp, a Puritan from the 1600’s, puts it, “He that stands with one foot on a rock, and another foot upon a quicksand, will sink and perish as certainly as he that stands with both feet on a quicksand.” These people in Judah had chosen the world over God and were placing their trust in things of this world. They chose to follow flesh instead of spirit. The battle for the will of mankind is between the flesh and the spirit. In this particular case, the flesh had most definitely won the fight; Judah were trusting in the flesh of horses rather than in the Spirit of God. However, the flesh is weak and cannot save anyone.

Just as there were no earthly answers to Judah’s problems, there are no earthly answers to our problems now. Alcohol, depression, suicide, and drug problems cannot be solved in the flesh; they are spiritual problems that only God can cure. People who are born of the Spirit of God overcome fleshly problems because their hearts are changed. They no longer need the things of the flesh to help them face the day; they have the love of Jesus instead. May Psalm 121 be our anthem this day and every day until God returns or calls us home: *“I lift my eyes up, unto the mountains, where does my help come from? My help comes from You, maker of heaven, creator of the earth.”*

Pray

Father, isn’t it funny how we run every which way instead of going straight to You? Forgive me today for using You like a fire escape or a life-boat. You are not my last resort. You are my first port of call. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 32

Live

Verse 1 of this prophecy seems to point to the reign of Hezekiah who was a good king. It is written of him in 2 Kings 18, *“And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.”* One of the things I have been learning over my years as a leader is that if a movement is going to keep moving, it’s not enough to be righteous and alone. A leader needs to build others around him or her who will lead righteously as well. I’m not talking about having a ‘yes’ team, quite the opposite. Leaders need a team of people who will think for themselves and bring challenge and even correction when needed. The king must have helpers, princes under him, who will also rule with justice. Hezekiah had loyal princes such as Eliakim, Shebna the scribe, the elders of the priests, and Isaiah himself.

When Isaiah speaks of *“a king who shall reign in righteousness”*, he is looking beyond the reign of King Hezekiah to the future reign of Christ Himself. The prophet foresees a time when a government will exist that is characterised by righteousness and judgment. Such a description is fully fit only for the King who is above all other kings, Christ Himself. Isaiah sees a much greater day coming when the godly character of Judah will be *“as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”* I love the way the Old Testament is full of types and shadows of things to come. Isaiah points to a time when people will understand knowledge and, even more powerfully, he predicts an outpouring of the Spirit in verse 15. Pretty cool!

Here is a question for you: if Hezekiah, the righteous king, points to Jesus, then who are Jesus’ princes? The answer can be found in 1 Peter 2:9 *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”* How cool is this, training for reigning!

Pray

Father, thank You for pledging Yourself to me in my hard places and brokenness. You say to me not *“if”* but *“when”* I pass through deep waters and rushing rivers You will be with me. Give me the grace and strength I need to trust You in such times of pain. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the contrast in this chapter as the Lord comes in both judgment and grace. His judgment is against the Assyrians. It is good to see that His people no longer look to the Egyptians but are now trusting in God, which is most definitely an improvement. In verses 5 and 6, we see how the people who came through tough times have allowed such times to mould and make them better, exalting God in the process. *Strong's Concordance* offers us two Hebrew words for 'times'. Firstly, we have the word 'olam' meaning time in expanse, the big picture of time itself, all embracing and all inclusive. But the word we have here in verse 6 is the Hebrew word 'et', found almost 300 times in Scripture; it refers to a specific time like a time of hardship, a trial or a difficult season. I find this so beautiful and so personal because God is not only in the macro of the world but also in the micro of our lives.

I long for the day when I will see the King in all His beauty, splendour, and majesty. Instead of offering Him resistance, let's be so grateful that He intends His peace to reign in every aspect of our lives. May we ask His forgiveness when we choose resentment over reconciliation, nurse grudges over building bridges, and rehearse our hurts quicker than we remember the truth of His Word. The highest experience we could have now is nothing compared with what we will experience when we "*see the King in His beauty*" (verse 17). Paul said of our present walk, "*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*" (1 Corinthians 13:12) In the ancient world, mirrors were made of polished metal and the image was distorted and unclear. We see Jesus now only in an unclear way, but one day we will see Him with perfect clarity.

Pray

Father, help me to see with clearer vision, to lift my eyes out of the mud and mire of difficult times and place them on You. It is so good to know that You, Abba Father, are not just governing the macro but also the micro. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This section of Isaiah's prophecy is apocalyptic, declaring God's wrath against the nations of the world. The prophet depicts the worldwide carnage of the Battle of Armageddon when God's fury is poured out on all nations. So great is this destruction that mountains shall be melted and the host of heaven dissolved. This is the final devastation of the world at the end of the Tribulation period, the Day of the Lord. Isaiah continues the message of the coming judgment against Assyria, but in the larger context, we can see this passage as an announcement of judgment of come upon the nations during the Great Tribulation. Jesus and many Old Testament prophets went out of their way to tell us of this coming time when, because of the judgment of God, conditions on earth will be the worst human history has ever seen (we can read about this in Matthew 24). Revelation 6 also describes this horrific time of widespread ecological, economic, cosmic, and human catastrophe on a level never before known in history. It's no wonder Isaiah exclaims, *"Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it."* It is good to heed the word of the Lord in our lives.

Isaiah's words at the end of the chapter today are daunting, *"Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is His mouth that has given the order, and His Spirit will gather them together."* This remarkable statement tells me that Isaiah understood that his words were actually God's words and that his prophecy should be understood literally. It also means that Isaiah clearly challenged doubters to 'look it up' once the prophecy was fulfilled. I stand amazed today at the clarity of God's Word. I love that I get to play a part in this amazing God-story.

Pray

Father, it is so easy to be swayed by this voice and that, to be upset and alarmed by the six o'clock news rather than attend to the voice above all voices, Yours, which rings loud and clear. You are in full control and Your voice has not weakened or waned. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

While the restoration of Judah did take place practically speaking after the invasion of the Assyrians, I think the prophet here is looking further ahead. We long for restoration of the Kingdom that we have grown to love. I think of the words of Paul to the church at Rome: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."* (Romans 8:18-25)

Even the old world is waiting in hope of restoration to its former purpose and calling. I love the word 'hope'. Paul reminds us in the last verse of 1 Corinthians 13 that faith, hope and love will last forever. How often have we heard love and faith preached and discussed, and yet how seldom do we hear hope spoken about. Paul reminds us in Romans 5 that the hope God gives us does not disappoint because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So, how is your hope today? And what is it you hope for? God's Word encourages the redeemed of the Lord to say so. Say it: "I am redeemed! Praise His holy name, I am redeemed!"

Pray

Father, the blood of Jesus Christ Your Son has cleansed me from every spot and stain. Past, present, and even future sins are all under the precious blood. Thank You a thousand times over for the eternal price. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 36

Live

This is history at its best. The Assyrian invasion has been the background for much of Isaiah's prophecy from chapter 1 to chapter 35. Now Isaiah gives us an historical record. During the period outlined in the first three verses, the Assyrian army had conquered both Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, and had devastated the countryside and fortified cities of Judah. All that remained was Jerusalem; if the Assyrians conquered her, Judah was destroyed as a nation just as Syria and Israel were destroyed. These were the desperate times of King Hezekiah!

