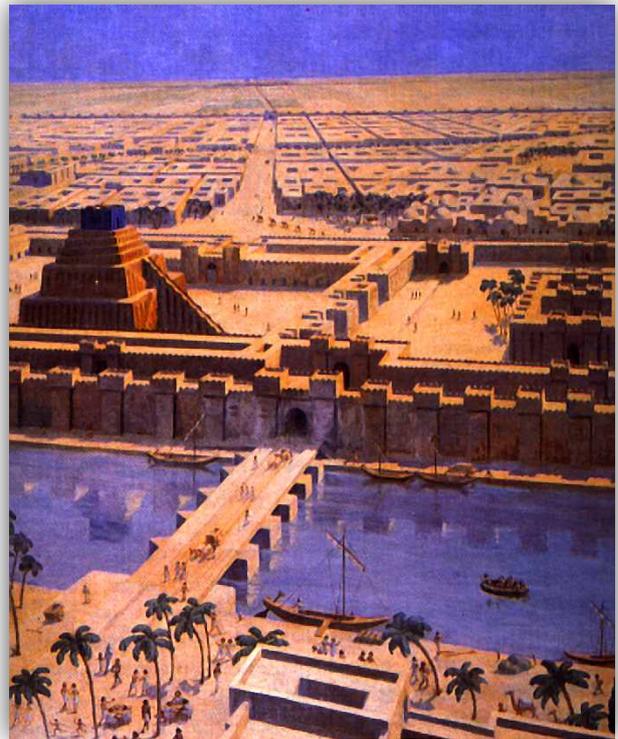


Growth Group Bible Studies

Isaiah 40-55

*“Leave Babylon,
flee from the Babylonians!
Announce this with shouts of joy
and proclaim it.
Send it out to the ends of the earth;
say, ‘The LORD has redeemed his
servant Jacob.’”*

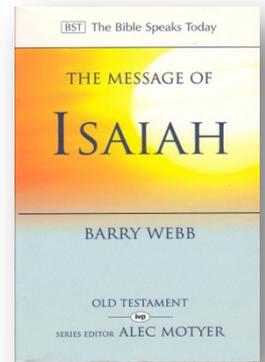
Isaiah 48:20 (NIV)



An Introduction to these Bible Studies

We will be covering Isaiah 40-55 in Growth groups and a lot of the rest of Isaiah in church. Being such a large book we will not cover every bit, however the selected chapters should give an good overview.

It will be great if you read through the whole of Isaiah yourself while we're working our way through these studies. Even better would be to have a commentary handy to explore some of your questions too. Barry Webb has an easy to read Commentary in The Bible Speaks Today series.



Here's the plan for our Bible studies and Sermons:

Church Sermons	Growth Group Bible Studies
1. Isaiah 1-2:5	1. Introduction and Background
2. Isaiah 2-4	2. Isaiah 40
3. Isaiah 6	3. Isaiah 42
4. Isaiah 7-9	4. Isaiah 45
5. Isaiah 11-12	5. Isaiah 49-50
6. Isaiah 36-39	6. Isaiah 52-53
7. Isaiah 66	7. Isaiah 54-55

Growth Group is more than a Bible Study

We refer to our mid-week groups as 'Growth Groups'. It's a way of reminding ourselves that we aim to grow - both in maturity as followers of Jesus, and in number.

Growth Groups are central to what makes our church *work*. We like to think in terms of **growing in Growth Group** and **servicing on Sunday**. Of course, that *is* over-simplified, but it can help us stay focussed.

While Bible Study is the core of our Growth Group meetings, we want to ensure that they are **more than just a Bible Study**. We aim to care for each other, pray together, find ways to serve one another, and encourage each other to share the truth about Jesus with friends and family. In other words, Growth Groups are about fellowship, service, sharing, praying, learning and challenging.

Study 1: Background

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Growth Groups**

Thank God for those who have committed themselves to being a part of a Growth Group. Pray that each of the groups would grow this term.

2. **Youth Group and KPC Kids**

Take time to pray for KPC Kids and Youth Group. Thank God for those who give up their time to serve and teach. Pray too for the children and youth.

Give me a reason to read Isaiah!

