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**Editorial Office**  
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904

**Principal Contributor**  
Roy Gane

**Editor**  
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**Art Director and Illustrator**  
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**Concept Design**  
Dever Design

**Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline**: Kaaryn Sanon, web/media designer, Baltimore, Md., U.S.A.

**The Commentary**: Brian Jones, Pastor, Parkersburg, W.Va., U.S.A.

**The Inductive Bible-Study Method**: Michelle Powell, certified etiquette trainer, Columbia, Md., U.S.A.

**The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach**: Anne Hope, freelance writer, Silver Spring, Md., U.S.A.

**The Life Application Approach**: Anne Hope, freelance writer, Silver Spring,Md., U.S.A.

The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of the Sabbath School Publications Board, a subcommittee of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), publisher of the Bible Study Guides. The published guide reflects the input of worldwide evaluation committees and the approval of the Sabbath School Publications Board and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
Isaiah
“Comfort My People”

From the time they were first uttered, the words of the prophet Isaiah have been etched, even embedded, into our consciousness. They are unforgettable words, heavy laden not only with meaning but with hope and with promise, words like “‘God with us’” (Isa. 7:14, The Living Bible). “For unto us a child is born” (Isa. 9:6), “Every valley shall be exalted” (Isa. 40:4), and “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).

Words create pictures, images, echoes; weak, paltry words create weak, paltry pictures; powerful, refined, well-crafted words create powerful, refined images and loud, crisp echoes. This, of course, explains why Isaiah’s words speak so loudly, so crisply to us—even after 27 centuries.

In his suffering-servant poem, for instance (Isa. 52:13–53:12), Isaiah brings a picture of the Messiah into finer resolution than anywhere else in the Old Testament. This section alone is enough to justify his sobriquet, “the gospel prophet.”

Plus, his prediction of Cyrus, by name, a century and a half before the Persian king conquered Babylon (Isa. 44:28–45:6), is so stunningly specific that some scholars have attributed much of Isaiah to a later “second Isaiah,” a hollow creation of those unable to see past the crusty intellectual confines of human imagination.

With a unique blend of vivid imagery, matchless poetic rhythm and balance, Beethovenlike dramatic contrasts, and a rich weave of profound themes that recur in a sophisticated symphonic process of ongoing elaboration and development, Isaiah’s inspired book is a worthy literary vehicle for divine thoughts that are higher than the mundane as the heavens are higher than the earth (see Isa. 55:9). Even in translation, which loses the evocative word plays and alliterations of the Hebrew, the book of Isaiah has few peers in the history of literature, either secular or sacred.

We know his words, so eloquent, so poetic, so emotive, and powerful, but do we know the man Isaiah and the world in which he wrote, prayed, and prophesied? As the cruel Assyrian Empire rose to its height of power, it was a time of crushing peril. Even worse, the people of Judah, the chosen people, were sinking ever deeper into moral weakness. Greed and misery fought in the streets. In their struggle for wealth or survival, some puffed the narcotic vapors of vain euphoria while others withered in despair. Seeking to preserve his nation’s identity by taking a remnant from a state of denial and anchoring them in reality, Isaiah called upon his people to behold their God, the Holy One of Israel, the Creator of heaven and earth, the One who knew them
by name and who promised to redeem them from fire, but only if they would
listen . . . and obey.
Isaiah counseled kings. When the slender thread of God’s remnant line was
confined to one city doomed by Assyrian legions, it was Isaiah’s prophetic
words that strengthened King Hezekiah to look for the miracle
that was Jerusalem’s only hope (Isaiah 36, 37). If Jerusalem had
fallen at that time, rather than to the Babylonians a century later,
the Assyrian policy of scattering conquered peoples could have
vaporized the national identity of Judah. Thus, there would have been no Jewish people from whom the Messiah,
the Savior of the world, would arise.
Isaiah’s God said: “Comfort ye my people” (Isa. 40:1), a comfort that
pierced through a gloomy valley of desperate, deepening shadows to a
brighter, gentler world. It contained a hope that kept the community of faith
alive through some painful, even potentially faith-destroying, times and trials.
This quarter, we take a look at Isaiah, at his words, his times, his predica-
ments, but mostly at his God, the God who, back then as well as today, cries
out to us, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name;
thou art mine” (Isa. 43:1).
What is the message of Isaiah? What did he write back then that speaks so
powerfully to us today? What warnings does he offer, what promises does he
make? And what does he tell us about our God that we, today—whoever we
are and wherever we live—need so desperately to know?
This quarter’s Bible Study Guide was written by Dr. Roy Gane, a Hebrew
scholar and a teacher of Old Testament studies at Andrews University
Seminary, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Roy brings to these lessons not only
his linguistic and historical expertise but his obvious love of the Bible and
(even more so) of the Lord whose Holy Spirit inspired its creation. It is our
prayerful desire that, as you study these lessons, Dr. Gane’s passion for the
Lord will rekindle yours, as well. These words reveal to us the One who,
back then and even now, proclaims with the same longing desire, “Comfort
ye, comfort ye my people” (Isa. 40:1).
The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

▶ **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline**: The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to: (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

▶ **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

▶ **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner’s investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

▶ **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

▶ **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

*Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.*
Crisis of Identity

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Lost in the land of forgetfulness. If you drive in Ireland along a narrow country lane lined with hedgerows, you may find the way blocked by a herd of cows, ambling home after a crunchy meal. Even if no herdsman is with them, they will go to their owner’s barn. They will know where, and to whom, they belong.

If a small boy in a store gets separated from his mother and yells, “I’ve lost my mommy!” he may not know exactly where he is, or where his mother is, but amid a sea of mothers walking through the store, he will know the one mother who, alone, is his.

Sadly, unlike those Irish cows (much less the little lost boy), the Judeans forgot that they belonged to the Lord, their heavenly Parent, and thus lost their true identity as the covenant people. “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (Isa. 1:2, 3, NRSV).

This week we’ll take a look at God’s work to restore His people to Himself.

The Week at a Glance: What was the spiritual state of Judah at the time Isaiah was written? Can we truly worship the Lord if our hearts are not right with Him? How did the choices the Judeans faced parallel the choices we face today?

Memory Text: “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18, NRSV).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 3.
Hear, O Heavens! (Isa. 1:1-9).

The book of Isaiah briefly introduces itself by identifying the author (“son of Amoz”), the source of his message (a “vision”), and his topic (Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, during the reign of four kings). The topic also identifies Isaiah’s primary audience as the people of his own country during the time in which he lived. The prophet spoke to them concerning their own condition and destiny.

By mentioning the kings whose reigns span the period of his prophetic activity, Isaiah narrows down the audience and ties the book to the historical, political events of a certain period. This time frame directs us to the accounts of 2 Kings 15–20 and 2 Chronicles 26–32.

Read Isaiah 1:2. What is the essence of the message here? What is the Lord saying? How has this same idea been seen all through sacred history? Could it be said of the Christian church today, as well? Explain your answer.

Notice how Isaiah’s message begins with the words “Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth” (NRSV; compare Deut. 30:19, 31:28). The Lord isn’t implying that heaven and earth, themselves, can hear and understand. Instead, He uses this imagery for emphasis.

When an ancient Near Eastern king, such as a Hittite emperor, made a political treaty with a lesser ruler, he invoked his gods as witnesses to emphasize that any violation of the agreement would surely be noticed and punished. However, when the divine King of kings made a covenant with the Israelites in the days of Moses, He did not refer to other gods as witnesses. As the only true God, He called, instead, for the heavens and earth to fulfill this role (see also Deut. 4:26).

Read carefully Isaiah 1:1-9. Summarize on the lines below what the sins of Judah were. Take special note, also, of the results of those sins. What was Judah guilty of, and what happened because of her guilt? At the same time, what hope is presented in verse 9?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Key Text: Isaiah 1.

Teachers Aim:
1. To illustrate the relationship between forgiveness and transformation.
2. To stress God’s mercy while underscoring the importance of our choices, both individually and corporately.

Lesson Outline:

I. Rebellion (Isa. 1:1-17).
   A. How much more guilty are God’s people than those of Sodom and Gomorrah—a people who did not know God?
   B. God cannot delight in the worship of a rebellious people (church/denomination and individuals) (vss. 11-17).
      1. Piety is useless without justice.
      2. In our guilt, we stress religion, not transformation.

II. God’s Invitation—Our Choice (Isa. 1:18-31).
   A. In the midst of our sins, God invites us to restore our relationship with Him—to become transformed.
   B. Forgiveness and restoration can take place only through God’s love and mercy.
   C. In His mercy, God continues to contend with us. Ultimately, however, He will accept our choice (vss. 19, 20). There is no middle ground.

Summary: Even in this picture of rebellion and God’s displeasure, hope runs throughout. Isaiah’s very name means “the Lord is salvation.” God will be victorious. It is for us to choose whether we will live with Him or perish opposing Him.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: Crisis of Identity.
   God wants His people to remember that their identity is rooted in Him, their Creator, Sustainer, and Ordainer of purpose. When they forget their spiritual roots, their affections are transplanted into unhealthy soil and bring forth corrupt fruit. But God does not abandon His wayward people. He offers complete restoration to all who are willing to return and be rerooted in Him.

I. The Heavenly Parent.
   God introduces Himself in Isaiah’s prophecy as an anguished parent grieving over His children, who have become estranged from Him. He calls heaven and earth to witness His people’s failure, not to shame them but to demonstrate how His grace works in
Rotten Ritualism (Isa. 1:10-17).

