



BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

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I S A I A H



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INTRODUCTION

If you could only have one book of the Bible, which would you choose? Certainly, one of the four Gospels would be high on the list, but I would suggest considering the Book of Isaiah.

Among all of the Old Testament books, it is a literary masterpiece. Its vivid use of images and visual descriptions is striking. Isaiah writes to an affluent people who have grown cold and distant from their God. He strikes with the deepest Law—warning of God’s coming wrath, which sweeps on like a raging flood. Then he speaks of the gracious love of God, pouring the rich, healing Gospel into wounded souls.

But what sets this book close to the Gospels in importance is the wealth of information Isaiah reveals about God’s promised Son and His saving mission, from His birth to His ministry to His suffering, death, and resurrection. Even more, he explains very clearly how Jesus’ suffering and death will secure our salvation, some seven hundred years before Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin.

PURPOSE

Isaiah writes to confront Israel’s waywardness, warn of the coming wrath, and then promise God’s merciful forgiveness and restoration of His people through the coming Messiah. Isaiah points out that God’s wrath is fierce and only a remnant of Israel will be saved. But he also teaches us that God’s wrath is not confined to Israel; it extends to every nation on earth. But the same is true of His gracious salvation, as we will see.

For these Bible study questions, we will focus on the role of the Messiah as shown through the chapters of Isaiah.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

TITLE AND OVERVIEW

In the first twenty verses of his book, Isaiah masterfully sets the main themes of Law and Gospel before us. In the very first verse he describes this book as a “vision.” Notice his striking language and imagery throughout the book. Try to picture the images his words paint in your mind’s eye.

Read Isaiah 1:1–20.

Isaiah exposes the guilt and sin that God sees in His people, but that they do not see in themselves.

Q 1: What is the significance of the colors Isaiah uses in 1:18 to depict our sinful state and the forgiveness God grants through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ?

- Scarlet and crimson are vivid red colors that remind us of the blood dripping off the hands of murderers. Yet, the forgiving blood of Jesus Christ cleanses away those sins, leaving the believer as white as snow or as clean white wool.

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

If you know the Gospels well, this parable will sound familiar. Jesus uses it on Tuesday of Holy Week. In Isaiah, the parable of the vineyard focuses on the grapes—the Israelite people God planted to do good works of kindness and compassion, but who instead only did things out of selfishness and hatred.

Read Isaiah 5:1–7.

Compare this with Jesus’ parable of the tenants in **Matthew 21:33–46**.

Q 2: Isaiah uses this parable to focus on the common Israelites. On whom did Jesus focus in His version of this parable?

- Jesus focused on the Jewish religious leaders who were exploiting their positions and the people for their own selfish gain. These leaders would be instrumental in poisoning the Jews against the efforts of Jesus Christ and the apostles to share the Good News with the descendants of Abraham.

ISAIAH'S COMMISSIONING

In this familiar passage, Isaiah reveals the source of his authority as prophet of the Lord. As Isaiah looks upon God, who has made Himself visible in His temple, consider the Lord's real presence in the place you worship, how He speaks to you through His Word, and how He empowers you for witness through His Sacraments.

Read Isaiah 6:1–10.

Q 3: How might we compare the burning coal in verse 6 with the body of the Lord we receive in Holy Communion?

- Just as the burning coal touched and purified Isaiah's sinful lips, the body and blood of Christ Jesus in, with, and under the bread and wine touch our lips and cleanse us of all sin. God makes us worthy by grace through faith to be His messengers to the world.

Now we read the first of three great messianic prophecies regarding the conception, birth, and ministry of Jesus Christ.

THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE

Ahaz is the unbelieving king of Judah. He hears word that two enemy kings have allied themselves together against him—the kings of Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Syria. In fear, he is considering making an alliance with the king of Assyria. God sends Isaiah to urge Ahaz to put his trust in his God.

Read Isaiah 7:1–17.

First, God reveals that He will prevent the kings whom Ahaz dreads from entering the land of Judah. Beyond that, God prophesies that within sixty-five years the Northern Kingdom will fall. Then, to strengthen Ahaz's faith, God offers to perform a miraculous sign of Ahaz's choosing.

Q 4: What is wrong with Ahaz's refusal to ask and put the Lord to the test?

- On the surface, this sounds like a response of faith—similar to Jesus' answer, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7), when Satan tempted Him to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple. But on Ahaz's lips it is the opposite. He has made up his mind to ally himself with the king of Assyria. He doesn't want to hear what God has to say through Isaiah.

So, God chooses His own sign: the virgin conception and birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

You might wonder what kind of sign would this be for Ahaz if Jesus was not to be conceived for another seven hundred years. God was telling Ahaz that in the time it would take for a virgin to conceive, bear a son, and for that son to grow to the age of knowing good and evil, the threat of the two kingdoms would be gone.