Isaiah is one of the longest books of the Bible, it mentions names and places that we are not familiar with, and some bits are just odd. Put that together and reading Isaiah is a daunting prospect! However, it is well worth the effort. Isaiah is very important – just look at how many times it gets quoted in the New Testament. And although it was written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, we get an incredibly clear picture of what Jesus achieves on the cross (e.g. Isaiah 53:5-6). Let's face it, this is an amazing part of God's word, and we should not neglect it. Is that enough reason?

Let's get our bearings.

We're going to dive into Isaiah, starting at chapter 40. As we read it is important to keep in mind the historical context and the Biblical context. This will help us make sense of what is written, and it will also help us see the Bible's story line, leading to Jesus.

When Isaiah lived and wrote.

Read Isaiah 1:1

1. What do we learn about Isaiah's time and audience?

OK It's time for you to do some investigating. The three kings mentioned here in Isaiah are each mentioned in the historical books of 1&2 Kings. These books record the events in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel which became separate in 1 Kings 12.

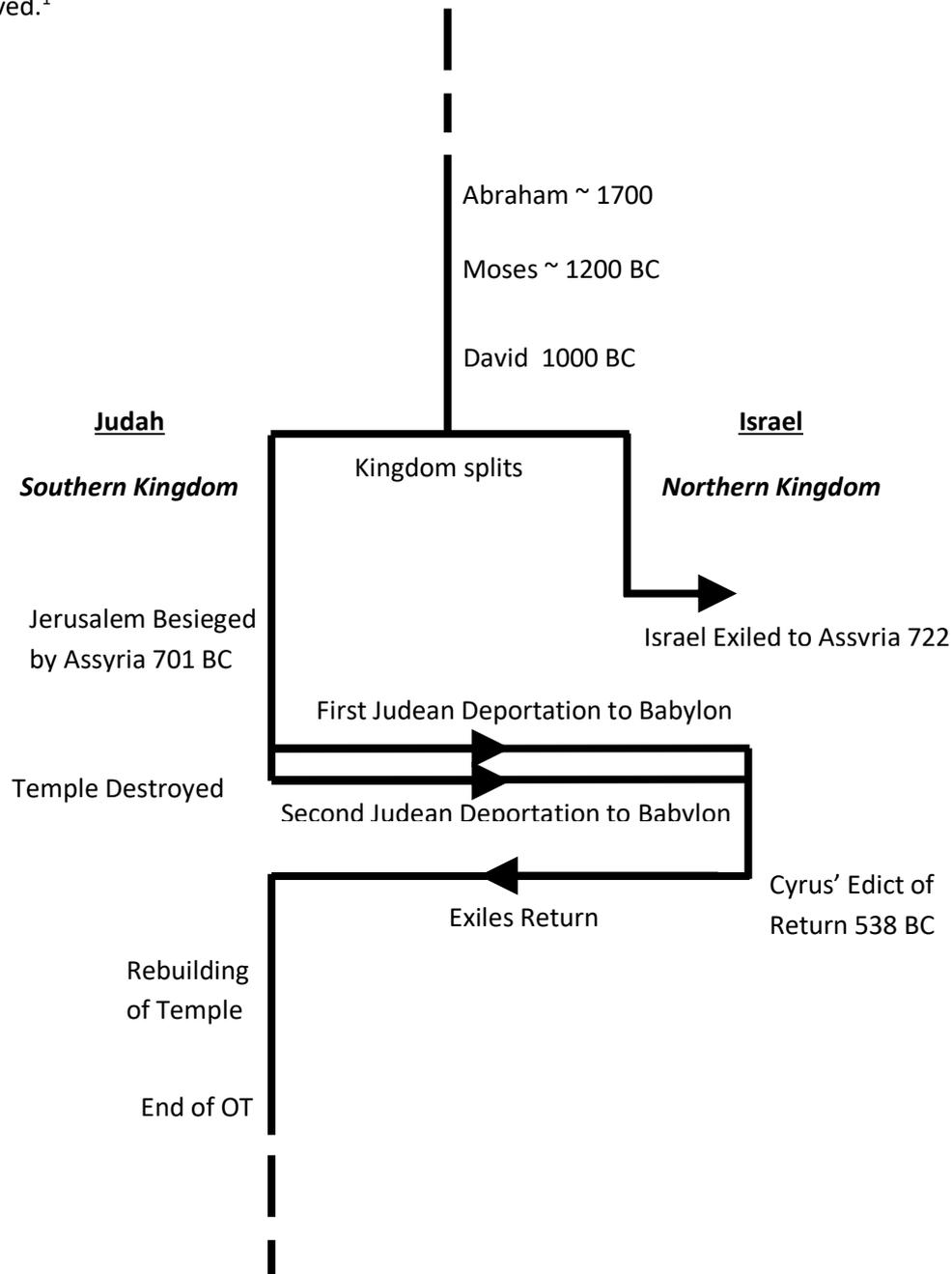
2. *Quickly* scan through 2 Kings 15-19 (especially 17-19) and record the major events which occur in Judah and Israel