Read Isaiah 1:10. Why do you think the imagery of Sodom and Gomorrah is used? What point was the Lord making?

Read Isaiah 1:11-15. What is the Lord telling the people there? Why did He reject the worship that His people were offering Him?

The same hands that offered sacrifices and were lifted up in prayer were “full of blood”; that is, guilty of violence and oppression of others (Isa. 1:15; 58:3, 4). By mistreating other members of the covenant community, the people were showing contempt for the Protector of all Israelites. Sins against other people were sins against the Lord.

Of course, God Himself had instituted the ritual worship system (Leviticus 1–16) and designated the Jerusalem temple as the appropriate place for it (1 Kings 8:10, 11). But the rituals were intended to function within the context of the covenant God had made with His people. It was God’s covenant with Israel that made it possible for Him to dwell among them at the sanctuary/temple. So, rituals and prayers performed there were valid only if they expressed faithfulness to Him and His covenant. People who offered sacrifices without repenting from unjust actions toward other members of the covenant community were performing ritual lies. Thus, their sacrifices were not only invalid—they were sins! Their ritual actions said they were loyal, but their behavior proved that they had broken the covenant.

Read Isaiah 1:16, 17. What is the Lord commanding that His people do? How do these texts, in this context, parallel what Jesus said in Matthew 23:23-28? What message can we find for ourselves, today, in these texts and in the context in which they are given?
Teachers Comments

behalf of sinners. This drama of redemption conveys lessons of eternal value for the entire universe. In this context, consider the similarities between Isaiah 1 and Romans 1.

Restoration and renewal are God’s aim for His erring children. He associates spiritual regeneration and renewal with an intimate union with Himself. In the prologue to Isaiah’s prophecy, God diagnoses His people’s basic problem so that they may recognize their need for a cure. But Israel’s spiritual disorders were so deep and long-standing that they had no concept of spiritual health and their need for healing. God loved them too much, however, not to declare their morally diseased condition that pervaded every fiber of their being (Isa. 1:5, 6). Except for the few faithful believers in Judah, God’s elect nation would have been as degenerate and doomed as Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Isa. 1:10.) Modern-day relevance of this point is underscored by Jesus’ words in Luke 17:26-30. Some professed Christians in these last days are similar in their spiritual condition to the Judeans of Isaiah’s time. Overlook this, and the book of Isaiah will have very little to say to us. It is well to remember that the divine records of the past are preserved “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11; compare Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

II. Religion in Ruins.

Why the severe indictment of God’s people, whose religious lives, in many respects, outwardly conformed to His requirements? They kept the Sabbath, after a fashion; they performed the required sacrifices in the temple; they celebrated the feast days, and did “many wonderful works” in God’s name. But their hearts were far from Him, and they exercised little compassion and kindness toward one another. In fact, cruelty, exploitation, violence, immorality, and oppression were rampant among them. They had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof (see Isa. 29:13; compare 2 Tim. 3:1, 5).

In proportion to their relational distance from God, a people’s religious life easily can assume haughty display and ritual complexity to disguise inner emptiness. (See Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 566–568.) But God takes no delight in a religion of externals. He looks on our inner being and wishes to fill our hearts with His holy presence, so that our worship of Him may be genuine, steadfast, and free.

III. Indictment and Plea.

Unworthy though they were, God did not cast off His people lightly. His indictment of their evils was valid, but He preferred to restore rather than prosecute His nation. Consequently, He pleaded with them to accept the spiritual benefit that their daily sacrifices pointed to—the saving merits of His atoning blood. He stood before
The Argument of Forgiveness (Isa. 1:18).

**Read** Isaiah 1:18 (in various translations, if possible). After going over it numerous times, write what you believe the Lord is saying here (read a few verses beyond it to get the whole context).

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God has stated powerful evidence that the Judeans, the accused, are guilty of breach of contract (vss. 2-15), and He has appealed to them to reform (vss. 16, 17). This appeal suggests there is hope. After all, why urge a criminal deserving execution to change his ways? How could a prisoner on death row “rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (NRSV)? But when God says “Come now, let us argue it out” (vs. 18, NRSV), we can see the Lord still seeking to reason with His people, still seeking to get them to repent and turn from their evil ways, no matter how degenerate they had become.

The Lord says to them that your red sins shall become white. Why are sins red? Because red is the color of the “blood” (bloodguilt) that covers the hands of the people (vs. 15). White obviously is the color of purity, the absence of bloodguilt. Here, God is offering to change them. This is the kind of language King David used when he cried out to God for forgiveness for his sin of taking Bathsheba and destroying her husband (read Ps. 51:7, 14). In Isaiah 1:18, God’s argument is an offer to forgive His people!

**How** does God’s offer of forgiveness serve as an argument for them to change their ways? Compare Isaiah 1:18 to Isaiah 44:22.

Now we see the purpose of God’s sharp words of warning against His people. They are not to reject His people but to bring them back to Him. His offer of forgiveness is the mighty argument supporting His appeal for the people to morally purify themselves (vss. 16, 17). His forgiveness makes it possible for them to be transformed by His power. Here we see the seeds of the “new covenant,” prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, in which forgiveness is the basis of a new-heart relationship with God. We start off “in the red,” owing a debt we can never repay. From the humble position of acknowledging our need for forgiveness, we are ready to accept everything God has to give.
them as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (see Isa. 1:18; compare Isaiah 53). How He looked forward to the day when they would allow Him to “purely purge away” their dross and be fully restored by His grace. Then His judgment and righteousness would be their guiding light instead of a probe light to expose their iniquity (see Isa. 1:17-28, 32:15-18). Once truly converted, they would tenderly care for the destitute and afflicted and use all their talents to His glory (see Isa. 1:17, James 1:27).

But God will not be trifled with. If His mercy and redemption are despised and His authority flouted in the face of His revealed goodness, then He must eventually apply justice (see Isa. 1:19, 20; compare Rom. 11:22, James 2:15).

IV. Love’s Irrepressible Song.

God has the soul of a poet. His royal love, whether returned or rejected, demands expression in song (see Deut. 32:1-44; Psalm 117; Inductive Bible Study Texts for Discovery: Zechariah 1:2, 3, 6; Titus 3:3-7; James 1:6-8.

1 How does it make parents feel when their children continue to disobey, even though specific behavior is required of them? When should parents reserve their anger and show mercy? When should they immediately deliver punishment? The words of Isaiah 1:19 are clear and familiar: Do as I say, and you will be blessed. How often, though, do we act as the rebellious child by deliberately disobeying God’s instruction? How does our heavenly Father respond to us when we are rebellious? Why does He seem to respond to us differently in various situations? See Isa. 13:11; Zech. 1:2, 3, 6; Eph. 2:2-6; and Titus 3:3-7.

2 When we have done wrong, God offers us incentives to come back to Him. Two of these incentives are forgiveness and a new start. What other blessings does He offer us? See Ps. 86:5 and Col. 2:13. Invite the class to share personal examples of blessings they received after accepting God’s forgiveness.

3 God says, “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). His stability is necessary for establishing trust. Trust is the foundation of any relationship. It is important that God is consistent in character, so we can more easily identify Him and the prompting of His Holy Spirit. It is important that we also be consistent in our character, so other people will recognize us as children of God, and God will see us as His own. See Matt. 7:20-23 and James 1:6-8.
To Eat or Be Eaten (Isa. 1:19-31).

Read Isaiah 1:19-31. What theme appears here that is seen all through the Bible?

Notice the logical structure in Isaiah 1:19, 20: If the people choose to be willing and obedient to God, they will eat the good of the land (vs. 19). By contrast, if they refuse His offer of forgiveness and restoration and rebel against Him, they will be eaten by the sword (vs. 20). The choice is theirs. These verses, then, contain a conditional blessing and curse.

Isaiah 1 reiterates and applies the words of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 30:19 at the time when the covenant with the nation of Israel was set up: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses” (NRSV).

Look at those words from Moses. Notice, there is no middle ground. It is either life or death, blessings or curses. Why do you think there is only one of two choices for us? Why can’t there be some sort of compromise?

These words of Moses summarize the series of warnings, blessings, and curses that concludes the formation of the covenant in Deuteronomy 27–30 (compare Leviticus 26). Elements of this covenant include (1) the recounting of what God had done for His people, (2) conditions/stipulations (commandments) to be observed in order for the covenant to be maintained, (3) reference to witnesses, and (4) blessings and curses to warn the people what would happen if they violated the covenant conditions.

It has been shown that these elements appear in the same order in political treaties involving non-Israelite peoples, such as the Hittites. So, for establishing His covenant with the Israelites, God used a form they would understand and that would impress upon them as forcibly as possible the nature and consequences of the mutually binding relationship into which they were choosing to enter. The potential benefits of the covenant were staggering, but if Israel broke their agreement, they would be worse off than ever.

How, in your own Christian walk, have you experienced the principle of blessings and curses as seen above?
Witnessing

As citizens, we are expected to know, understand, and adhere to the laws of the land. We are taught, and believe, that these laws are meant to protect us against harm, to ensure the safety of others, and to improve the overall quality of life for each citizen. In return for faithfully following these requirements, we enjoy the benefits of a safer, cleaner, and more beautiful environment.

Willfully disregarding the laws of the land often leads to chaos, unrest, and, ultimately, punishment for the offender. Sadly, sometimes those who come in contact with the offender also are negatively affected. Therefore, many citizens choose to obey, thus acknowledging that the advantages of obedience far outweigh the disadvantages. Ultimately, however, the choice is ours.