For us, the virgin birth of God's Son assures God's presence with us. Jesus' victory over sin, Satan, hell, and death frees us from fear of all our enemies.

TO US A CHILD IS BORN

After a chapter that describes the devastating invasion by Assyria, Isaiah brings us another great messianic prophecy about Immanuel, who would be conceived of a virgin. When laid alongside John 1, where we learn the divine origin and identity of the baby of Bethlehem, this prophecy reveals the Christ Child through some amazing names.

Read Isaiah 9:1–7.

In order to help his audience understand the freedom Christ would bring, Isaiah talks about the “day of Midian,” when Gideon’s three hundred routed a huge foreign army with nothing but torches, jars, and trumpets.

Q 5: What is meant by the phrase “and the government shall be upon His shoulder” (v. 6)?

- No earthly, purely human king can carry the entire kingdom upon his shoulder. He needs an army, advisors, counselors, and his subjects. But Jesus Christ is different. The almighty Son of God carries the entire creation upon His mighty shoulder, just as He will singlehandedly battle Satan, sin, death, and hell to win the victory for all of us on the cross.

Take a moment to meditate on each of the names for this child in verse 6, as well as the way verse 7 shows how His kingdom will grow with the spread of the Church throughout the earth and from generation to generation before Judgment Day.

THE SHOOT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE

One hundred years after Isaiah's ministry, Judah fell to Babylon and the reign of the sons of David stopped. It was as though the tree of David's father, Jesse, was cut down. But six hundred years later, a new Son would rise from the dead stump of that tree. And since the Branch would grow from the stump of Jesse and not David, He would be a new and greater King David for the people of God.

Read Isaiah 11:1–10.

Jesus read this prophecy when He returned to His childhood home of Nazareth and taught in the synagogue there. When He concluded the reading, He began His sermon saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Notice first the stress placed upon Jesus' being anointed with the Holy Spirit at His Baptism. Verse 2 definitely emphasizes the extreme importance of that wonderful event and how the Spirit prepared Jesus for His earthly ministry and mission.

Q 6: What is the significance of saying Jesus will judge not "by what His eyes see" or "by what His ears hear" but rather with righteousness?

- Too often, humans judge by appearance, and we are quick to fall for someone's lies. Jesus knows the deception of this wicked and sinful world. He who knows man's thoughts will judge by the thoughts and motivations of the heart, not based on the empty, flattering words of liars. Even if no one else believes us, Jesus knows and promises to answer every desperate cry we raise to Him.

Following these three great messianic prophecies, Isaiah shares some prophecies regarding the nations surrounding Israel. Due to the brevity of this study, we will skip past them at this time. But please notice that God was not just the God of the Israelites; every nation under heaven is accountable to Him, and each human has been redeemed by His precious Son, Jesus Christ.

GOD WILL COME AND SAVE YOU

Isaiah picks up the theme of the Messiah's ministry again in chapter 35. When John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod, he sent some of his disciples to ask

Jesus, “Are You the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). In His answer, Jesus referred to **Isaiah 35:5–6**.

Read Isaiah 35:1–10.

Now read Jesus’ response to John’s disciples in **Matthew 11:4–6**.

Q 7: How would this answer reassure John that Jesus was indeed the Promised One who was to come?

- Isaiah prophesied the course of Jesus’ ministry. Some theologians believe John was having doubts about Jesus being the Messiah because he had foretold the judgment Jesus would bring, but as of yet, he was seeing no judgment—only Herod Antipas continuing in power and John in prison. Jesus used these words to reassure John that He was doing what God had set out for Him to do. The judgment of the wicked that John prophesied will come when Christ returns on the Last Day, not during Jesus’ earthly life.

The next three chapters of Isaiah (36–39) are historical chapters addressing huge events in the reign of King Hezekiah. Again, we will skip over them for the purposes of this study.

COMFORT MY PEOPLE

The Book of Isaiah seems to take a drastic turn from Law to Gospel beginning in chapter 40. The contrast is so sharp, some scholars have suggested a different author wrote this section of the book. But Lutheran scholars have argued the prophet Isaiah wrote the entire book, his writing simply reflects the great contrast between God’s Law and His Gospel, between hell and heaven.

Read Isaiah 40:1–11.

Q 8: How does this passage reflect the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus?

- John is the “voice calling in the wilderness”; Jesus is “the Lord GOD who comes with might.” John’s ministry was one of preparation for Jesus. Thus John hits hard with the Law to confront those who are secure in their own sense of self-righteousness; he convicts sinners and convinces them of their need for the coming Savior. But he also uses Gospel to comfort those who are repentant, promising that among them stands the Messiah.

Jesus is able to come to those whom John prepared and share with them the wondrous glories of the Gospel—God’s promise of forgiveness, peace, and everlasting life.