Events in Judah

Events in Israel

Bible Timeline

Sometimes it helps to see these things on a timeline. On the timeline below mark the section which depicts the time Isaiah lived.¹



What time period is Isaiah is writing about?

Isaiah 1-39 is concerned mostly with the events we have just read about. Through Isaiah God warns Judah (the southern Kingdom of Israel) of the coming judgement and punishment at the hands of Assyria. However, in God's mercy Jerusalem is spared. When we come to Isaiah 40 onwards though, it seems Isaiah has a different time in mind.

Read Isaiah 39

3. What is the note that Isaiah 1-39 ends on?
4. What are we left expecting?

¹ This diagram is adapted from *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* Graeme Goldsworthy, page 36.

The Exile

It seems that the rest of Isaiah is written to, or for, the generation experiencing the Babylonian exile. Isaiah speaks to them of God's love for them, and about God's coming salvation of them. He prophesies about a return to Israel and a restoration of God's blessings.

Read the account of the destruction of Jerusalem & the Exile in 2 Kings 24:10-14 & 25:8-12

5. In what way was Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 39 fulfilled?

Broad Structure of Isaiah

Chapters 1-37 Assyrian Oppression

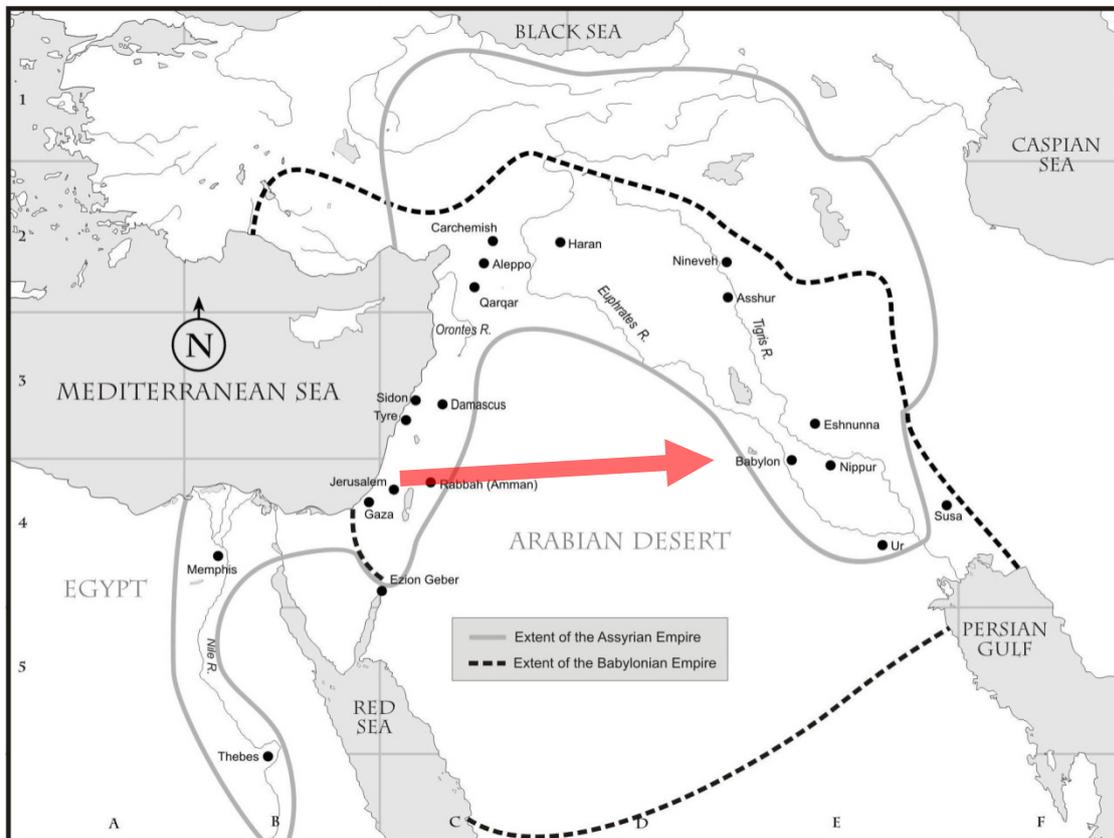
These chapters are 'real-time' (Isaiah's life-time)