During my journey through life I have been making an interesting observation about the devil's tactics. This age-old enemy of our soul uses the same approach as the Assyrians (after all, he was the one empowering them and giving them his evil strategies). Many of us picture Satan as always sizing up to us, always ready for a fight with us. What I've come to realise is that Satan doesn't want to do battle with you. The reasons are several. First of all, there is the strong chance you will win because of Whose you are. Second, win or lose, the battle has the strong possibility of drawing you even closer to the Lord than you were before. Third, Satan is bound to know by now that God brings beauty out of ashes and so He can turn the battle around to be a great blessing for loads of other people. Therefore, I think Satan would much rather not fight you at all! He would much rather try to talk you into giving up and packing it all in!

Let's thank God today for His amazing love which makes us more and more aware of the enemy's strategy to discourage, divide, and conquer. See how he seeks to discourage our hearts and weaken our defences so we eventually give up. These were dark days for King Hezekiah and he desperately needed God to show up.

Pray

Father, I feel so like Hezekiah at times; I feel if You don't show up I'd certainly be doomed. Thank You that greater is He that is within me than he that is in the world. Thank You for the blood of Your Son Jesus that cleanses me from every sin. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Hezekiah's initial response when he realised they were in a precarious position was a good one; he did not answer the taunts of the enemy. As we saw in our last chapter, the sneaky move of the enemy is to weaken resolve and get us to give in. That's why Hezekiah's second response was even better; he turned toward God, not away from Him. When he simply and powerfully handed it all over to God, God destroyed this mighty nation in one night. 185,000 died at the hand of the angel of the Lord. Against all odds and against every expectation except the expectation of faith, the Assyrian army was turned back without having shot even one arrow into Jerusalem. The unstoppable was stopped, the undefeated was defeated!

The impossible is not hard for God to do. As a matter of fact, it's His specialty. The more difficult thing for the Lord to do was to get the hearts and minds of His people in the right place. Once they were there, it was nothing for God to dispatch one angel to wipe out their enemies. Oh, you have got to love this! My thought today is this: if one angel could kill 185,000 warriors in a night, what in the wide world would have happened if, at Jesus' request, twelve legions had been released at Calvary? (See Matthew 26.) 72,000 angels multiplied by 185,000 equals 13,320,000,000. Just saying! It amazes me how powerful, how wise, how in control God really is.

I love this passage today and I love Hezekiah's prayer, *"LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to all the words the enemy has sent to ridicule the living God."* Isn't it absolutely amazing what can happen when God got the alignment of His people's hearts? It was simply a matter of releasing one angel to do the job. The Scriptures remind us of this over and over again: unity commands the blessing!

Pray

Father, may I always turn to You in all my ways. Help me to not lean on my own understanding, rather, in all my ways acknowledge You, knowing that You most certainly will direct my paths. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Hezekiah receives a word from the Lord to set his house in order because his sickness was going to lead to death. We are not told what this sickness was, but it is clear that God had permitted it. Hezekiah's response is worthy of note; he turns to the wall, weeps bitterly, and puts his case to the Lord. His prayer is a little self-righteous in that his plea was how he had been faithful and God was being unfair. Why was Hezekiah so undone at the prospect of death? Don't forget Hezekiah lived under the Old Covenant and at that time, there was no confident assurance of the glory in the life beyond. Also, he was only in his late thirties and probably felt that a lot of life was still to be lived. Another thought to consider is that under the Old Covenant, Hezekiah would have regarded this early death as evidence that God was angry with him. Whatever the circumstances, Hezekiah's prayer was important and by all indications, if he had not made his passionate plea, his life would not have been extended.

Never forget this, please: every prayer matters! In answering Hezekiah's prayer, God gave him two gifts. Firstly, He gave the gift of more time. Secondly, He gave the gift of knowing he had fifteen years left. If he was wise, this would give King Hezekiah the motivation to walk uprightly with God and set his house in order. I suppose the question posed to us all today is, what way would we live if we knew our exact time of departure from planet earth?

I love the Scriptures that continually remind us of the power of prayer and how God allows the fervency of it to change His heart. He is God and we are His mere creation; nevertheless, He raised our status to sons and daughters through the cross. I love that God gives us not only fifteen years, but eternal life with Him in glory. Now that is pretty good news for all.

Pray

Father, the cost of my redemption was incredible; it cost You heaven's richest treasure, Your well-beloved Son, Jesus. Jesus, thank You that You were part of the plan from the beginning, according to Ephesians 1:4. You came willingly and knowingly of the drastic cost. In Your strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is the record of what is probably Hezekiah's biggest blunder, at least diplomatically. When commended for all he had done, Hezekiah began to show off all the treasure of the house of Judah. It was a genuine compliment for Hezekiah to receive this recognition from the king of Babylon, but he received it wrongly and let it go to his head. It is so easy to get puffed up when people compliment us, to take their praise and make it all about us. There is no doubt that Hezekiah started out as a good king and overall his reign was one of outstanding godliness, according 2 Kings 18:3-7. Yet his beginning was much better than his ending; sadly, Hezekiah did not finish well. We saw yesterday how God gave Hezekiah the gift of fifteen more years of life, but the added years did not make him a better or godlier man. I find that a little shocking, especially with him knowing his time was short. It makes me realise that time doesn't necessarily make us any better.

Time does nothing but pass away. Sometimes we say, "Time will tell," "Time will heal," or "Time will bring out the potential in me," but time will do nothing of the sort! Time will only come and go. It is how we *use* time that matters. We have heard it said that experience is the best teacher. I am not so sure because if that were true, we would get better as we get older and I know some people who have got older and haven't got better, they have got bitter. It is *evaluated* experience that is the best teacher – when we look back and learn from the experience, the hardship, the wrongdoing. That's how we will get better. Scripture commands us to redeem the time because the days are evil. Even though, in our weakness, we often question His timing and His ways, all we have to do is look to Jesus and we are reassured of God's heart toward us.

Pray

Father, thank You that I can unwind and not pose or pretend with anybody. Thank You for the coming Day of wiped tears and redeemed sorrows, of no more sin in my heart and of Your glory covering the earth. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 40

Live

The book of Isaiah is like a view of the whole Bible; it has 66 chapters clearly divided into a 39 and a 27. Just like the Old Testament with its 39 books about the Old Covenant, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, while certainly containing passages of comfort and hope, have a strong tone of judgment and warning. Now, beginning with Isaiah chapter 40, the tone shifts to being predominately one of comfort and blessing, full of the glory of God, just like the New Testament. I had an old mentor who often referred to the second part of this book as “the gospel of Isaiah”. I find this most interesting.

I love this chapter so much; it displays the magnitude of our Almighty God with such poetic language. Over and over again, we are challenged as to what we could compare this God to. He spreads out the heavens like a canopy and knows the name of every star; the nations of the world are like dust in His hand. This is the God who ‘tends’ His people like a shepherd would tend his flock (verse 11). He gathers us in His arms, holding us close to His heart. How beautiful is that! The little word ‘tend’ is the Hebrew word ‘raah’ which carries connotations of love, protection, and tenderness. It is the same word used in Psalm 23 when David refers to God as his shepherd. Many of the greatest men of the Bible were shepherds and their characters were amazing types and shadows of Jesus who is revealed in John 10 as the “*Good Shepherd*”!