Of course, Jesus preached Law as well as Gospel. But the very character of His ministry was Gospel-centered, while John’s was Law-oriented. It even shows in their clothing and eating habits. John wore garments made of camel’s hair and a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey. He called people to leave their homes and their day to day life to come out into the wilderness and confront their sins. Jesus came to peoples’ villages and houses, eating and drinking, and wearing the common clothing of a Jew of His day. With John’s work of preparation completed, Jesus could come as the Friend and Savior of sinners.

BEHOLD MY SERVANT

The next significant messianic prophecy in Isaiah comes two chapters later. Matthew (12:18–20) uses these words to explain why Jesus commands people He has healed not to tell anyone.

Read Isaiah 42:1–7.

Q 9: What is significant about the mention of the Father putting His Spirit upon His Son, the Servant?

- The title Christ, which is always linked with the name Jesus, is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah,” which means “Anointed One.” That title speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ Baptism where Jesus was anointed, or set apart and equipped by the Holy Spirit to accomplish His ministry. During that ministry, the Holy Spirit is inseparable from Jesus, and both the Son and the Spirit work together as God’s right and left hands, accomplishing His purposes in the world. The Holy Spirit even has an important task at the crucifixion, because through the Holy Spirit Jesus offers His blood to God the Father in payment for our sins.

A LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS

The words of this prophecy come from the lips of the Servant Himself, Jesus Christ. He passes on to us the words of God, His Father.

Read Isaiah 49:1–7.

Q 10: What is the importance of this passage?

- It lays the groundwork for the New Testament mission to the Gentiles. In Luke 2:32, Simeon advances this idea of Jesus being

a “light . . . to the Gentiles.” It shows that God has always been concerned with every child of Adam and Eve, not just that small nation descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

This brings us to the very heart of Isaiah’s prophecies of Christ. Nowhere in the Old Testament, perhaps even in the New Testament, do we find so much rich theology about Jesus’ suffering and death packed into one place as we find in the words of this powerful passage.

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

Q 11: How does 53:4–6 make absolutely clear the substitutionary nature of Jesus’ suffering on the cross for us?

- Look at the way Isaiah uses personal pronouns when describing and emphasizing the exchange that takes place between Jesus and all sinners:
 - “**He** has borne **our** griefs”
 - “**He** has . . . carried **our** sorrows”
 - “**He** was pierced for **our** transgressions”
 - “**He** was crushed for **our** iniquities”
 - “Upon **Him** was the chastisement that brought **us** peace”
 - “With **His** wounds **we** are healed”
 - “The LORD has laid on **Him** the iniquity of **us** all”

Q 12: Besides prophesying Jesus’ burial in the tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, what bold assertion does 53:9 make about Jesus?

- He was innocent and undeserving of the punishment that fell upon Him.

Q 13: What does 53:10–11 add to the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion?

- By themselves, the Gospels show us the events of Jesus’ crucifixion—what He said and did. But the bare account can look like Jesus’ weakness and defeat. This passage shows us that Jesus was suffering the punishment we deserve, setting us free from that judgment. It also shows God the Father accepted the offering Jesus made—Himself.

Q 14: Where do you see the promise of Jesus’ resurrection in this passage?

- In verse 10 it says, “He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days.” These are clearly references to Jesus’ appearing to His

disciples after His resurrection. It is interesting that the other great prophecy of Good Friday, David's account in Psalm 22, also predicts the resurrection in verses 22–31, just as Jesus always included a prediction of His resurrection each time He told His disciples of His coming death in Jerusalem.

THE LORD'S INVITATION

Now that Isaiah has prophesied our salvation in Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Holy Spirit and the mission of the New Testament Church.

Read Isaiah 55:1–11.

The very last book of the New Testament, Revelation, picks up this same theme in 22:17: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

Q 15: Why is it fitting that this chapter follows the great prophecy of Jesus' salvation in chapter 53?

- Jesus won salvation for all by His death and resurrection, but we only receive the benefits of His sacrifice by faith. Now that salvation has been won for all humanity, it is time for the Holy Spirit to work through the Church, the Bride, to get that wonderful word out!

THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR

We close out this brief study of Isaiah with words Jesus spoke to the people of His hometown of Nazareth when He recognized the skepticism growing in their hearts toward Him (Luke 4:16–21). They were so familiar with Jesus from His childhood among them that they were letting their doubt drown out His words of life and salvation.

Read Isaiah 61:1–3.

Q 16: What warning does this passage give to Christians who have grown up in the Church?

- Like the people of Jesus' hometown, when we have grown up with Jesus and the stories in the Bible, it is easy to grow skeptical, thinking we have heard it all before. This passage reminds us that Jesus is God's one and only Son, the only way to the Father. We must listen to Him!