Chapters 38-66 Babylonian Oppression

These chapters are 'future-looking' (beyond Isaiah's life-time)

It is this 'future-looking' aspect of the second half of Isaiah which has led many biblical scholars to decide that someone else wrote the second half of the book. It is not necessary to arrive at this conclusion, particularly if you believe God is sovereign!

Below the map shows the extent of the Assyrian and subsequent Babylonian Empires. The red arrow indicates where the exiles from Judah were taken.



Trustworthiness of God's Word

One thing Isaiah emphasises is the trustworthiness of God's Word and God's sovereignty in doing what he says he will do.

*For I knew how stubborn you were;
your neck muscles were iron,
your forehead was bronze.*

*Therefore I told you these things long ago;
before they happened I announced them to you
so that you could not say,
'My images brought them about;
my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'*
Isaiah 48:4-5 (NIV)



Amazingly God had already spoken of the exile far earlier than Isaiah's time.

Read Deuteronomy 28:15, 62-65

6. What did God promise Israel from the very beginning?

Read Deuteronomy 30:1-5

7. What did God promise Israel from the very beginning?

Wrapping up

8. What are your impressions of Isaiah so far, and what are you looking forward to about reading this Old Testament book?

Prayer

We have an amazing God who is trustworthy to fulfil his Word. He hates sin and will punish it – we see this in Israel's history. But as we have seen and will see in Isaiah 40-55 God is also a compassionate God who saves His people.

Pray together thanking God for our experience of his compassion and mercy, though we deserved his judgement. Praise him also for his trustworthiness.

Study 2 - Isaiah 40

The God of Comfort

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Religious Instruction in schools**

Pray for RI teachers as they prepare and teach lessons. Pray that the children will hear and understand the truth about Jesus.

2. **Mission Partners**

Pray for some of our Mission Partners and their work in sharing the Gospel of Jesus, both in Australia and overseas.

Get your sandals on...

As we saw last week, when we come to Isaiah 40-55 we are dealing with a different time-frame to Isaiah 1-39. Isaiah addresses his prophecy to a generation *after* his own, to a generation in Babylonian exile. This generation has seen Jerusalem, God's chosen city, destroyed. They've seen God's temple looted and razed to the ground. They have been taken from their promised land; their kings have been killed or kept in prisons. Meanwhile the Babylonians boast that Marduk (their chief god) has defeated the God of Israel. Isaiah now writes to this future generation. Before we read what he has to say, lets 'get in their shoes' so that we might better understand.

1. Imagine you are such an Israelite in exile, what might you be feeling or thinking about God's power? Or his love for you?

Getting into the passage

Read Isaiah 40

In pairs or threes come up with titles/summaries for each of these sections. Try to capture the main theme of the section. After 10 minutes or so, come back and compare your ideas.

40:1-8

40:9-11

40:12-17



40:18-26

40:27-31

2. Have a look at 40:1-11 again and note down the reasons Israel has to be comforted by what they hear.
3. What issues can you see in the passage that Israel might have in regard to God? (especially 40:18-19,27)
4. What reasons does Isaiah give for why Israel is wrong to doubt God's faithfulness to his promise to save them?
5. Have a go at summarising the overall message of this chapter

Finding Fulfilment

Israel did return from exile, but the historical reality did not live up to the great expectation set in this and other passages in Isaiah. So then what happened to the trustworthiness of God's word? Let's have a look at what the New Testament has to say about this passage.