Pray

Father, thank You for this great section of Isaiah we have just entered. I take the words of Isaiah’s prayer and speak them to You: “*Do people not know? Have they not heard? You, the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, You will not grow tired or weary, and Your understanding no one can fathom. You give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in You, O 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.*” In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

As God invites the people in distant lands to come and reason with Him, He shows them His greatness over all creation and over all history. The coasts of lands around the Mediterranean Sea and the islands represent the nations. The Lord challenged the nations that refused to wait on Him to be silent in awe, and then to move to renew their strength. They had to collect their best arguments to plead their case before Him. That just meant the people of the islands were quiet before the Lord; they had nothing worthwhile to say. We shall all stand before God one day and be judged, so the renewing of our strength must be in the Lord.

This is one of my favourite sections in Scripture. Here, God lets the nations see who is in control. He invites them to examine who it was that created it all, from the lofty heights of the mountain ranges to the deepest depths of the sea. Over every moment in time and every inch of space, God declares, "I was there; they are mine." No wonder we should bow before the Creator, our Maker, our All in All. Who, indeed, can give Him counsel? Though we don't always understand His ways, there's no panic in heaven today. He is completely faithful; it's just us who need to be full of faith. God is not distracted or perplexed about anything. We may find it hard to imagine why He hasn't answered certain prayers we've offered with a quick and big "Yes"; nevertheless, He does all things well. He gave Jesus for our sins; surely, we can trust Him to give us everything else we need.

The "*man from the east*" is likely talking of Cyrus the Great, king of Persia who conquered Babylon and allowed some of the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. He founded the Persian Empire and came from the east of Babylon. God called and empowered him for this task; it was not out of his own righteousness, but the righteousness God gave him.

Pray

Father, grant me grace in my waiting and strength in my weariness. And in the meantime, help me to be more attentive to the needs of others. Fill my heart with kindness and gentleness for the needs of others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Verse 1 of this chapter calls Messiah *“My chosen, in whom My soul delights”*. The fact is, Jesus always was. He didn’t just come into being at Bethlehem. If Jesus is the ultimate chosen One, our election is really a matter of being chosen in Him. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:4, God *“chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”*. In Isaiah 41:8, God calls His chosen ones ‘friends’ which shows that for the Lord, election is not a cold, calculating, technical thing; it is deeply connected with His love and approval. When God chooses someone, His soul delights in them. If you are chosen in Jesus before the foundation of the world, then God says, ‘My soul delights in you.’ Understanding this helps us to receive God’s favour instead of trying to earn it. The approval of God is His free gift, received by faith, because He has chosen, ‘elected’, to delight His soul in us.

We ought to be so thankful that God has the whole world in His hand because that frees us to acknowledge the obvious ... we don’t. We don’t have control over a lot of things. Let’s come to Him today with empty hands, not to grab what isn’t ours to control, but to raise our hands to Him in praise and surrender. We don’t have control over the number of days we have left before He calls us home, but He can fill the ones He has marked for us with as much of His grace, love, and wisdom as possible. We don’t have control over the things that others do to us or the feelings of disappointment that often come our way. What we do have is control over the way we respond to these knocks and set-backs. Today, let’s choose to not be controlled by our circumstances but to lean on Him, the One in full control of all things.

Pray

Father, when am I ever going to learn that You are the One in control of all things? I remember how the disciples in the boat said of Jesus, *“even the wind and the waves obey Him.”* Help me today to lean in on You for all my needs, all my stresses and strains. You do all things well for my good and for Your glory. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There are many passages of Scripture that I find hard to write about without emotion welling up in my soul. Today is probably the greatest of these for me as this chapter was given to me by the Holy Spirit in the darkest night of my soul to date. Here, we have the multiple security of being chosen into the family of God; He created us, He formed us, He chose us, He redeemed us, He called us by name. And if that's not assurance enough, He says, 'you are Mine'. Then He continues to assure us of what this means. He declares, 'I will be with You in every circumstance – mountain high or valley low.' The rest of the chapter goes on to exalt the greatness of our God. Allow this to bathe your soul today; it is a beautiful piece of prophecy.

God declares in this chapter that even the wild animals honour Him and He calls us to *"forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."* We live in a world that doesn't handle endings very well: the loss of a job or friendship, the tragedy of losing a loved one way too early. I know the pain of this, but in the new Kingdom to come, there will be no endings, only beginnings. Imagine that, a life of eternal beginnings! Israel had their share of trials, and we all have ours too. Trials are inevitable; verse 2 doesn't say 'if' you pass through the waters; it says 'when'. Sometimes we face what seems like impassable waters, the toughest of rivers, and sometimes the fires try to consume us. But the Scriptures do not say, 'When you walk on a cushy road, I will be with you.' It says God will be with us in the toughest of circumstances.

Pray

Father, how this chapter reassures me of Your magnificent hand of mercy and grace. You are so worthy of honour and praise. May I walk today in Your newness and see clearly new things springing up in my life as I live it wholly for You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter contains one of the most amazing prophecies in all of Scripture; Cyrus, the king of Persia, is named as the coming deliverer of the Jews – more than 140 years in advance. A similar prediction can be found in 1 Kings 13 where Josiah is named 300 years ahead of his time. As the passage opens, Israel is again identified as “*My servant*”, chosen from the womb to fulfil God’s purposes. I love the constant reminders that God is still active in, and responsible for, creation; He didn’t just create Adam and Eve and then, when sin arrived, let the whole thing go. Before there was sin there was a Saviour! God has made each one of us, so we each have a personal obligation to Him as our Creator. I am reminded of what Paul says to the church in Corinth in chapter 9 of his first letter, how we are not our own but are bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus, God’s Son.

What amazing promises are in this chapter of not just receiving the Spirit but also of an ongoing outpouring of it. I couldn’t say it better than Charles Hadden Spurgeon: *“Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing; we are as ships without wind, or chariots without steeds; like branches without sap, we are withered; like coals without fire, we are useless; as an offering without the sacrificial flame, we are unaccepted. I desire both to feel and to confess this fact whenever I attempt to preach. I do not wish to get away from it, or to conceal it, nor can I, for I am often made to feel it to the deep humbling of my spirit.”*

I’m sure you are like me, yet again humbled by God’s mercy and forgiveness. He regenerates our flagging and fledgling spirits with His incredible Holy Spirit. If this doesn’t awaken us, then we must be dead. The very Spirit of God Himself chooses to reside in us. Yes, that’s right, *us* – mistake-making, weak, feeling very small and insignificant, us.

Pray

Father, I have been bought by Jesus’ righteous blood and made fit to enter into Your holy presence. You, the same God whom Israel stood before at the smoking quaking mountain, not daring to even touch it lives in me. I have been redeemed and set free from all bondage. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is incredible stuff. God announces the name of the man He will use to deliver Israel. You may think this isn't that incredible ... but wait for it, this was 100 years before Cyrus was even born. Though not a worshipper of the Lord, this Persian monarch played an unusual role as Israel's shepherd (as we saw in verse 28 of the previous chapter) and as God's anointed judge of nations. We usually think of men such as Abraham as being anointed by God, but all mankind are the creation of God, whether they are Israelites or not. Men and women choose who they will serve, but all are God's creation.