In our lesson this week, we learned that God called Isaiah to remind the children of Israel to follow faithfully God’s covenant and that by doing so, they would receive great blessings. How appropriate this counsel is to each of us. Just as being good citizens will reap positive benefits on earth, accepting Jesus as our personal Savior and following His Word will assure our heavenly citizenship.

Do not resist telling others about the positive outcomes of accepting and following our Lord’s invitation to participate in, and enjoy, a better life. Pray for God to send you at least one person this week who needs to hear about the benefits of free choice and its effect on eternal life. Let this person know how liberating it is to be bound to Jesus!

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Zeph. 3:17; Matt. 26:29, 30). Deep calls unto deep. In the vaulted chambers of divine sentiment, the echoes of love’s call ring melodious. Even from the most cavernous and unresponsive of hearts, the echoes of His wooing fade away slowly and reluctantly. Never does the dove of mercy take its final flight from the stony hearted without tears, however despised those tears may be (see Jer. 13:15-17).

Divine love, however, is not a sponge cake, all sweetness but no substance. In God’s economy, love and moral uprightness stand united. He will not slur over His moral requirements any more than He will spare the outpouring of His care for us (see Eccles. 8:11-13; Rom. 1:18-25; 2:1-11; Gal. 6:7, 8).
Ominous Love Song (Isa. 5:1-7).

Read the song in the above verses. What is the meaning of this parable?

God explains the meaning of the parable only at the end, in verse 7. By using a parable, He helps the people to look at themselves objectively in order to admit their true condition. God effectively uses this approach with King David (compare 2 Sam. 12:1-13). By calling this a “love song,” God reveals at the outset His motive toward His people. His relationship with them originates from His character, which is love (1 John 4:8). He expects a response of love in return. But instead of “grapes,” He gets “wild grapes,” which means, in the Hebrew, “stinking things.”

What does the Lord mean when He says in Isaiah 5:4, “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?” (NRSV).

God says in the next verses: “And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste” (Isa. 5:5, 6, NRSV).

When we sin, God immediately does not cut us off from Himself by removing His protection and destroying us. He patiently gives us an opportunity to receive forgiveness (compare 2 Pet. 3:9). He does not cut off anyone who responds to Him. He appeals as long as there is hope for a response. He immediately does not take No for an answer, because He knows we are ignorant and deceived by sin. But if He gets nowhere with us, He ultimately acknowledges our choice and lets us remain the way we have chosen to be (compare Rev. 22:11).

If persistently we reject God’s appeals through His Spirit, we can eventually pass the point of no return (Matt. 12:31, 32). Turning away from Christ is dangerous (Heb. 6:6-8). There is only so much God may do, because He respects our free choice.

Take the concept found in Isaiah 5:4, “What more could have been done to my vineyard . . . ?” and look at that in light of the Cross, where God offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, paying with His flesh for our violation of His law. What more could have been done for us than what was done there? How does dwelling on the Cross give us assurance of salvation and motivate us to repent and change our ways?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Sometimes, we might feel totally disconnected from life. This type of situation is often called an identity crisis. Finding out who we really are and what is most important to us are part of the Christian growth process. If you have experienced such a crisis, do you think it helped you in a positive or negative way?

**Thought Questions:**
1. Israel had reached a point where they had minimalized what should have been the focus of their worship—God Himself. What religious rituals do we have? Explain how these can keep us from focusing on God. Why should form never take priority over substance? Is this to say that form is not important? Explain.

2. Keeping young people in the church is one of the greatest challenges facing our denomination. How might young people be expecting too much from the church? Share suggestions on how to improve the church atmosphere on Sabbath morning in order to enhance their experience.

3. God tells us we must accept His forgiveness in order to receive His blessings and eternal life. Yet, forgiveness can be difficult both to give and to receive. A compelling example of giving and receiving forgiveness is in the story of Mary Magdalene's bathing Jesus' feet with her hair and tears. Share some examples of your extending and/or receiving forgiveness.

**Application Questions:**
1. Is there someone in your life whom you have been unable to forgive? Perhaps this someone is a former friend. If so, contemplate the following: “A good friend is a fortune. A friend is worth forgiving.”—Marjorie Holmes, “Hold Me Up a Little Longer, Lord,” *Guideposts* (Carmel, New York: 1977), p. 57. Call this person today to mend the breach; both of you will receive a blessing!

2. Do you believe your relationship with Jesus is what it should be? If you think He deserves more of your time and resources, then make arrangements to spend a portion of each day with Him. Speak with Him about renewing your covenant with Him; ask Him for His forgiveness and be prepared to receive it with an open heart.
Further Study: In the context of Isaiah 1:4, Ellen White wrote: “The professed people of God had separated from God, and had lost their wisdom and perverted their understanding. They could not see afar off; for they had forgotten that they had been purged from their old sins. They moved restlessly and uncertainly under darkness, seeking to obliterate from their minds the memory of the freedom, assurance, and happiness of their former estate. They plunged into all kinds of presumptuous, foolhardy madness, placed themselves in opposition to the providences of God, and deepened the guilt that was already upon them. They listened to the charges of Satan against the divine character, and represented God as devoid of mercy and forgiveness.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1137.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we wash ourselves? What does that phrase mean? (see Phil. 2:12, 13).


3. What is the relationship between the forgiveness God offers and the transformation He accomplishes in our lives? Which comes first, transformation and then forgiveness—or forgiveness and then transformation? And why is it important to know which comes first?

4. In the Ellen White quote above, she says people placed themselves in opposition to “the providences of God.” What does that mean?

Summary: When God’s people forget Him and take His blessings for granted, He reminds them they are accountable to their covenant with Him. Mercifully, He points out their condition, warns them about the destructive consequences of abandoning His protection, and urges them to allow Him to heal and cleanse them.
Crisis of Leadership

When asked by one of his disciples about the ingredients of good government, Confucius answered: “‘Sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the common people.’

‘But,’ asked the disciple, ‘suppose you had no choice but to dispense with one of those three, which would you forego?’

‘Weapons,’ said Confucius.

‘His disciple persisted: ‘Suppose you were then forced to dispense with one of the two that are left, which would you forego?’

‘Replied Confucius, ‘Food. For from of old, hunger has been the lot of all men, but a people that no longer trusts its rulers is lost indeed.’”


People do, indeed, want strong, trustworthy leadership. When a soldier signed up for a second term of duty, he was asked why. “I tried civilian life,” he said, “but nobody is in charge out there.” This week we will look at Judah’s crisis of leadership and the sad results that followed.

The Week at a Glance: What spiritual dangers come with success? What prepared Isaiah for his ministry? How do we understand the idea that God “hardens” people’s hearts?

Memory Text: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 10.
The King Is Dead. Long Live the King!

Isaiah 6:1 talks about the death of King Uzziah. Read 2 Chronicles 26 and then answer this question: What is the significance of King Uzziah’s death?

Different perspectives can be given regarding the death of this king.

1. Although Uzziah’s reign was long and prosperous, “when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction” and attempted to offer incense in the temple (2 Chron. 26:16, NRSV). When the priests rightly stopped him because he was not authorized as a priestly descendant of Aaron (vs. 18), the king became angry. At this moment, when the king refused reproof, the Lord immediately struck him with leprosy, which he had “to the day of his death, and being leprous lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the Lord” (vs. 21, NRSV). How ironic that Isaiah saw a vision of the pure, immortal, divine King in His house/temple in the very year the impure human king died.

2. There is a striking contrast between Uzziah and Isaiah. Uzziah reached for holiness presumptuously, for the wrong reason (pride), and, instead, became ritually impure so that he was cut off from holiness. Isaiah, on the other hand, allowed God’s holiness to reach him. He humbly admitted his weakness and yearned for moral purity, which he received (Isa. 6:5-7, NRSV). Like the tax collector in Jesus’ parable, he went away justified: “‘For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted’” (Luke 18:14, NRSV).

3. There is a striking similarity between Uzziah’s leprous body and the moral condition of his people: “…there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds” (Isa. 1:6, NRSV).

4. The death of Uzziah in about 740 B.C. marks a major crisis in the leadership of God’s people. The death of any absolute ruler makes the country vulnerable during a transition of power. But Judah was in special danger, because Tiglath-pileser III had ascended the throne of Assyria a few years before, in 745 B.C., and immediately went on a warpath that made his nation an invincible superpower and threatened the independent existence of all nations in the Near East. In this time of crisis, God encouraged Isaiah by showing the prophet He was still in control.

Read carefully 2 Chronicles 26:16. In what ways does each one of us face that potential for the same thing? How can reflecting upon the Cross protect us from that pitfall?
COMMENTARY

Introduction: Crisis of Leadership.

Though human greatness often fails, God's greatness never does. His commission to Isaiah came while one of Judah's best kings had died after marring his record in the latter days of his reign. God's appearance to Isaiah in the temple affirmed that His purpose would triumph, regardless of the difficulties ahead.

I. A Fallen King.

King Uzziah's presumption in attempting to take the office of the priesthood is a warning to all future leaders. God kept the office of priest and king separate, prohibiting the crossover that was so common in pagan cultures (see Num. 18:6, 7; 2 Chron. 26:16-21).

Uzziah's ambition to burn incense in the sanctuary arose when his kingdom was at the height of its power. Success had fueled his

Notice what was happening here in the first four verses of Isaiah 6. The king dies during great political turmoil (the Assyrians are on the warpath); it could have been, for Isaiah, a fearful time when he was not sure who was in control.