Read Luke 3:1-6

6. Compare Luke with Isaiah, how does Luke see Isaiah 40 being fulfilled?

Israel was saved from exile, but Isaiah's prophecy pointed forward to *another* greater reality, the *spiritual* salvation we have in Christ. Isaiah 40 begins by declaring comfort from God, and God's comfort is only complete in Jesus. In fact, the comfort and assurance we enjoy as Christians not only helps us in times of trial, it gives us true hope and comfort to share with others. Paul can say in 2 Corinthians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 2 Cor 1:3-5 (NIV)

7. From Isaiah 40 and what we have seen in the New Testament, what comfort can we know as Christians?

Prayer

Pray together thanking and praising God for the comfort we have knowing he has saved us, and that he is powerful to fulfil his word to us. Pray also that he would comfort those who are afflicted, especially our friends and family who still need to find comfort in him.

Study 3 - Isaiah 42

The Servant of the LORD #1

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Pray for some people in your congregation by name** (Morning Church or NightChurch): Thank God for our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray they might continue to grow in him.
2. Give thanks for visitors to church. Pray that they will find it a welcoming church family which they can join and grow in Christ with.

What do you know about the Servant?

Last week in Isaiah 40 we saw God's promise to the exiles that he would comfort them by saving them out of their exile. He defended His trustworthiness against Israel's complaints that he had forgotten them. Now we come to a passage which lays out more of God's plan for Israel, and we meet the enigmatic figure: 'The Servant of the LORD'.

1. When you hear the phrase 'the Servant of the LORD' what ideas or Bible passages come to mind?

Position Vacant: Servant of the LORD

As we come to Isaiah 42 - leave your ideas about the Servant of the LORD at the door for a while and encounter him as Isaiah presents him.

Read Isaiah 41:8-10

2. Who is the Lord's servant in this passage? What is his relationship with God?

Read Isaiah 42:1-9

To help us understand the Servant and his role, fill in the 'job ad' for his position below:

Position Vacant: Servant of the LORD

The successful applicant will have the following character, perform the below tasks, and will be expected to achieve the listed results.

Character:

Tasks:

Results:

The most natural understanding of who the Servant is at this stage would probably be Israel. Israel was chosen by God (Is 41:8), and if you remember back to Exodus last year, was called to be a nation of priests among the other nations (Exodus 19:5-6)

Read Isaiah 42:10-17

3. What are the results of the Servant's actions?
4. Interestingly God is described as the main actor in this passage, what things is he doing?
5. Discuss what you think the relationship is between God's actions and the Servant's in this passage?

The Blind Servant

Read Isaiah 42:18-25

Israel was our natural reading for who the Servant was in 42:1-8 but let's consider their application. How does Israel compare to the job description?

Character:

Tasks

Results:

Israel was called to be the Servant, they were chosen by God to be a light to the nations, but they failed terribly. The position of Servant of the LORD is not going to be filled by Israel, yet Isaiah doesn't give us too many clues yet about who *will* fill the role.

Because of their rebelliousness, Isaiah's readers find themselves in the situation described in 42:24-5, under God's punishment. But this is not the end for Israel.

Read Isaiah 43:1-7

6. What *has* God done for Israel?
7. What *will* God do for Israel?
8. Discuss what does this passage shows us about God's character.

Read Isaiah 43:8-13

9. God now calls Israel, the blind and deaf, to be his witnesses. What are they a witness to?
10. Discuss how the 'blind' can be effective witnesses?

Bringing it all together

11. In this passage, what have we learnt about:

a. The Servant?

b. Israel?

c. God?

Throughout this passage there have been three main characters: the Servant; the blind; and God. The servant is called by God to give sight to the blind (42:7). But Israel who were called to be the Servant are in fact the blind (42:19) because they ignored God (42:21-22). God himself leads and saves the blind (42:16) and he will redeem and save Israel (43:1-7). These 'blind' servants of God will be witnesses to his salvation (43:8, 10-11).

Consider our position as Christians; we too were called to a life of righteousness we cannot live up to. We were blind and deaf to God. But we are redeemed and saved by God through the true Servant of the LORD – Jesus! How are we to be witnesses to God's salvation?

Prayer

Pray thanking God for the salvation he has accomplished. Ask for his strength as we bear witness to him and his salvation.

Study 4 - Isaiah 44-45

The Messiah?

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Pray for some people in your congregation by name** (Morning Church or NightChurch): Thank God for our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray they might continue to grow in him.
2. **Other Churches:** Pray for some of the other Bible teaching churches around us. Pray too for the churches in our Presbytery.

What do you know about the Messiah?