We see in this chapter an explanation as to why God anointed Cyrus: that he might subdue the nations. When God opens the gates and sends you through those gates, you cannot fail. The *"right hand"* has to do with the spiritual side. Cyrus is put in place only in order that God's people may have their liberty. The whole world will know that the victories Cyrus won were of God. The Lord raises up one and He puts down another. Behind all the drama of human events today, there is a God who is planning for His Church to be perfected and prepared through affliction and persecution, chastening and tribulation to inherit the Kingdom of God.

Verse 4 tells us that Cyrus didn't even know the Lord, yet God could anoint him, guide him, bless him, and use him. How much more should God be able to do these things through those who have at least a mustard seed's worth of faith in Him! God is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Why do we worry so much as we watch the evening news when God knew the name of Israel's deliverer 100 years before he was born? God's eye is on His Church and only He knows the moment He will close the doors of heaven and say, 'No more. Let eternal life begin in a new realm.'

Pray

Father, forgive me please for worrying about the present or the future when my eye has not seen nor has my ear heard nor can my heart even imagine what it's going to be like in eternal glory. Thank You, my Father, for choosing me before the very foundation of the earth. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Oh boy, this just gets better and better. The idols, the biggies, are all bowing to God. God declares in the first few verses that these dumb idols are nothing but a burden having to be carried everywhere while He, the true God, is the Carrier of His people. Bel and Nebo were two of the most prominent Babylonian deities. The name Bel is derived from Baal and refers to Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon. Nebo was viewed as the son of Marduk; his name is found in the name of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The idea in this passage is that the Babylonian deities will one day fall before the Lord (as we see in Nebuchadnezzar's confession in Daniel 4).

The question *"To whom will ye liken Me?"* implies the obvious answer, no one! God declares categorically, *"I am God, and there is none like Me."* Yahweh is the unique and incomprehensible God. His singular distinctiveness is found in His ability to predict the future with complete accuracy; He declares the end from the beginning. Since He alone knows the future, His salvation will operate on His timetable, all things proceeding on schedule.

At the end of the chapter, we have another reference to Cyrus. God's people need to remember that God always has a deliverer for His people, even if He has to find one among pagan kings! We need to remember that God's timing is always precise and wise. When we are stubborn-hearted, we need to listen to Him and remember that He never delays and is never late. God always has His deliverer, and always knows exactly when to bring His deliverance. He is our Carrier. The psalmist calls God his Shield, his Glory, and the Lifter of his head. God is not a God that needs to be carried but a transcendent Creator who spans time and eternity, who lives in every inch of space and time, and yet dwells within the believer. How humbling and beautiful!

Pray

Father, You never cease to amaze me, and I think even eternity will not unfold all of Your greatness and majesty. The idols that You are not afraid to name are but dumb pieces of wood or stone and one wonders how people could bow before them. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Isaiah pictures proud Babylon as a humiliated woman who shall no longer be called tender and delicate. She is stripped of her fine clothing and forced to march in a forced relocation. The humiliation God will impose on Babylon is exactly the humiliation she put upon Judah and Jerusalem. Babylon thought that it was through her own strength that she had defeated Jerusalem, but actually she was only a tool in the hand of God because His people had disobeyed Him. The former royal virgin is depicted as a slave woman forced to exchange royal garments for working clothes. She must lift her garment to wade through water, traversing a river in her duties as a slave. Such duties in the East belonged to women of low rank, fitting imagery for Babylon's fall into degradation.

The message in this chapter is cross-generational: if we don't look to the Lord, there is nothing or no-one that can save us. In verse 13, the prophet sarcastically points out the futility of trusting in idols and their imagery. This ancient deception is still popular today in the widespread use of horoscopes. We can see in this verse many of the things we are doing in our society today that are displeasing to God. How sad it would be to think being born on a certain month of the year determined your life; that would mean you had no control over your behaviour. We can see that these things are very worldly, and are also displeasing to God. Many of the false gods God's people had been worshipping were connected to stargazing.

Many people greatly underestimate the blazing strength of God's judgment! We see this tragic thinking among those who say, "I won't mind going to hell. I'll party there with all my friends!" They think the fires of judgment will somehow be fun, but they are making a deadly mistake. Can there be a more dangerous sin? Today I am reminded of the verse in Acts 4 that says there is no other name under heaven whereby I can be saved.

Pray

Father, grant me fresh grace to wait upon You patiently and gratefully. Turn my whines into worship, knowing with assurance there is no-one like You who can save to the uttermost all who come to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter kicks off very badly for the people of Judah. Did your mum or dad ever say to you, “You should have known better!”? Well, this passage is basically saying exactly that. These people should have known better but they have lived in opposition to the voice and move of God. It’s important to note these words are addressed to *“the descendants of Jacob”*, which includes both Israel and Judah. Both are criticised for calling on God’s name but refusing to live by His laws. These people were Israelites, the chosen people of God, but their hearts were far from Him. This hypocrisy was common throughout Israel’s history, even to the time of the Lord Jesus, as Matthew 23 describes. God speaks of having chosen them and because of that, they are being drawn into *“the furnace of affliction”*, referring to God’s merciful judgment that would burn away their dross ... hopefully! He will refine them and try them with affliction.

Does it bother us to know that God allows trials and His refining fires in our lives for His own sake? We should remember that we are not at the centre of the universe, but God is. Everything He does and allows furthers His eternal purpose. This is a great thing to keep in mind. So often we think it is all about us; today’s passage brings us back to the reality that it is all about God and His purposes. He has made us for Himself and our deepest, most powerful, and most insatiable longings for relationship can only be met in Him, not in any human being or religious activity.

There is a little statement in verse 17 that I want you to highlight: *“I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you.”* That is a pretty powerful statement! The word ‘teach’ in Hebrew is ‘lamad’ which refers to the goading of animals to get them to move in a certain direction. Scholars tell us that from this word ‘lamad’ comes the word ‘talmud’ which means ‘student’ or ‘scholar’. How cool is that!

Pray

Father, once again, inundate my heart with the love that is better than life, the love that will never let go of me, the only love that is enough to fulfil me – Your lavish and liberating love for me in Jesus. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This has to be one of the most beautiful chapters in Scripture. It is rich and full of our Lord Jesus Christ. If I were digging for gold or drilling for oil, I would have just become the wealthiest person in the world. Here are a couple of nuggets of gold...

The *Servant of the Lord* is a person who will come forth from the servant nation of Israel. This is none other than the Messiah, formed in the womb to “bring Jacob back to Him”. He is further commissioned to be “a light for the Gentiles”. This is quoted in Acts 13:47 as being fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the light of the world. He was with the Father in the creation of the earth, and He was the One who would breathe life into man in Genesis 2. Therefore, He would also be the Saviour of His creation.