And then—what happens? While taken in vision, Isaiah gazes upon the blazing glory of God upon His throne, hears the antiphony of shining seraphim (“burning ones”) calling out the words “holy, holy, holy,” feels the resultant seismic shaking of the floor beneath him, and peers through swirling smoke as it fills the temple. It must have been a stunning experience for the prophet. Surely Isaiah now knows who is in control, despite outward events.

Where is the Lord in this vision (see Isa. 6:1)? Why would the Lord make an appearance to Isaiah here, as opposed to anywhere else? See Exod. 25:8, 40:34-38.

In Ezekiel 1; Daniel 7:9, 10; Revelation 4–5; the prophets Ezekiel, Daniel, and John are in exile when they receive their visions. Like Isaiah, they need special comfort and encouragement that God is still in charge, as their world is falling apart (Daniel and Ezekiel are captives in a pagan nation that had destroyed their own, and John is exiled to a lonely island by a hostile political power). No doubt, these visions helped give them what they needed in order to stay faithful, even during a crisis situation.

John’s description of God’s temple in heaven is especially close to what Isaiah saw. See Revelation 4:8, where four living creatures, each of which has six wings, also sing “Holy, holy, holy” (compare Isa. 6:2, 3).

The transcendent holiness of God, emphasized in Isaiah’s vision, is a basic aspect of his message. God is a holy God, and He demands holiness from His people, a holiness He will give to them if only they would repent, turn from their evil ways, and submit to Him in faith and in obedience.

All of us have been in discouraging situations, where from outward appearances all seemed lost. Even if you didn’t get a vision of the “glory of the Lord,” as did Isaiah, recount the ways in which the Lord was able to sustain you and your faith during this crisis. What have you learned from these experiences that you could share with others?
pride. “The cup most difficult to carry is not the cup that is empty, but the cup that is full to the brim. It is this that needs to be most carefully balanced. Affliction and adversity bring disappointment and sorrow; but it is prosperity that is most dangerous to spiritual life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 212.

Uzziah’s apostasy typified Judah’s national pride and loss of faith. This made them vulnerable to invasion from God’s enemies. Their greatest foe, however, was their own immorality, symbolized by the king’s leprosy.

II. The King of Glory.

After Uzziah’s death, Isaiah received a vision of the Redeemer-King in the throne room of the heavenly sanctuary. That scene shattered Isaiah’s own spiritual complacency. *Review Isaiah 6:5.*

“The vision given to Isaiah represents the condition of God’s people in the last days. They are privileged to see by faith the work that is going forward in the heavenly sanctuary. . . . As they look by faith into the holy of holies, and see the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, they perceive that they are a people of unclean lips,—a people whose lips have often spoken vanity, and whose talents have not been sanctified and employed to the glory of God. Well may they despair as they contrast their own weakness and unworthiness with the purity and loveliness of the glorious character of Christ. But if they, like Isaiah, will receive the impression the Lord designs shall be made upon the heart, if they will humble their souls before God, there is hope for them. The bow of promise is above the throne, and the work done for Isaiah will be performed in them. God will respond to the petitions coming from the contrite heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Dec. 22, 1896.

Since Calvary, believers have an open invitation to enter into God’s presence in the sanctuary above (see *Heb. 4:14-16, 10:19-23*). When we do, we, like Isaiah, are flooded with a sense of God’s majesty, purity, and love. This will stir in us the same spirit of self-abasement that overcame Isaiah and John when God revealed Himself to them in the beauty of holiness from His sanctuary (*compare Isa. 6:5-8 with Rev. 1:12-19*). Both prophets experienced the death of self-importance and the cleansing, fervor, and power needed to fulfill God’s commission (see *Exod. 3:1-10; Ps. 138:6; Ezekiel 1, 2; Dan. 10:1-12*). God delights to dwell in the hearts of His servants, for only they are receptive to the fullness of His grace (see *Ps. 34:18; 1 Pet. 5:5, 6*).

III. A Purified and Empowered Prophet.

As a result of Isaiah’s response, a seraph touched his lips with a coal from the altar of incense, purging him of iniquity. “The live coal is symbolical of purification. If it touches the lips, no impure word will fall from them. The live coal also symbolizes the potency
New Personality (Isa. 6:5-7).

At the sanctuary/temple, only the high priest could approach the presence of God in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and with a protective smokescreen of incense, or he would die (Lev. 16:2, 12, 13). Isaiah saw the Lord, even though he was not the high priest, and, unlike Uzziah, he was not burning incense! The temple filled with smoke (Isa. 6:4), reminding us of the cloud in which God’s glory appeared on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:2). Awestruck and thinking he was finished (compare Exod. 33:20; Judg. 6:22, 23), Isaiah cried out with an acknowledgment of his sin and the sin of his people (Isa. 6:5), reminiscent of the high priest’s confession on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21). Having experienced the worship of God from the lips of heavenly beings, Isaiah realized the inadequacy of worship offered by the lips of mortal, faulty human beings.

Why did the seraph use a live, or burning, coal from the altar to cleanse Isaiah’s lips? Isa 6:6, 7.

The seraph explained that through touching the prophet’s lips his guilt and sin were removed (vs. 7). The sin is not specified, but it need not be limited to wrong speech, because lips signify not only speech but also the entire person who utters it. Having received moral purification, Isaiah was now able to offer pure praise to God.

Fire is an agent of purification, because it burns away impurity (compare Num. 31:23). But the seraph used a coal from the special, holy fire of the altar, which God Himself had lighted and which was kept perpetually burning there (Lev. 6:12). So, the seraph made Isaiah holy, as well as pure. There is more. In worship at the sanctuary, or temple, the main reason for taking a coal from the altar was to light incense. Compare Leviticus 16:12, 13, where the high priest is to take a censer full of coals from the altar and use it to light incense. But in Isaiah 6, the seraph applies the coal to Isaiah, rather than to incense. Whereas Uzziah wanted to offer incense, Isaiah became like incense! Just as holy fire lights incense to fill God’s house with holy fragrance, it lights up the prophet to spread a holy message. It is no accident that in the next verses of Isaiah 6 (vss. 8 and following), God sends Isaiah out to His people.

Read prayerfully Isaiah’s response (vs. 5) to his vision of God. How do we see in it an expression of the basic problem of a sinful people existing in a universe created by a “‘Holy, holy, holy’” (vs. 3, NRSV) God? Why was Christ on the cross the only possible answer to this problem? What happened at the Cross that solved this problem?
of the efforts of the servants of the Lord. God hates all coldness, all commonness, all cheap efforts. Those who labor acceptably in His cause, must be men who pray fervently, and whose works are wrought in God; and they will have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and their reward will be given them,—even eternal life.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1141.

God filled Isaiah’s mind with a sense of His power and holiness, His hatred of sin and His judgments upon it, as well as the certainty that His purpose will triumph. This was to give the prophet courage and strength.

Then God asked: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). Stripped of self-sufficiency, but filled with ardent love and loyalty to God, the prophet replied, “Here I am, send me” (vs. 8).

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Exodus 1–14, 2 Chronicles 26.

1. Being in a position of power and leadership is an awesome responsibility that comes with great temptations. Ask the class to cite examples, both biblical and modern, of people who were in positions of leadership but ended their reign in disgrace because of their presumptive or ego-driven behavior.

2. Leadership roles are numerous and varied and include the following: parents, classroom teachers, work supervisors, etc. As Christians, however, we are all leaders, because God has called us to share Him with both the world around us and the world far away from us. How has God saved you from the temptation to do wrong in your role as a Christian or in any other leadership position you hold? When temptation strikes what promise has He given us? See 1 Cor. 10:13. What can we learn from public leaders who failed or lost favor, because they abused their positions?

3. Compare the leadership, actions, downfall, and destruction of King Uzziah and Pharaoh. What was the state of their kingdoms as a result? Why is this an important lesson to us in our leadership positions? See Exodus 1–14, 2 Chronicles 26.

4. End the class with these questions to be answered silently by class members: As a leader, have you ever been approached by an “Isaiah” or a “Moses” with instructions and corrections from God? Did you take heed, or harden your heart? What was the result, based on how you handled the situation?
Royal Commission *(Isa. 6:8).*

“**Also** I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” *(Isa. 6:8).*

Having been purified, Isaiah immediately responded to God’s call for a representative whom He could send out on His behalf. In New Testament terms, Isaiah would have been called an apostle; that is, one who is sent.

Interestingly enough, the book of Isaiah does not begin, as do some other prophetic books, with the prophet describing his prophetic call *(compare Jer. 1:4-10, Ezekiel 1–3).* In other words, he must have already been called to be a prophet, even before the events of chapter 6. The Bible does show that a divine encounter can encourage a prophet even after the ministry began *(Moses: Exodus 34; Elijah: 1 Kings 19).* In contrast to other examples, too, God tells people they are to be prophets; in Isaiah 6, the prophet volunteers for a special mission. It appears that chapters 1–5 of Isaiah represent conditions at the time when Isaiah was first called, after which God jump-started his ministry by encouraging him at the temple and reconfirming his commission as God’s prophetic spokesman.

**God** encouraged Isaiah at His temple. Is there evidence elsewhere in the Bible that God’s sanctuary is a place of encouragement? *Psalm 73 (see vs. 17), Heb. 4:14-16, 10:19-23, Revelation 5.* **What do these texts tell us?**

Not only does God’s sanctuary throb with awesome power; it is a place where weak and faulty people such as ourselves can find refuge. We can be reassured by knowing that God is working to rescue us through Christ, our High Priest.