'The Messiah' is a term you are probably familiar with if you've been around church for a while. It's a word which has even found its place in common speech popping up in movies and every now and then in the news - when we have a new sporting hero.

1. When you hear the phrase 'the Messiah' what ideas or Bible passages come to mind?

The Sovereign LORD

Read Isaiah 44:24-28

In this passage God makes a number of assertions about himself. He begins in the second half of vs 24 "I am the LORD" and then continues with a sequence of descriptions beginning "who ..."

Fill in the table below summarising and recording the things God asserts about himself, and consider why these things might be important.

Assertions about God	Why they might be important

Who is Cyrus?

In this section, Isaiah prophesies about a man names Cyrus who seems to have a pretty special role in God’s plans. Here are some details about him:

Position: King of Persia 559-530BC

Conquests: Defeated Babylon in 539BC

Relationship to Israel: Sent the exiles home, restored temple fittings and provided for the re-building of the temple in Jerusalem.

Where can I find him in the Bible? 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, Ezra 1, Daniel 10.



We come now to a part of Isaiah which would have been very strange to its original audience. As we read, first of all put yourselves in the shoes of an Israelite in exile, living under a pagan king who has conquered you.

Read Isaiah 45:1-8

2. What is God’s ...
 - a. ... relationship with Cyrus?
 - b. ... purpose for Cyrus?
 - c. ... Goal in all of this?



Cyrus gets a pretty big role in God’s plan, and a pretty big title. In 44:28 he was called “my shepherd” and here in 45:1 he is called “his anointed” – literally, Messiah!

3. Quickly look up these other Old Testament references to ‘shepherd’ and ‘anointed’ (messiah). Who bears these titles?
 - a. 2 Sam 5:1-2
 - b. 2 Sam 7:5-7
 - c. 1 Sam 24:9-10
 - d. Ps 18:49-50

The title of 'the LORD's anointed' or 'messiah' was a special term used often of the kings of Israel. It showed they were separated by God for His purposes. It came to be used particularly of Davidic kings following God's promise in 2 Samuel 7 that his line would never end.

4. How can Cyrus be a 'messiah'?
5. How do you imagine the Israelites would have reacted to this part of Isaiah and the prediction of another conquering pagan king?

Read Isaiah 45:9-11

6. What reaction does God expect from Israel?
7. What is his answer to their protests?

The Sovereign LORD who saves

Though he doesn't have to, God gives reasons for His use of Cyrus in these following verses.

Read Isaiah 45:12-25

Quickly look through this passage

8. How does God define himself?
9. What are his goals?

In this passage God has outlined his radical plan for the salvation of Israel from Babylon. Knowing Israel would grumble and complain about his method he justified himself from the very beginning of the passage. Look back at your table from the first section. Can you see how the assertions he made about himself became important throughout the whole passage?

10. Discuss what comfort we can draw from this passage in world where things often seem out of control?
11. Can you think of some places where this same theme is picked up in the New Testament?

Prayer

Pray together praising our sovereign creator God, that nothing is out of his control, and that all things are used by him for his purposes. Thank him for his arranging of events and the salvation he has brought us through the true Messiah. Pray that we might trust him unquestioningly even when life seems out of control.

Study 5 - Isaiah 49-50

The Servant of the LORD #2

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Pray for some people in your congregation by name** (Morning Church or NightChurch): Thank God for our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray they might continue to grow in him.
2. **Neighbours, family, friends:** Pray by name for neighbours, family, friends – who need to submit to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Ask God for opportunities to talk about Jesus with them.

The Servant so far...

Now we pick up the theme of the Servant of the LORD. We last encountered this character in Isaiah 42. Isaiah began to unfold the mission of the Servant and we learnt a bit about his character too. Now in two more passages on the Servant Isaiah will tell us more about the mission and the character of the Servant of the LORD.

First let's remind ourselves of what we saw in Isaiah 42.

1. What did we learn about the Servant of the LORD's mission?
2. What did we learn about his identity?

Getting to know the Servant

Now we'll consider another two of the 'Servant Songs' in Isaiah. It will be a bit of a whirl wind tour of them, but hopefully we will get an appreciation for what Isaiah is telling us about the Servant. In chapter 49 the Servant himself speaks. Let's see what he has to say.