The Messiah prophetically proclaims that He is like a carefully made and polished arrow in the service of the Lord, ready to be used at the right time. This probably has reference to the hidden years of Jesus when He lived in obscurity, a polished shaft waiting in the quiver of the Lord. In verse 16, He declares that you and I have been engraved on the palms of His hands. One day we will look upon those nail-pierced hands of our Saviour and thank Him for bearing our sin. What a Saviour! We need to thank Him not only for being fair with us, but also for being outrageously generous. What we could never earn in our own right – His perfect righteousness – He has given to us as a gift. What we deserve is to be dealt with according to the wages of our sin, but He is not going to do that because of His perfect and finished work. My transgressions are forgiven, all of them, my sins are covered, every one of them, and God will never hold me guilty for them, none of them.

Pray

Father, thank You for revealing Jesus in this amazing chapter and allowing me a glimpse of His greatness. Every day reveals more of His splendor, majesty, and might; I imagine eternity will not fully reveal it all either; there is such strength and beauty in the redemption plan. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter begins with an emphasis on the Lord's unbreakable commitment of marriage to His people, Judah. This can be viewed in contrast with Jeremiah 3:8 where the Lord states that He divorced Israel and threatens Judah with the same. However, in spite of their sins, He never severed Himself from the Davidic line. He is proclaiming, 'If you think I have divorced you, produce the certificate. Show Me some proof of what you say. Was it not because of your own sins that you have been separated?' Then God shares His willingness to redeem by declaring that His arm is not shortened that it cannot save.

From verse 4, we have amazing prophetic detail of the Messiah. *"I offered My back to those who beat Me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting."* We know from Mark 15:15 that Jesus was beaten on the back. We know from Luke 22:63-65 that Jesus was beaten on the face. We know from Mark 15:19-20 that Jesus was mocked and spat upon. Let's remember that this was penned 740 years before it happened! Notice carefully, *"I offered My back"* means that Jesus did it voluntarily. How can anyone still think that God does not care for them? Yet again, we turn to Jesus as the designer and builder of all things, including the history of the world. At times, He has had to use a wrecking-ball on our human assumptions in order to build something more lasting and beautiful, and while we still have breath, that process continues.

"I have set My face like a flint," referred to in Luke 9:51, points to Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem to be crucified. He did all this because *"the Lord God helps Me"*. It would be so easy to miss this little statement. If Jesus needed this help, how much more do we! No matter how He was mistreated, the Servant had full confidence in the Father's support.

Pray

Father, even when I'm overbearing or under-believing, disengaged or too enmeshed, I am thankful to know that You remain faithful and loving. Help me to quick repentances so that I never minimise Your extraordinary love in my life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If you mark your Bible, it would be good to mark the three times God tells the people to listen to Him in this chapter. God is really trying to drive home some points. I love this verse, *“Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”* God counsels His people to look at His work in days past. This is the reason I keep beating the drum of reading God’s Word; it tells us how God has dealt with His people, and gives us faith and guidance for His work in our lives. As Isaiah speaks here, God’s people were in a discouraged place. They felt defeated, so the prophet tells them to look to God’s work in and through His people in the past. Isaiah also looks down the corridor of human history to a time when the heavens and the earth will be no more. He likens the earth to an old garment, meaning it will one day wear out and only the ransomed and redeemed shall return with singing unto Zion and experience everlasting joy.

I love verse 9; it has been one of my go-to verses in discouraged times. We need to clothe ourselves with strength. I lay emphasis on “yourself”; it is *our* job to pick ourselves up and push into the things of the Lord. Discouragement is such a destructive thing. I love this quote: *“Once a Christian gets eaten up with discouragement and unbelief it takes a great deal to shake him out of it. Those two emotions are the masterstrokes of Satan. So long as the child of God maintains an attitude of praise and trust in the Lord, then he is invincible. Once the devil gets him discouraged, that poor man is really going to take a knocking!”* (Redpath)

I love God’s Word but will you join me today in asking the Lord to multiply our hunger for it 1,000 times? May His Word mean more to us than our natural bread (which I’m really fond of, by the way!) May we realise that we simply can’t live without it.

Pray

Father, whenever I’m tempted to wonder about my value to You, all I have to do is consider the astonishing sacrifice You made for me. By Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, I’m forgiven and clothed with Your very own righteousness. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The theme of God's deliverance for His people now reaches its greatest expression in the Servant of the Lord who will suffer for the sins of His people. The prophet foresees the Millennium when Jerusalem will once again be "*the holy city*" and the "*uncircumcised and defiled*" will no longer enter her gates. There is a repetition today from verse 9 in yesterday's chapter to clothe oneself with strength, and Isaiah adds the detail of the clothes being as beautiful garments of splendour. This was a call for lethargic, sleepy Zion to awake from drunkenness and clothe herself in garments of honour and dignity provided by the Lord.

This is such beautiful writing as God calls Israel to realise they can actually clothe themselves with something beautiful, and at no cost to themselves. They were to be redeemed, according to verse 9. This is the Hebrew word 'gaal' meaning to ransom or buy something back that was lost through violence. We can see from the last couple of verses that our redemption did have a cost, but it was paid by another. It would be great to remind our hearts today of the cost of the redemption which we received freely.

Verse 14 refers to people looking at Jesus and being astonished at His disfigurement; it went beyond any other human being; He was marred beyond human likeness. He was punched and beaten beyond recognition. I sometimes imagine how Pilate presented Jesus with Barabbas to have one freed, according to their custom. At that stage, they had beaten Jesus so badly that even the rabble mob were shocked by what the Roman soldiers had done to Him. For Jesus, the crown of thorns would precede the crown of glory. Is it any wonder He prayed in the garden, "*Father, if there is any other way*"? Aren't you glad He bowed to the will of the Father? He endured the suffering and bought back our freedom forever!

Pray

Father, my guilt is gone and my shame is shattered. I'm rooted in Your love and standing in Your grace. I'm clothed in Christ's righteousness and rest in Your forgiveness. I've been sealed by Your Spirit and made Your beloved child. How incredible is that! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 53

Live

This must be one of the most intense prophetic passages in the Old Testament about Jesus and His sufferings. Adam Clarke put it this way: “This chapter contains a beautiful summary of the most peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of Christianity.”

The statement “*by His stripes we are healed*” has brought much debate over whether Isaiah had spiritual or physical healing in mind. Is physical healing part of the atonement? We see a little more light shed on this passage where it is quoted in the New Testament. In Matthew 8:16-17, the view seems to be of physical healing. In 1 Peter 2:24-25, the view seems to be of spiritual healing. I think we can safely say that God has both aspects of healing in view. Both our physical and spiritual healing is provided for by the suffering of Jesus. (You can be sure we will enjoy the full intensity and benefit of both in eternity!) I suppose my view on the subject has always been a simple one: eternal life is found in the cross and everything that doesn't fit that mould – misdemeanours, disabilities, bad or wrong things – isn't a part of that life.

This chapter reveals the personal Messiah who alone can atone for sin. In the first three verses, His message is rejected, His person is refused, and His mission is misunderstood. Yet He still wins and reigns victorious as our one and only Saviour. To miss the fact that Jesus Christ is the central figure in this passage is to stumble in unbelief over the cornerstone and foundation of all the gospel. No “*form or comeliness*” denotes His humble origin rather than His personal appearance. No “*beauty*” does not mean He will be ugly, but that He will not appear on the scene in the regalia of a king, rather, He will come as one who is common. Nothing could better describe the humble appearance of Jesus than this amazingly beautiful prophecy from Isaiah. Jesus is our wonderful and incredible Servant King!