John also saw Christ represented as a sacrificial lamb that had just been slaughtered, its throat slit *(Rev. 5:6).* This was not a pretty sight. The description makes the point that although Christ was raised from the dead and has ascended to heaven, He continually carries the Cross event with Him. He is still lifted up in order to draw all people to Himself at His altar.

**How have you found encouragement by entering God’s heavenly temple, by faith, in prayer? Hebrews 4:16 invites you to boldly approach God’s throne to “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” *(NRSV).* If someone were to ask you how you have found grace and mercy in your time of need, what would your response be?**
We have heard the question, “Are leaders born or made?” Certainly, we could debate either side of the issue. But the point is that during a critical time, someone needs to assume leadership.

On September 11, 2001, the United States faced such a momentous time. Following an attack on New York and Washington, D.C., the nation waited to hear from its president. This man had won his position a short time earlier in a strongly contested election. This was his first crisis, one that many felt would define his presidency. Would he be able to reassure the nation and help to unite it? Could he look beyond the immediate situation by demonstrating visionary capabilities?

If at that moment, the president did emerge as a leader, history will determine the effectiveness and value of his leadership.

Our lesson reminds us that God gave the children of Israel a leader in Isaiah. God prepared him and sent him to give Israel an opportunity to reaffirm their covenant with God.

Centuries later, Jesus assumed the role of a servant leader—a Shepherd guiding His flock toward the heavenly kingdom. Two thousand years later, we are able to understand the value and sacrifice of His leadership, which assures us of our heavenly home if only we will accept Him.

Conscientiously practice servant leadership in the week ahead. Be willing to ask no more of others than you are willing to give or do yourself. No task is too small or too unimportant for you to undertake if you believe in the leadership model established by our Lord.

Lead by example, just like Jesus.
Appalling Appeal (Isa. 6:9-13).

**When** God recommissioned Isaiah, why did He give the prophet such a strange message to take to His people (Isa. 6:9, 10)?

God does not want any to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), which explains why He sent Isaiah to the people of Judah—and Jesus to the world. God’s desire is not to destroy but to save eternally. But while some people respond positively to His appeals, others become firmer in their resistance. Nevertheless, God keeps on appealing to them in order to give them more and more opportunities to repent. Yet, the more they resist, the harder they become. So in that sense, what God does to them results in the hardening of their hearts, even though He would rather that these actions soften them. God’s love toward us is unchanging; our individual response to His love is the crucial variable.

The role of a minister, such as Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or even Christ, is to keep on appealing, even if people reject the message. God said to Ezekiel: “Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them” (Ezek. 2:5, NRSV). God’s role and that of His servants is to give people a fair choice, so that they will have adequate warning (compare Ezek. 3:16-21), even if they end up choosing destruction and exile (Isa. 6:11-13).

**With** these ideas in mind, how do we understand God’s role in hardening Pharaoh’s heart?

In Exodus 4:21, God says, “‘but I will harden his heart’” (NRSV). This is the first of nine times in which God said He would harden Pharaoh’s heart. But there were also nine times when Pharaoh hardened his own heart (for example, see Exod. 8:15, 32; 9:34).

Clearly Pharaoh possessed some kind of free will, or he would not have been able to soften his own heart. But the fact that God also hardened Pharaoh’s heart indicates that God initiated the circumstances to which Pharaoh reacted when he made his choices, choices to reject the signs God had given him. Had Pharaoh been open to those signs, his heart would have been softened, not hardened, by them.

Have you, in your own experience with the Lord, ever felt a hardening of your heart to the Holy Spirit? Think through what caused it. If you didn’t find that concept frightening then (after all, that’s part of what having a hard heart is all about), how do you view it now? What is the way of escape? See 1 Cor. 10:13.
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Isaiah was to tell Israel that because they were no longer following His will or His teachings they were in danger of losing His protection and blessings. They were free to choose. But they needed to be reminded of the consequences for turning away from God.

Isaiah knew his message from God would not be received warmly. This frightened him. Would you have had the courage and faith to do what Isaiah did?

**Thought Questions:**
1. Read Psalm 3:1-3. How can we apply this prayer to our life and times? How does God act as a shield in your life?

2. Isaiah was given a vision of God’s majesty and holiness. If you were given the opportunity to view God’s inner glory, how would you imagine the scene? Describe what you think you would see. Share how you believe it would change your life.

3. Media today relentlessly bombard our senses. How, then, are we to describe heaven and the new earth so they are attractive to nonbelievers? Read Matthew 25:31. Discuss how we can help people long for this experience.

**Application Questions:**
1. Without the hope of the Second Coming, what would we have to look forward to? Ask various members of your class to express their thoughts.

2. Our lesson this week leads us to understand that God’s sanctuary is a place of hope and encouragement. In these difficult days, how important is it for God’s people to gather regularly in church to worship and to honor Him? When is it appropriate for individuals to worship with a few good friends in a more casual atmosphere?

3. Few are called to be prophets. But God asks all of us to work in His cause. What does that mean to you? How can you encourage others to work for Him?
Further Study: “Iniquitous practices had become so prevalent among all classes that the few who remained true to God were often tempted to lose heart and to give way to discouragement and despair. It seemed as if God’s purpose for Israel were about to fail and that the rebellious nation was to suffer a fate similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

“In the face of such conditions it is not surprising that when, during the last year of Uzziah’s reign, Isaiah was called to bear to Judah God’s messages of warning and reproof, he shrank from the responsibility. He well knew that he would encounter obstinate resistance. As he realized his own inability to meet the situation and thought of the stubbornness and unbelief of the people for whom he was to labor, his task seemed hopeless. Should he in despair relinquish his mission and leave Judah undisturbed to their idolatry? Were the gods of Nineveh to rule the earth in defiance of the God of heaven?”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 306, 307.

Discussion Questions:

1. If a skeptic or an atheist were to challenge you with the question, “How can you show that your God is in charge?” what would you answer?
2. If God is in charge, why do innocent people suffer? Does Isaiah 1:19, 20 mean that in the present life only good things are supposed to happen to God’s faithful people and only bad things happen to those who rebel? Compare Job 1, 2; Psalm 37; Psalm 73. Can we reconcile our understanding of God’s character with the bad that happens to people? Do we need to?
3. In Isaiah 6, why are there so many connections to the Day of Atonement? Consider the fact that on this yearly judgment day, God purified His people by cleansing sin from loyal ones (Lev. 16:30) and purging out the disloyal (Lev. 23:29, 30).

Summary: At a time of national insecurity, when the weakness of human leadership was painfully obvious, Isaiah was given a grand vision of the supreme Leader of the universe. Petrified by inadequacy but purified and empowered by mercy, Isaiah was ready to go forth as God’s ambassador into a hostile world.
When Your World Is Falling Apart

One Sabbath, Connie and Roy drove into their driveway after church. A bantam hen flew frantically across the yard in front of them. Something was wrong. The pet birds were supposed to be safely in their pen but had gotten out. Quick investigation showed a tragedy in progress. Beethoven, the neighbor’s small dog, also had escaped her yard and was down by the pond with Daisy in her mouth. Daisy was a beautiful laying hen with fluffy white tail feathers. Connie rescued Daisy, but it was too late. Her precious pet, now with a mangled neck, soon died in Connie’s arms. She sat down in the yard, holding the dead bird, and wailed.

Another pet was deeply disturbed. A tall, white duck by the name of Waddlesworth saw Connie holding Daisy and seemed to have assumed she had killed her. So, for the next few weeks, whenever Waddlesworth saw Connie, he would viciously attack her, pinching her painfully with his strong bill. Sometimes it is hard to sort out who your friends and enemies are.

This week we’ll look at a king of Judah who also had this problem as we seek to understand why he made the wrong choices he did.

The Week at a Glance: What threats was Judah facing, and why? How did King Ahaz respond to those threats, and why? What great thing did the Lord promise to do for him, if only he would show faith? What does it mean that “God is with us”?

Memory Text: “If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all” (Isaiah 7:9, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 17.
Danger From the North (Isa. 7:1-9).

**What** terrifying crisis did King Ahaz face early in his reign? 2 Kings 15:37, 38; 16:5, 6; Isa. 7:1, 2.

The kingdoms of northern Israel (Ephraim) and Syria (Aram) ganged up on the smaller country of Judah, to the south. This happened when Judah was weakened by attacks from the Edomites and Philistines. In the past, Judah had fought with Israel, but an alliance between Israel and Syria was an overwhelming peril. It appears Israel and Syria wanted to force Judah to participate with them in a coalition against the mighty power of Tiglath-pileser III, of Assyria (called “Pul” in 2 Kings 15:19), who continued to threaten them with his expanding empire. Israel and Syria had put aside their longstanding struggle against each other in view of a greater danger. If they could conquer Judah and install a puppet ruler there (Isa. 7:5, 6), they could use its resources and manpower.

**What** was Ahaz’s solution when his world was falling apart? 2 Kings 16:7-9, 2 Chron. 28:16.

Rather than recognize that God was the only Friend who could rescue him and his country, Ahaz tried to make a friend out of Tiglath-pileser III, the enemy of his enemies. The Assyrian king happily complied with his request for aid against Syria and Israel. Not only did Tiglath-pileser receive a rich bribe from Ahaz, he also gained a good excuse to take Syria, which he promptly did (2 Kings 16:9). The power of the Syrian-Israelite alliance was broken. In the short run, it appeared that Ahaz had saved Judah.

This action on Ahaz’s part, however, should not come as a surprise. He had been one of the worst kings Judah had up to that point. (See 2 Kings 16:3, 4; 2 Chron. 28:2-4.)