Read Isaiah 49:1-13

3. How would you describe the Servant's relationship with God? (Mostly in 49:1-5)
4. What is God's purpose for the Servant?
5. Look at verses 4 and 7, what do these verses tell us about the Servant and about his situation?

6. Consider the beginning and end of this section (verse 1 and 12-13) - what is the scope and significance of the Servant's mission?
7. Throughout much of this part of Isaiah the pressing issue has been the exile of God's people. Do you think this is the main concern in the Servant's mission? Why/why not?
8. From this passage, what can we say about the Servant's role in the salvation of Israel and the nations?

Read Isaiah 49:14-50:3

While God has these plans for salvation through the mission of the Servant - Israel is not yet on board. Let's have a look at the next section where God speaks to Israel again.

9. What is Israel's complaint this time?
10. Summarise briefly God's response to them.

Before we begin the next Servant Song, let's remind ourselves how Israel has been described so far. Quickly look over 40:27, 42:19-25, 45:9-10, 49:14 – what is Israel's attitude to God?

We now come to Isaiah's third Servant Song, and we hear the Servant speaking about himself again.

Read Isaiah 50:4-11

11. Unlike the last two Servant Songs (42:1-4 & 49:1-6) this song does not focus on the Servant's mission. What is the focus?
12. How is the Servant different from Israel in his attitude to God?
13. How is the LORD described each time his name is mentioned? Why might this be significant?
14. Back in Isaiah 42 and in 49:3, the Servant was identified with Israel. Does this passage help us understand how an individual might bear this title?

15. People will be divided into two groups (in verse 10 and 11), what is the comparison between the two groups and the result for each?

16. From this passage what can we say about the Servant's role in the salvation of Israel and the nations?

Finding the Servant

Isaiah gradually reveals the Servant. We learn more about him as we read Isaiah's prophecy. We know that God planned to save not only Israel but the nations through him. We know he was despised and humiliated. Unlike Israel he did not stop trusting in the Sovereign LORD. We know that it is through obedience to the Servant and trusting in God that people will be saved.

17. Jesus is the one who fulfils these Servant Songs. Thinking particularly on the last passage we looked at tonight, where in Jesus' life do we see points of contact with Isaiah 50?

Hebrews summarises the fulfilment in Christ when it says:

"Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" Hebrews 5:8-9 (NIV)

18. From Isaiah 49-50 and Hebrews 5:8-9, what ought our response be, to God's work through his Servant Jesus?

Prayer

Thank God for the obedience of Christ, that he willingly suffered humiliation and suffering for us. Pray that we might obey him and trust in our sovereign God.

Study 6 - Isaiah 53

The Servant of the LORD #3

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Pray for some people in your congregation by name** (Morning Church or NightChurch): Thank God for our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray they might continue to grow in him.
2. **Mission Partners**
Pray for some of our Mission Partners and their work in sharing the Gospel of Jesus, both in Australia and overseas.

The Servant so far...

Now we come to the last of Isaiah's Servant Song and reach the climax of the prophecies about the Servant and his mission. Look back over Isaiah 42:1-6, 49:1-4 & 50:4-9 and remind each other of the things we have learnt about the Servant so far.

Throughout our studies in Isaiah 40-55 we have seen two problems with Israel that God is addressing. Firstly, they are in exile and need saving. Secondly, their sin and rebellion needs dealing with. We've met two characters who will help solve these problems. Cyrus would lead Israel back to their land solving the problem of their physical exile and continuing a line from Abraham. The Servant would lead Israel back to God, solving the problem of their sin and spiritual exile. Isaiah tells us how the Servant will accomplish his mission.

A Case of Mistaken Identity

The Servant in this song is described from the point of view of someone who has seen his life and only later come to understand its purpose.

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12

1. Read through this passage and see how many comparisons you can find between what people thought about the servant and the truth about him.

What people thought about the Servant

The truth about the Servant.

2. This Servant Song has a number of stanzas, have a go at giving a summary title to each

52:13-15

53:1-3

53:4-6

53:7-9

53:10-12

3. Try to summarise the passage in a single sentence.
4. What are the results of the servant's work?
5. What is the final situation for the servant?