Pray

Father, I am so thankful for Your love for me. There aren't many other passages which display that as powerfully as this one. Thank You, Jesus, for the fulfilment of this amazing prophecy. By Your suffering I am healed and will live through eternity as Your joint heir. Wow! In Your name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Who ever heard of a barren woman rejoicing? In Isaiah's times, barrenness was seen as a shame and reproach; it was even looked upon as a judgment from God, a sign He was angry with you. Here, this barren woman can sing because she has produced more than any normal woman. Such is the blessing that Israel will have to enlarge their tent. The curse and shame of barrenness will be so completely broken and Israel so fruitful that they will have to expand their living space. *"Enlarge ... stretch forth ... lengthen"*; the prophet commands barren Israel to prepare for the day when their numerous inhabitants will require a larger space to dwell in. I love this. Christianity was not going to be only for a handful of people in the holy land, but available to all mankind everywhere. The Church would grow at an amazing rate. After the filling of 120 people with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, Peter preached and 3,000 accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

This is one of those chapters which, for me, drips honey. It is the eternal God of heaven speaking to Israel as His wife. He makes the beautiful proclamation in verse 5, *"For your Maker is your husband"*. There is much a preacher could concentrate on in a chapter like this, but I really want to encourage and inspire you to understand that the promise of the Lord will meet our needs when other people do not. Never again will any of us have to take the place of second best. God can be a greater spouse than any person; this is something for every single person to remember, and something no married person should forget. An earthly spouse can never fulfill every need; the great heavenly Husband can. Amazing truth! His love is boundless and timeless and we are the recipients of it under the New Covenant. We are blessed, truly blessed indeed.

Pray

Father, I feel like I've been slam-dunked yet again by Your ceaseless pursuit of Your people. Even when they broke Your heart and committed adultery with just about every other nation, You wooed them back with such promise and affection, it would melt the hardest heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In the NKJ version, verse one starts with the word “*Ho!*” It’s a bit like saying, ‘Hi there!’ or ‘Hey you, pay attention!’ I love what Spurgeon says: “Ho! – this is the gospel note; a short, significant appeal, urging you to be wise enough to attend to your own interests. Oh, the condescension of God! That he should, as it were, become a beggar to his own creature, and stoop from the magnificence of his glory to cry, ‘Ho!’ to foolish and ungrateful men!”

God then throws out an incredible invitation to buy food and drink without price. The invitation is clear and everything is available, but we must still do some things to acquire the provision. We must tune our ear to His voice, we must seek the Lord above all, and then we must turn to Him. Things haven’t really changed! If we desire the provision of the King, here are the simple principles: the love of God is unconditional, you can’t earn it or stop it, it is like an avalanche; the blessings of God, however, always come with an “*if*” before them, they must be earned.

When God inspired Isaiah to pen this chapter, He called for the wicked to forsake their way, and then He fires in this statement: “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,*” declares the LORD. “*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts*”. We quote this verse often, especially when we have no answers for what’s going on in the world or when a friend is sick or dying, but I wonder, is it actually a reprimand? Is it saying that our ways *should* be His ways and our thoughts *should* be His thoughts? Our hearts should so intertwine with our King that we know and feel His very heartbeat. May we all cry with the Apostle Paul, “*Oh, that I might know Him!*”

Pray

Father, again today I need to align my wayward heart with Yours. For far too long the old enemy of my soul has fed me the lie that You are too busy for me and have more important people to attend to. Thank You for being the Lover of my soul today. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I mentioned in the previous chapter that the love of God is unconditional. God cannot *not* love You; it is His very nature. But the blessings of God are conditional. I'd love to elaborate this thought today. Over and over in the Bible you will read the little word with huge meaning – 'if'! *"If my people would humble themselves and pray ... then I will hear from heaven and come and heal their land."* Another great example of our responsibility is found in Luke 6:38 *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* Notice who is asked to make the first move – you! You give and it will be given to you.

The prophetic word today is all about this divine law and established principle of sowing and reaping. It is directed to God's discouraged people who have slackened in obedience and righteousness. They see no reason to repent. However, what they do matters. I challenge people around tithing all the time, especially when they say, "When the Lord blesses me, then I'll start giving." I say an empathic, "No! Start giving now and do it in anticipation that God will bless your finances."

Remember how Jesus spoke the words *"Come out"* to a dead Lazarus and he was raised from the dead? Imagine asking a dead person who is bound and wrapped in grave clothes to move! Jesus continues to call people to respond and pass from death to life, from condemnation for our sins to the righteousness of faith, and from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God. And, as surely as Lazarus needed to be freed from his grave-clothes, so do we. The smell and signs of death still cling to us, bind us, and trip us up, so let's rid ourselves of the ties that bind and follow Him with all we have.

Pray

Father, there are many areas of my life in which I long for greater freedom. Today, I invite You to invade my life as I yet again respond to matchless grace. Your love is greater than all loves combined. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this chapter, we again see God as the husband of Israel and how their passionate, chronic attraction to idols was like the lust of an adulterer. God's people pursue the false gods like a lover runs after the focus of their love; they throw themselves upon the idols as a lover gives themselves to their loved one. Read again the potent language of verse 8, *"Forsaking Me, you uncovered your bed, you climbed into it and opened it wide; you made a pact with those whose beds you love, and you looked with lust on their naked bodies."* Those are strong words for a spouse to say to their partner, but when it's coming from the portals of heaven, it's really serious stuff.

It would be so easy to fly into judgment of Israel, but I suggest to you that our idols today have become more sinister. It would be a great exercise to ask yourself, what idols are in my life? Could the language of this chapter be used towards me? These are stirring thoughts and realities! As we meditate on and pray our way through this exercise, let's not sit up on our critical hobby horse, looking down on anyone; but rather, let's sit down and look up to our heavenly Father, owning our vulnerability and heeding His warning.

We all need fresh grace to take these things to heart. In Proverbs 7, we are warned about sexual immorality. A woman seduced a young man with her pretty speech and enticed him with her flattery. He followed her like an ox going to the slaughter. He was like a stag caught in a trap, awaiting the arrow that would pierce its heart. He was like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life. Whether it's a she or a he or a thing doing the seducing, the story is predictable, and the end is awful.

Pray

Father, the truth is, life is too short to have an affair – emotional, physical, or both. The truth is, You are the Spouse I have always wanted. Only in union and vital communion with You will I find what I've been looking and longing for – the intimacy and joy for which I have been created and redeemed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this chapter, the true fast is contrasted with the false external show of religiosity and downright piety, a 'look at me' kind of thing. The type of fasting they were doing was a waste of their time, just a show for the world. It was as if they were saying, 'I have fasted, God, so what are You going to do for me in return?' It was as if fasting was a trade-off. The Jews here felt that God had not kept His bargain with them if He did not immediately reward them for fasting. This type of fast was, of course, unacceptable to God – then and also now. Fasting should be a private thing between you and God alone.