When we read about what Ahaz was like, it is understandable why he reacted to danger as he did. What lesson is here for us on a personal level? If we’re not obeying the Lord now, what makes us think we’ll have the faith to trust Him when real trials come? (See James 2:22, Jer. 12:5.)
Key Text: Isaiah 7.

Teachers Aim:
1. To demonstrate God’s willingness to reveal Himself.
2. To apply God’s process for decision making to today.

Lesson Outline:
I. Common Sense Versus Kingdom Sense (Isa. 7:1-13).
   A. Beware of consulting a human before God. Request for help from Assyria should have been addressed to God instead.
   B. Ahaz’s false piety and humility in his refusal to accept God’s invitation for a sign shows a lack of faith.

II. What’s in a Name? (Isa. 7:3, 14-25).
   A. The name Shear-jashub means “a remnant shall return.” Whether this means returning to God now or from captivity later is largely dependent on Ahaz’s decision.
   B. Immanuel means “God is with us.”
   C. Despite faithlessness and rejection, God is actively present in our lives.
   D. No matter what we go through, God promises always to be with us.

Summary: As people of faith, we are called to make decisions in line with God’s will. In His goodness, He reveals His will to us. We need to open our hearts and listen with discernment, rather than rely on what seems more readily apparent in the world surrounding us.

COMMENTARY


Despite our stubborn pride, God sends forth rays of gospel light, attended with prophetic revelations designed to pierce the thick armor of unbelief and ignorance. He reveals the path of life that scatters indifference and despair.

I. Weak King, Ambitious Enemies.

Ahaz paved the road to national ruin with his morally bankrupt administration (see 2 Chronicles 28, 1 Pet. 3:12). Hoping to prevent an invasion from the allied forces of Syria and Israel, he enlisted help from Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria. Assyria’s ambition for conquest soon led them to turn their sights toward Judah. It is a mistake for God’s people to seek friendship with the world for the preservation or advancement of His purposes (see 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Gal. 4:6-9, James 4:4, 1 John 2:14-16).
Attempted Interception (Isa. 7:3-9).

While Ahaz was weighing his political options to meet the threat from Israel and Syria, God knew some things he did not. For one thing, it was God who had allowed trouble to come upon him in order to discipline him and bring him to his senses (2 Chron. 28:5, 19). Moreover, although appealing to Tiglath-pileser for help seemed logical and attractive from a human standpoint, God knew it would bring the Davidic kingdom of Judah under foreign control from which she could never recover.

The stakes were staggeringly high. So the Lord sent Isaiah to intercept the king (apparently as he was inspecting Jerusalem’s water supply in preparation for a siege) in order to dissuade him from contacting the Assyrian leader.

**Why** did the Lord tell Isaiah to take his son, Shear-jashub, with him (Isa. 7:3)?

Ahaz would be startled when Isaiah greeted him and introduced his son, named “A Remnant Shall Return.” Remnant of whom? Shall return from what? Because the boy’s father was a prophet, the name sounded like an ominous message from God about people going into captivity. Or was it about returning to God in the sense of repenting (the verb “return” also carries the meaning of repentance)? The message from God to Ahaz was: It means what you make it mean! Turn from your sins or go into captivity, and from captivity a remnant will return. The decision is yours!

**How** did God’s message address the king’s situation? Vss. 4-9.

The threat from Syria and Israel would pass and Judah would be spared. Powers that looked to Ahaz like huge, fiery volcanoes were in God’s sight only “two smoldering stumps of firebrands” (vs. 4, NRSV). There was no need for Ahaz to appeal to Assyria for help.

But in order to make the right decision, Ahaz needed to trust the Lord and His promises. He needed to believe in order to be established (vs. 9). The words for “believe” and “be established” are from the same Hebrew root, from which come also the word for “truth” (that which is reliable) and the word “Amen” (affirming that which is true/reliable). Ahaz needed to be sure in order to be made sure; he needed to rely in order to be reliable.

Look at that last section of Isaiah 7:9. Why are faith and belief so important in order to be “established”? Established in what?
II. Approaching Conquerors, Promised Deliverer.

God sent Isaiah to Ahaz to reassure him that, if he only returned to faithfulness, he would not need to fear the Syrian-Israelite alliance—that in 65 years, Israel would cease to be a nation (see Isa. 7:4-7, 9; compare 2 Chron. 20:20). Meanwhile, God was willing to be Judah’s defense. But having defiled his conscience, the king dreaded God’s involvement. Nevertheless, God offered to give Ahaz a sign of His intervention. Ahaz’s refusal of the sign was a rejection of the divine authority of Isaiah’s message. It also revealed the king’s hypocritical unwillingness to meet the conditions required to receive divine protection.

God, however, was not so easily dismissed from the court. The throne was His footstool. Looking beyond the record of human failure, He promised the Messiah who would redeem the fallen race and establish His peace and righteousness. It is an exquisite prophecy revealed in a spiritually hostile setting. Contrast it with the reception Christ got from Judea’s religious rulers during His life on earth. The history of Israel’s resistance to God’s mercy is illustrated in Nehemiah 9, Psalm 78, and Acts 7. Well might we profit from this record of failure (see 1 Cor. 10:11, 12).

III. Deliverance Through a Child.

Isaiah’s prophecy, given in the presence of the unreceptive king, magnified the root of all humanity’s hope and the cornerstone of all prophecy. A Child would be born. This is what God had revealed to Adam and Eve on the day of their rebellion (see Gen. 3:15). A Child would be born who would crush the serpent’s head. A Child would be born as Israel’s eternal King (Ps. 89:25-29). A Child would be born, higher than the kings of the earth but meek and lowly in heart. A Son would be given to bless all who put their trust in Him (see Ps. 2:7, 8, 12). This Son will stand with His people in their fiery trials and turn flames of persecution into floodlights for His glory (see Dan. 3:24, 25).

IV. God in the Garments of Humanity.

Read Isaiah 7:14. This verse presents eternity in miniature and is a seal that authenticates all Messianic prophecy. Some scholars have disputed translating the Hebrew word alma as “virgin.” They contend that alma simply means a young woman. But their objection is overturned by the divine authority of Scripture, which quotes the text in New Testament times with unmistakable clarity: “Behold, a virgin [parthenos, in Greek, exclusively meaning “virgin”] shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Christ’s birth was as unique as His mission. As the only begotten (monogenes, in Greek) of the Father (John 1:14, 18), He was con-
TUESDAY  
April 13

Another Chance  (Isa. 7:10-13).

Ahaz did not respond to Isaiah’s call for faith. So, God mercifully gave the king another chance, telling him to ask for a sign that was “deep as Sheol or high as heaven” (vs. 11, NRSV). Here is one of the greatest invitations to faith ever given to a human being. Unlike lotteries or sweepstakes, this invitation did not carry restrictions in fine print. God did not even limit His offer to the half of His kingdom as human rulers did when their subjects reached the upper limit of their generosity (compare Esther 5:6, 7:2, Mark 6:23). He stood ready to empty all heaven and earth for a wicked king if only he would believe! Ahaz could have asked for a mountain of gold, as a sign, or soldiers as numerous as grains of sand by the Mediterranean.

Why did Ahaz respond in the way he did (vs. 12)?

At first glance, Ahaz’s answer seems pious and respectful. He would not put God to the test, as the Israelites had centuries before, during their wilderness wanderings (Exod. 17:2, Deut. 6:16). But the difference was that God invited the king to put Him to the test (compare Mal. 3:10). To take Him up on His overwhelmingly generous gift would please Him, not test His patience. But Ahaz was not even willing to allow God to help him to believe. He barred and bolted the door of his heart to shut out faith.

Read Isaiah 7:13. What is Isaiah saying here?

Isaiah pointed out that by refusing to put God to the test, outwardly to avoid wearying God, he, in fact, wearied God. But the most troubling aspect of this verse is the fact that here Isaiah refers to “my God,” by clear contrast to verse 11, where earlier the prophet asked the king to ask a sign of the Lord “your God.” When Ahaz refused the divine offer, he rejected the Lord from being his God. The Lord was the God of Isaiah, but not of Ahaz.

What does this day’s study teach us about God’s forbearance and willingness to bring all of us to salvation? What also does it tell us about the blindness and hardness of the human heart when not surrendered completely to the Lord? In the end, even if God had given Ahaz any sign that he had wanted, do you think Ahaz still would have believed? Explain your answer.
ceived by the Holy Spirit’s implantation of the seed of life in a young Israelite virgin who was deeply devoted to God. Thus, Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, partaking of our nature (1 Tim. 3:16). “Jesus left the royal courts of heaven, and laid aside His own glory, and clothed His divinity with humanity, that He might come into close connection with humanity, and by precept and example uplift and ennoble humanity, and restore in the human soul the lost image of God.”—Ellen G. White, Temperance, p. 40. In Hebrews

**Inductive Bible Study**


1. Often people cry out for a change of circumstances—for their troubles to go away. Even as Christians, we sometimes pray, “Lord, remove this thing from me” or “Please don’t let me go through this.” It is in going through, however, that our faith can be strengthened. God has promised to stay with us when trouble will not leave us and when the pain of our suffering (physically, financially, spiritually, or emotionally) is great. Explore God’s commitment to this promise in the following verses: Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 27:14; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; Hebrews 13:5, 6. Ask the class to cite examples of God’s nearness during troubled times in their lives.