Read Leviticus 16:15-22

6. This part of Leviticus gives instructions on what is to happen on the Day of Atonement once per year. How does Isaiah 53 use the language of sacrifice?
7. How does this help us understand the Servant's ministry?
8. Thinking back over our studies about the servant, why do you think the Servant has often been called "Israel"? e.g. Is 49:3

The True Servant of the LORD

When we compare what we read here to the sufferings of our Lord Jesus it is easy to see the fulfilment of these words – in Jesus. And, we have an example of this the book of Acts.

Read Acts 8:25-40

9. Imagine you were Philip, what would you have told the eunuch after explaining that the passage was about Jesus?

Isaiah never saw the true Servant of the LORD. He spoke of Jesus who would live hundreds of years after him. He did not see the reality of what he spoke, but we have. So Peter says:

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.” 1 Peter 1:10-12 (NIV)

The comfort and salvation Israel was promised has come in our Lord Jesus. He has overcome the problem of sin and the rebelliousness against God which Israel struggled with. Have a look at how Peter (in 1 Peter 1:13) continues after what he has said above.

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 1 Peter 1:13 (NIV).

10. How does this call resonate with the instructions to Israel in Isaiah?
11. Having seen the true Servant of the Lord, and knowing the salvation Jesus brings, how do you think Isaiah would urge us to respond?

Prayer

Pray together thanking God for revealing the servant to us and for his death on our behalf. Thank him for the fact that we can know and believe in what Isaiah prophesied.

Pray for each other's friends or family who have not yet been saved by the Servant of the LORD, Jesus Christ.

Study 7 - Isaiah 54-55

The Free Gift of Salvation

Praying Together

Pray for some of the things you have already discussed since arriving for Growth Group. Share any other concerns. Also pray for:

1. **Pray for some people in your congregation by name** (Morning Church or NightChurch): Thank God for our brothers and sisters in Christ and pray they might continue to grow in him.
2. **Neighbours, family, friends:** Pray by name for neighbours, family, friends – who need to submit to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Ask God for opportunities to talk about Jesus with them.

Isaiah so far...

We've come a long way, so take a minute to remind ourselves of what we've covered so far.

- a. What did God promise Israel in Chapter 40?
- b. What was the problem with Israel in Chapter 42:19-25?
- c. How would God restore Israel from exile in Chapter 45?
- d. How would God deal with Israel's sin in Chapter 53?

We began chapter 40 hearing about God's promise to comfort his people. God would bring them out of their exile in Babylon and forgive their sins. Controversially, God would use Cyrus to bring Israel back from exile (45), but the issue of their sin was not so easily solved. The exile could not be full payment for Israel's sins, since even in exile Israel continued in rebellion against God (42:23-25). Gradually the character of the Servant is unfolded. He is described as everything Israel should have been. His mission is to bring Israel and the nations back to God (42 & 49). However, the Servant is a man despised and rejected by his people (50 & 53) and in the end it is through his sufferings for his people that their sins could be forgiven.

We have seen Israel's two problems addressed. Their exile would be ended by Cyrus, and the cause of the exile would be dealt with by the Servant. In chapters 54 and 55 Isaiah tells us about the result of the Servant's suffering.

The great reversal

Read Isaiah 54

3. How would you describe the vibe of this passage?

4. In this passage God's blessing of Israel is pictured a number of times as a reversal of former situations. What pictures of this reversal can you see in the chapter?
5. How can Israel be confident in this promised restoration?
6. What characteristics of God are displayed in this chapter?

The Free Gift

Read Isaiah 55

7. What is God offering?
8. What are the people like who need these things?
9. How are God's people to receive what he offers?
10. Why does God offer these things?
11. How can Israel be confident in the coming of these blessings?
12. What characteristics of God are displayed in this chapter?

In these two chapters God describes the blessings of salvation – which he will give to his people. This is as a result of the suffering of the Servant described in chapter 53. It is a free gift, given to those who realise they need it, received by responding to God's offer. A free gift, guaranteed by God.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

13. What aspects of salvation that we saw in Isaiah 54-55 can you see also here in Ephesians?
14. In the passages we've covered in Growth Group, virtually every week Israel has been pictured as not trusting God to fulfil his promises to save. When do you struggle to have confidence in God?
15. What comforts and encouragements can we draw from the characteristics of God we saw in Isaiah 54-55 and here in Ephesians?

Prayer

Thank God for the free offer of salvation we have in Jesus who suffered for us. Praise God for his trustworthiness. Pray for help in relying on God even when we are tempted to doubt his control over events, or his salvation of us.