A great study on fasting is found in Matthew 6. Look for the three *when's*: When you pray, when you fast, and when you give. Notice Jesus didn't say "if"; it's a definite "*when*"! These people in the book of Isaiah were no different from the Pharisees of Jesus' day; they trusted in empty ritual that had no spiritual reality. Real fasting that is partnered with real repentance and isn't only about image has huge potential and power before God, but God sees through the hypocrisy of empty religious ritual, including fasting. In Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the Publican, found in Luke 18:9-14, He told how the self-righteous Pharisee made a special point to say, "*I fast twice a week*". The answer isn't to stop fasting, but to get right with God and make your fasting more than something superficial.

Situations and times differ between Bible days and ours, and yet we often resort to the same foolish strategies, slipping into the category of trying to earn God's love while all we are really doing is hiding from His true love, ignoring His daily mercies, and resisting His great compassion. We all know this, but that old religious thing gets hold of us at times and we choose broken cisterns, dumb idols, and self-help over His love.

Pray

Father, I'm tired of wasting my thirst on water that does not satisfy. I'm tired of digging my own wells, and tired of being tired. Once again, I bring my thirst to You. I bring my excuse-making, unbelief, pride, and self-righteousness to You, my King. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The question that seemed to be rattling about in these people was: if God is all powerful and all hearing, then why doesn't He listen and act to end or prevent the suffering of His people? It would seem that these people turned a blind eye to the next twenty or so verses. It was their sin that had separated them from God, which begs us to ask, in what way does our sin separate us from God? Sin does not necessarily separate us from the presence of God because God is present everywhere, according to Psalm 139:7, and even Satan can have an audience with God, according to Job 1:6. Neither does sin separate us from the love of God because God loves sinners, according to Romans 5:8. However, you may remember I highlighted a few chapters ago how the love of God is unconditional but the blessings are always accompanied with an 'if'; therefore, sin separates us from our fellowship with God, from the blessings of God, from the benefits of God's love and, more scarily, sin separates us from the protection of God. It's easy to fall into the trap of blaming God when the problem is ours. We even hear media broadcasters use the phrase 'act of God' to describe tragedies and disasters. Never is there an acknowledgement of man's choice to sin and bring judgment.

Verses 15 and 16 are daunting, *"truth is nowhere to be found ... there was no justice ... He saw there was no man, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene."* How sad is that! In a chosen nation described as the wife of God, not one person, no one, could be found who was just and righteous. And yet, I love how God would provide salvation by His own arm. Who do you think that might be referring to?

Pray

Father, the psalmist prayed a prayer in Psalm 76 that we make ours today: *"You're all I want in heaven! You're all I want on earth! When my skin sags and my bones get brittle, GOD is rock-firm and faithful. Look! Those who left You are falling apart! Deserters, they'll never be heard from again. But I'm in the very presence of GOD — oh, how refreshing it is! I've made Lord GOD my home. GOD, I'm telling the world what You do!"* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love this chapter. The Rescuer and Redeemer has arrived and excitement is the only response. In darkness, we lie down; when it's light, we rise up. Darkness brings gloom and is for sleep; light is for shining. When the light has come, we must respond and do as commanded here today, "*Arise, shine*". Why? Because the light has come! This is no ordinary light; this is light that shines from the glory of God. The word 'glory' mentioned in verse 1 is the Hebrew word 'kavod'. *Strong's Concordance* refers to this as "weightiness, which is substantial or heavy, honour, splendour, power, wealth, authority, magnificence, fame, dignity, riches and excellency". Holy smokes, if a list like this doesn't make you arise, you must be dead. This glory is like the light of Jesus in the Transfiguration when "*His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning*" (Luke 9). Even kings will be attracted to the brightness of Israel's rising. This will ultimately be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus when Israel is lifted up among all nations.

Notice that Isaiah doesn't say 'arise and reflect' but 'arise and shine'. I hear preachers say we should reflect the glory of God, and I know what they mean, but the Apostle Paul said it was Christ in him which was the hope of glory. Imagine that, God in totality indwelling us fully, not just a little bit, but all of Him. Remember the context of Isaiah's prophecy: in much of this book, he speaks from before the time of the Babylonian captivity until it took place. He points those dispossessed people of God to a day when they shall inherit the land forever. Is this because of their own goodness or justice? Definitely not. It's all because of the promises and goodness of Almighty God.

Pray

Father, what a call today to arise, for Your light has come. There is no light like Your light because it exposes all darkness. No one can sabotage Your sovereignty or divert Your plans for the cosmos. Nations will come to Your light and kings to the brightness of Your dawn. You are irresistible and one day every knee will bow and tongue confess that You are Lord. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Isaiah 61

Live

Isaiah introduces the King who will rule in the glorious kingdom he has just described. We pick up this passage in Luke 4:16-22 where it is recorded that Jesus came to His hometown Nazareth; He went into the synagogue and this was the Old Testament passage He chose to read. When I say 'chose', He actually foreordained it; it was handed to Him as the reading for that morning. Jesus opened the scroll to Isaiah 61, read it loudly, and when He had finished, He sat down and simply said, *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* What confidence, what glory, what majesty as Jesus announces that He had come to heal the damage that sin brings. He was the great Redeemer, the King of the Kingdom that He was now introducing on earth. Sin has done such great damage there needs to be a great work of redemption. Jesus was the Perfecter of it.

The word 'anoint' means to rub or sprinkle on; apply an ointment or oily liquid. Persons in the Old Testament were often literally anointed with oil. For example, priests in Exodus 28 were anointed for their special service to the Holy One. Oil was literally poured over their heads; Psalm 133 records it running down on Aaron's beard. This was done as a sign of the Holy Spirit upon their lives and service. The oil on the head was the outward representation of the real spiritual work going on inside them.

As believers under the New Covenant, we also have an anointing. We are told in 1 John 2:20, *"but you have an anointing from the Holy One"*. In the New Testament sense, anointing has the idea of being filled with, and blessed by, the Holy Spirit. Let's not take this lightly but rejoice today that we have been anointed and are being constantly refilled with the Holy Spirit. How beautiful!

Pray

Father, I pray these verses from Hebrews 13:20-21 today: *"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This prophecy is directed towards Zion and Jerusalem. Although God is concerned with that actual physical place, it also stands as a representation of Israel, and, in an even more general sense, a representation of all God's people. We are told that Jerusalem will receive a new name and this new name will reflect Israel's new favoured status. In the Bible, when God called someone to serve Him, many times He changed their name. Jacob, which means 'deceiver', was changed to Israel. Abram's name was changed to Abraham, from 'father' to 'father of many'. The meaning of the name had to be correct for the call on the person's life. When we were saved, we all took on the name of Christ. The name Christian means 'Christ one' or 'little Christs'. I believe each individual also has a new name that no one knows but God; we are told this in Revelation 3:12. When we receive that private name from God, it will describe us as we really are.

I love verse 3, *"You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God."* Jesus will be proud of those who belong to Him and He will present His Church to the world as a precious stone or crown. Paul uses this familiar idea in Ephesians 1:8, where he says that the believer should understand *"what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"*. The idea is not of *our* inheritance in the Lord, but *His* inheritance in us. We often we have only a superficial understanding of how precious we are to God. How amazing is this revelation today that God has an inheritance in us! This truth should make us want to keep ourselves pure and separated from the world, so one day, Jesus will say, 'Father, here's Your son, Your daughter in whom You delight!'