2. Whenever we feel our world crumbling around us, it is a great temptation to become discouraged or to feel sorry for ourselves. We bargain with God and make promises we cannot always keep. “If You will just help me out, I will . . .” Many times we get ourselves into more trouble when we rely on ourselves or another person, rather than wait on God. What advice do we find in Psalm 27:14? How can we still have joy while waiting for the Lord to bring us through our trials? Recall the stories of Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16, 21); Jacob (Gen. 29:15-30); Joseph (Gen. 37:23–41:46); Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19-40). What other examples can your class think of?

3. What New Testament texts reveal Christ’s encouragement for those who are enduring trials and temptations? What good comes from trials and temptations? James 1:2, 3. What does all of James chapter 1 reveal about the source of our trials, the way of escape, and the rewards for our faithfulness?
Sign of a Son (Isa. 7:14).

An offer of a sign as “deep as Sheol or high as heaven” (vs. 11, NRSV) did not move Ahaz. So, when God says He Himself will come up with a sign (vs. 14), we expect it to have breathtaking dimensions that only the divine imagination could devise (compare Isa. 55:9, 1 Cor. 2:9).

Surprise! The sign is a son. But how could a young woman bearing a child and calling him “Immanuel” be a sign of biblical proportions?

Who is the woman, and who is her Child?

Nowhere does the Old Testament point out a fulfillment of this important sign, as it had done for the signs given to other people, such as Gideon (Judg. 6:36-40). So, here are some of the possible fulfillments, based on the Old Testament alone:

1. Because the word for “young woman” refers to a young woman of marriageable age, many assume she is a married woman living in Jerusalem, perhaps the wife of Isaiah. Isaiah 8:3 does record the birth of a son to Isaiah by “the prophetess” (referring to his wife, whose prophetic messages consisted, at least, of her children; compare Isa. 7:3, 8:18). However, her son was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa. 8:1-4), not Immanuel. Nevertheless, the signs of the two boys are similar in that before they reach the stage at which they can choose good or evil, Syria and northern Israel would be devastated (Isa. 7:16, 8:4).

2. Some suggest that Immanuel is Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, the next king. But nowhere is the name Immanuel applied to him.

3. Because Immanuel is somewhat mysterious and his name, commonly translated “God with us” refers to God’s presence, He could be the same as the special Son prophesied in Isaiah 9 and 11. If so, His exalted description as divine (Isa. 9:6) and “the root of Jesse” (11:10, NRSV) surpasses anything ascribed to good King Hezekiah.

4. A natural birth for an unmarried woman of marriageable age would result in an illegitimate child through promiscuity (see Deut. 22:20, 21). Why would such a child be a sign to inspire faith?

In contrast, the New Testament identifies Jesus as Immanuel (Matt. 1:21-23), born miraculously and with purity to an unmarried but betrothed virgin. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4, NRSV), to give us the presence of God with us.

Dwell on the reality of Christ’s coming into humanity. What kind of comfort can that reality give us amid what seems like a cold, fearsome, and uncaring world?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

10:5-10, we learn that God prepared a body for Jesus, that He might be the all-sufficient sacrifice to redeem us from our sins.

Such texts as Romans 1:3, 4; 8:1-4; Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:14-16; 5:5-9; 7:24-28; 9:24-28 reflect the completeness of Christ’s identification with our human nature for the sake of our redemption. These passages call for close and reverent study but are not fuel for theological dispute. Truly, Jesus is God with us and the perfect human model while partaking of our nature.

Witnessing

Do you remember the first time you stood on the edge of the swimming pool and your dad or mom held out his or her arms and said, “Jump! I’ll catch you!”? Or do you remember the first time you sat in the driver’s seat with one of your parents beside you as you attempted to parallel park? Whatever the situation, you believed you could trust your parents.

Because God is our heavenly Parent, we would be wise to place our trust in Him. “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14).

God’s timetable for addressing our concerns and needs is not always easy to understand. Sometimes it is extremely hard to exercise patience while listening for the still, small voice of God. Human nature being what it is, we often believe that we know better than God how to fix a situation. However, as our lesson taught us this week, to rush ahead without Him can lead only to disaster.

King Ahaz, upon learning that his kingdom was threatened, turned to human intervention rather than placing his trust in God for deliverance. Time and time again, Isaiah admonished Ahaz to place his trust in Him who never fails. Sadly, Ahaz chose not to listen. Although he was free to make that choice, the penalty of his action cost him his salvation.

During the week ahead, look for an opportunity to guide someone in crisis. Explain to that person how only God can help and assist him or her in understanding that His way is the only way!
“God Is with Us”! (Isa. 7:14).

Like the name of Isaiah’s children (Shear-jashub, “a remnant shall return,” and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which means “swift is booty, speedy is prey”), the name of Immanuel has a meaning. It is literally “with us God.” But the commonly accepted translation “God with us” misses something important. As with other Hebrew names of this kind that lack verbs, the verb “to be” must be supplied, because it is not expressed in Hebrew. So, Immanuel must be translated “God is with us” (compare the same words in Isa. 8:10) just as the name “Jesus” (Greek, and short for Hebrew Yehoshua, or Joshua) means “The Lord is salvation,” with the verb again being supplied (compare Isaiah, which means, “salvation of the Lord”).

But the name “Immanuel” is not just an abstract description; it is an assertion of a promise that is fulfilled now: “God is with us”!

What is the significance of the promise that God is with us?

There is no stronger assurance and comfort. “God does not promise that His people will not endure hardship and pain, but He promises to be with them. The psalmist says: ‘Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me’ (Ps. 23:4).

‘God says: ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you’ (Isa. 43:2). Where was the Lord when the Babylonians threw Daniel’s three friends into the fire? With them (Dan. 3:23-25). And where was the Lord during the time of Jacob’s trouble when he wrestled until daybreak? In Jacob’s arms, as close as he could get (Gen. 32:24-30).

“Even when the Lord does not appear in physical form on earth, He goes through the experiences of His people with them. Where was the Lord when the mob condemned Stephen? ‘Standing at the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:55). But when Jesus ascended to heaven, He ‘sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high’ (Heb. 1:3). Why did He stand when Stephen was in trouble, about to be stoned to death? As Morris Venden has said, ‘Jesus wasn’t going to take that sitting down!’”—Roy Gane, God’s Faulty Heroes (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald© Pub. Assn., 1996), p. 66.
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: One night, a man dreamed he was walking along the beach with God. Scenes from his life flashed across the sky. In most scenes, he noticed his footprints and God’s footprints. However, in the scenes that depicted the bleakest times of his life, he noticed only one set of footprints. When he asked about it, God replied, “Those were the times I carried you!” In your times of need, how has God responded to you? Have you been willing to accept His leading, or have you all too often insisted on going off in your own direction? We will see in our lesson this week the ultimate tragedy of refusing God’s help when it is most needed.

Thought Question:
The dictionary defines the word *leap* as “to spring free from . . . the distance covered.” The dictionary describes the word *faith* as “a belief and trust in and loyalty to God . . . a firm belief in something for which there is no proof . . . complete confidence.” If we connect these definitions, we see that trust in God, especially when there is no proof, allows us to spring free and cover a great distance. Perhaps one of the greatest acts of faith recorded in the Bible is in Exodus 14. Here, God instructs Moses to stretch his rod over the Red Sea to part the waters so the children of Israel can cross on dry land. With such miracles as part of their heritage, why did Ahaz and the people lose faith? How did their situation differ from earlier tests of faith?

Application Questions:

1. Fear is a basic human response. However, why might fear not always be negative? How does Satan use fear to reduce God’s influence in our lives? Reflect on individuals you know who have overcome fear. Share what you believe to be positive outcomes as a result of their experience.

2. Review Hebrews 11:1-3. Ask members to share how these verses have helped them grow in their walk with God.
Further Study: “‘His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . ‘God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love,—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 19.

“Well would it have been for the kingdom of Judah had Ahaz received this message as from heaven. But choosing to lean on the arm of flesh, he sought help from the heathen. In desperation he sent word to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria: ‘I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.’ 2 Kings 16:7. The request was accompanied by a rich present from the king’s treasure and from the temple storehouse.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 329.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you are in the process of making a decision, is it appropriate to ask God for a sign? What dangers are possibly inherent in doing something like that?

2. It is good to have human assistance, but how do you recognize its limits?

3. Russian author Leo Tolstoy once wrote to a friend that “Once a man has realized that death is the end of everything, then there is nothing worse than life either.” How does our knowledge that “God is with us” answer such a statement?

Summary: God brought faithless King Ahaz to circumstances in which he had to make a difficult decision: To believe or not to believe, this is the question. Even though the Lord offered him any sign that his imagination could devise, Ahaz even refused to allow God to demonstrate a reason why he should believe. As his “friend” he chose instead the king of Assyria.
The Hard Way

SABBATH AFTERNOON

At a burning building in New York City’s Harlem, a blind girl was perched on the fourth-floor window. The firemen had become desperate. They couldn’t fit the ladder truck between the buildings, and they couldn’t get her to jump into a net, which she, of course, couldn’t see.

“Finally her father arrived and shouted through the bull horn that there was a net and that she was to jump on his command. The girl jumped and was so completely relaxed that she did not break a bone or even strain a muscle in the four-story fall. Because she trusted her father completely, when she heard her father’s voice she did what he said was best.”—Edited by Michael P. Green, 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, p. 135.

In the same way, God provided powerful evidence that He wanted the best for His children, but they rejected the gently flowing way He first presented His concern to them; thus, He had to speak to them with a roar and a flood instead.

What lessons can we, today, learn from their mistakes?

The Week at a Glance: What calamities befell the northern kingdom? What was the result of Ahaz’s alliance with the Assyrians? Yet even amid all this calamity and suffering, what hope did the Lord offer? What does it mean to love and to fear God? What does the Word say to us about the dangers of spiritualism?