Pray

Father, I give thanks with Zephaniah today over the words in his third chapter, *"The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."* No wonder Paul made a special prayer in Ephesians 3:18-19 that I could somehow begin to comprehend such love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is speaking of the destruction of Edom, Bozrah most likely being the capital of Edom. The prophecy refers to Edom literally, and could also speak spiritually of those who do not regard God. Remember that Edom would not let the children of Israel pass through their land and God's wrath was against them, so they symbolise rebellion. Their leader, Esau, sold his birth right for a bowl of soup, so Edom could also symbolise those who reject the Lord for worldly things.

The splattered grape juice staining His clothing is, in reality, blood from those destroyed in judgment. John alludes to this in Revelation 19 in describing the second coming of Christ, the Warrior-King. In verse 4, Isaiah speaks of both *“the day of vengeance”* and *“the year of My redeemed”*. This is the time when the sickle is put in the earth, the wheat is separated out to be with God in heaven, and the evil ones are gathered as tares, spoken about in Matthew 13:30. This verse in Matthew tells us that the redeemed will be gathered into the *“barn”*. I love that little analogy, referring to heaven.

The most outstanding part of this chapter for me is when the Lord answers the prophetic question in verse one with, *“It is I, mighty to save”*. Even amidst the terrible judgment, God still wanted to be known as the God who saves. He declares in verse 3, *“I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me.”* In God's great plan of the ages, Jesus will accomplish two things, alone. First, He atones for our sin, alone on the cross. Second, He alone judges the world. God doesn't love punishing sinners, but He does love vindicating His redeemed. I'm giving thanks today I'm in the ranks of the redeemed!

Pray

Father, oh how special to stand as a redeemed saint. Thank You for Your promise that with every temptation I face in life, You will always provide a way out and grace to endure. Show me what that looks like today, especially when my cry for relief is much stronger than my cry for a changed heart. Help me to make redemptive choices today, choices that celebrate the abundant life You so freely give me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prayer of the people continues from chapter 63. The cry for God to move is very powerful, *“that the mountains would tremble before You”*. Isaiah perhaps has in mind how God shook Mount Sinai when Israel camped there on their way to the Promised Land, recorded in Exodus 19.

We see two reactions from God to the sinful condition of man. Firstly, He hides His face from them, showing them that fellowship is broken or, at the very least, damaged. Secondly, He consumes them because of their iniquities, displaying that the sinful condition of their hearts has invited, and even demanded, the righteous judgment of God. Is it any wonder the prophet begins to cry out for mercy! I love how he reminds God of who He is, *“but now, O LORD, You are our Father”*. The one who is praying is in a desperate place; he needs the mercy of God because the justice of God condemns him. Desperate times require desperate prayers and in his appeal for mercy, he first reminds God, ‘You are our Father. Please have mercy on us as a loving Father.’ He appeals for God’s mercy because God has sovereign power over each life. It is like saying, ‘We are like clay in Your hands. Oh God, would You deal gently with us and mould us according to Your mercy?’

A father is always a father; he can never truly disown his children. A potter cannot disown the pot; it is only there because he made it. I love how Isaiah is bold enough to say, ‘You made us, Lord, so You’re kind of stuck with us!’ As we read how God is the Potter and we are the clay, I’m sure we are all aware of our great need of His mercy and grace, which He so readily gives. It warms my heart to know that He looks at me today and addresses me as *“beloved”*. I am so grateful for the power of the gospel to rename, renew, and release us from old destructive labels, including the ones we’ve given ourselves.

Pray

Father, the name of Jesus is the name I love to hear more than any other. It is at that name I will one day bow my knee with everyone in heaven, on earth and under the earth, declaring that He alone is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prayer recorded in the last two chapters is one of the most beautiful and moving prayers in the Bible; however, it doesn't seem to be representative of the heart of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. In this chapter, God speaks to that heart, a heart with shallow repentance.

God says, *"I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me"*. The Jewish exiles in Babylon did ask for the Lord, but they would not find Him because, for the most part, they had no sincerity. Yet, God would be found by those who did *not* seek Him, namely, the Gentiles. In general, God deems the prayer of the last two chapters to be a load of self-righteous tosh. Verse 8 reminds us that there were some who were sincere, although not many. Yet I love how God's mercy is again revealed as He will spare the whole cluster just because He finds a good grape.

As is common for Isaiah, he swiftly changes his conversation to a time to come. Our natural minds struggle to comprehend the millennial reign of Jesus which will be not only a time of biological and social transformation, it will also be a time of profound spiritual transformation and intimacy. There will be an immediate and constant sense of the presence of God and His knowledge will cover the earth, as Isaiah spoke about in chapter 11. Imagine the predator and the prize eating together. Sounds a cool place!

Everything about us matters to God. Even in His judgments being declared in these Old Testament chapters, we see His mercy shining through the chinks in His armour. Our spirit, soul, body, and everything about us stands in need of His cleansing, healing, and liberating grace. I wonder at His patience with Israel and I wonder also at His patience with me. To know that one day we will be totally whole ought to make us grateful beyond measure. In light of that glorious day, our cry in this day ought to be simple, humble, and earnest.

Pray

Father, I desperately want to live for You even though my flesh seems to constantly get in the way. I take heart that You don't despise my asking and that You do all things well. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love how Isaiah closes his book with God putting things back into proper perspective. I can almost hear the bellow of God's eternal voice booming throughout the ages as He declares (in case everyone had forgotten), *"Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool"*. It is paramount we understand this one thing – He is God and we are not! Stephen, in Acts 7, just before he was martyred, quoted verses 1-2, agreeing with Isaiah about the greatness of God abiding in humans and not in man-made temples.

Isaiah's final prophecy begins with the statement, *"This is what the Lord says"*. The passage points to the immensity of God who is greater than the heavens; heaven is but His throne and earth His footstool. He is not limited to any house or temple made by man. The Apostle John, in Revelation 21, tells us that in eternity there is no need for a temple, *"for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"*. God's desire is to dwell in men and women who, as verse 2 says, are of a *"poor and contrite spirit"*. I'm sure you, like me, would never want to stand with arrogance before our God. Rather, we should tremble at His majesty and have a humble and contrite spirit. The word *"contrite"* actually means 'lamed' or 'disabled', and is used here with the intent to show the carnage that sin brought to the earth and how without God and His redemption plan through Jesus, we would be eternally lost.

Oh, how we need Jesus! How could we ever assume that if we prayed hard enough and long enough, we could appease God or earn His love and acceptance, when all the time He has loved us from even before the foundations of the earth were put down? So, as Isaiah closes his book, he foresees the New Testament doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the temple of man's body, according to 1 Corinthians 6:19. I really hope you enjoyed this book as much as I enjoyed reading and researching it.

Pray

Father, when I read the first few verses, I'm so thankful to remember that You are engaged in determining and directing all of my steps. You are the eternal God who rules the universe and yet You stoop to relationship with Your creation. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