Memory Text: “I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him” (Isaiah 8:17, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 24.
Prophecy Fulfilled (Isa. 7:14-16).

In Isaiah 7:14-16, Immanuel is a sign linked to the dilemma of Ahaz: Before the child Immanuel would be old enough to decide between different kinds of food, “the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted” (vs. 16, NRSV). This refers to the land and kings of Syria and northern Israel (compare vss. 1, 2, 4-9) and reiterates God’s promise that their power would soon be extinguished.

**Why** does Isaiah mention “‘curds and honey’” (NRSV) that the boy would have to eat? Isa. 7:15.

The crops and fields of Judah would be destroyed by the Assyrians (vss. 23-25). So the people, including the Old Testament Immanuel, whoever he was (vss. 14, 15), would be forced to return to the diet of nomads (vss. 21, 22). But while they would be poor, they would have enough on which to survive.

**When** was the prophecy regarding Syria and northern Israel fulfilled? 2 Kings 15:29, 30; 16:7-9; 1 Chron. 5:6, 26.

This prophecy of Isaiah was given about 734 B.C. In response to the bribe of Ahaz, Tiglath-pileser III did what he probably would have done anyway: He smashed the northern coalition, conquered the Galilee and Transjordanian regions of northern Israel, deported some of the population, and turned the territories into Assyrian provinces (734–733 B.C.).

The remainder of Israel was saved when Hoshea, after murdering King Pekah, surrendered and paid tribute. In 733 and 732 B.C., Tiglath-pileser conquered Damascus, the capital of Syria. Then he carved Syria into Assyrian provinces. So, by 732, within about two years of Isaiah’s prediction, Syria and Israel had been conclusively defeated, and it was all over for the two kings who had threatened Ahaz.

Then, King Hoshea of Israel committed political suicide by rebelling against Assyria. The Assyrians took the capital city of Samaria in 722 B.C. and deported thousands of Israelites to Mesopotamia and Media, where they eventually were absorbed into the local populations and lost their identity. God had predicted what would happen to the enemies of Judah, but His point to Ahaz was that this would happen anyway, without any need to rely on Assyria.

Think, if you were living in the northern kingdom while all this was happening, how easy it would be to lose faith. What can we do to keep our faith intact, so that when tomorrow’s calamities come we can stay firm? See 1 Pet. 1:13-25.
Key Text: Isaiah 8.

Teachers Aim:
1. To link the consequences found in Isaiah 8 to the warning and actions taken in preceding chapters.
2. To convey proper understanding of the love and fear of God.

Lesson Outline:
I. A Quick Downfall.
   A. In a short time, we go from a prophecy of unbelief in Isaiah 6 to its fulfillment in Isaiah 7 and the consequences thereof in Isaiah 8.
   B. God showed Ahaz that His word is true. However, as Ahaz faces trouble, he continues down the slippery slope to pagan ways.

II. Love and Fear.
   A. Many people present love and wrath as complete opposites. They are, however, both characteristics of God that cannot be diminished without raising the topic of idolatry.
   B. Fear as respect, reverence, and recognition of boundaries is in perfect harmony with love.

Summary: In just a few short chapters, the book of Isaiah prophesies a warning to Ahaz against disbelief and shows the fulfillment of that prophecy when Ahaz disobeys. Even in the imagery of a flood rising to Judah’s neck, God hopes. This time it is hope that Israel will not be completely consumed. We must turn to God alone if we hope to escape the same fate as Ahaz’s.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: The Hard Way.
Ahaz and the kingdom of Judah over which he ruled wanted deliverance and protection from their advancing enemies. Ahaz and his subjects would have accepted God’s help, but they believed the cost of doing so was too high. They choose ruin rather than submission to His authority and calling. This testifies to the deceitfulness of sin and its effect on human character (see Rom. 2:2-11; Heb. 3:12, 13).

I. The Fruits of Distrusting God.
In graphic, poetical language, Isaiah prophesies that Judah would be reduced to a wasteland through conquest and captivity. Rather than glorifying God as His fruitful vineyard, they were content to let their spiritual lives degenerate into a wilderness. Soon their land would be blighted to reflect their spiritual destitution (see Isa. 7:17-24; compare Matt. 21:33-44; Heb. 6:7, 8). If only God’s people had heeded His warnings, the calamity would have been averted.
M O N D A Y  April 19

Foreseen Consequences  (Isa. 7:17-25).

Read the above verses. What is the Lord saying that will happen to the land? Why should we not be surprised at this outcome?

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For Ahaz, the man of fear rather than faith, the good news from God was that Syria and Israel would be wiped out. The bad news was that Assyria, the ally and “friend” he had chosen to help him, would turn out to be a far more dangerous foe than Syria and Israel had been. By turning down deliverance offered freely by God, Ahaz was guaranteed defeat. If Ahaz thought his world was falling apart before, things were going to get far worse!

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes” (Ps. 118:9, NRSV). How could Ahaz trust that Tiglath-pileser III would be satisfied with taking the countries to the north and respect Judah? Assyrian writings, such as annals of the Assyrian kings themselves, testify to the fact that their desire for power was insatiable.

Read 2 Kings 16:10-18 and 2 Chronicles 28:20-25. What was happening to Ahaz? What spiritual principle do we see unfolding here? Why should we not be surprised at his actions?

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2 Chronicles 28:20-23 powerfully sums up what happened when Ahaz asked for help from Assyria rather than relying on the Lord.

Our natural tendency is to trust in what we can see, feel, taste, touch—the things of the world. Yet, as we know, the things of the world vanish. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:18. What is the text saying to us? How can we apply what it is saying to our own lives? And what difference will it make for us if we do?
II. Amid the Darkness Shines the Everlasting Light.

To establish that His prophetic revelations of the fate of Israel and Syria were genuine, the Lord stated that before Isaiah’s new baby was born, he should put the baby’s name on a large sign for everyone to see. The baby was to be named Mahershalalhashbaz, which means “the spoiler hastens, the plunderer comes quickly.” God explained that before the infant could say “Father” or “Mother,” Assyria would carry away the wealth of Judah’s two enemies and break their power. This was to encourage Judah to believe God and return to Him. God declared again, “Immanuel is on your side, prepared to save, protect, and revive you. Won’t you please turn to Him from whom you have revolted?” (see Isa. 1:5; 8:8; 31:5, 6, author’s paraphrase).

Christ (Immanuel) and His kingdom of righteousness are the primary themes of all prophecy (see 1 Pet. 1:19-21, Rev. 1:1). When the incarnate Source and Aim of prophecy is rejected, then life itself is rejected (see Prov. 8:36; John 6:53, 54, 63; 14:6; 1 John 5:12).

III. The Dark Alternative.

Jesus stated that condemnation comes to those upon whom the light of truth and grace shines when they “[love] darkness rather than light, because their deeds [are] evil” (John 3:19). People may join alliances of every sort that bypass the counsel of the Lord, but eventually these alliances are shattered (see Prov. 16:5; Isa. 8:9, 10; Rev. 17:12-16). Without God, life is crowded with pain and perplexity, leading people to grope desperately for answers. The yearning for supernatural guidance is a deeply rooted element of our nature. When we reject God, Satan is more than willing to fill the void with experiences that borrow some principles and sentiments from heaven to make his lies appear to be true. Chief among his deceptions is spiritualism—the notion that it is possible to communicate with the dead, who are enjoying a more advanced state of being in an invisible realm. God’s Word, however, exposes this deception. (Read Ps. 6:5; 115:17; 146:3, 4; Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10.)

Through Isaiah, God warned Israel not to turn to spiritualism or consult with mystics and mediums. Such are powerless to comprehend or overrule divine revelation (see Isa. 47:12-15; Dan. 2:1-11, 26-28). At first, spiritualism may seem to bring great comfort and reassurance that all is well with departed loved ones and that the future will be glorious for all. However, the more deeply enmeshed one becomes in spiritualist guidance, the more frightening it becomes, because demons cannot restrain their malice or renounce their desire for evil control over those who commune with them. Spiritualism is a refuge of lies that quickly turns into a dungeon of despair. How many cared to listen to Isaiah’s warning in his day? How many care to listen today? (Read Isa. 8:19, 20; Rev. 13:11-14.)
What’s in a Name? (Isa. 8:1-10).

Can you imagine playing a ball game with Isaiah’s second boy? By the time you could say “Maher-shalal-hash-baz, throw me the ball!” it would be too late. But even longer than his name is its meaning: “swift is booty, speedy is prey” or “speed the spoil, hasten the plunder.”

The message of the name clearly relates to rapid conquest, but who conquers whom? Isa. 8:4.

Isaiah 8:1-10 reinforces the message of chapter 7. Before a child could reach a certain stage, spoils of war from the capitals of Syria and northern Israel would be taken by Assyria. Furthermore, because Judah had refused God’s message of assurance, represented by the gently flowing waters of the Shiloah stream in Jerusalem, it would be overwhelmed by the mighty power of Assyria, represented by flooding from the great Euphrates River.

Because Ahaz turned to Assyria, the names of Isaiah’s sons referred to Judah, as well as to northern Israel: “swift is booty, speedy is prey,” but also “a remnant shall return.” Why was there still hope? Because although Assyria would fill Immanuel’s land (Isa. 8:8), they still had the promise that “God is with us” (vs. 10). Indeed, what we see here is a theme that permeates the entire book of Isaiah, which is that though there would be judgments on God’s enemies in Judah and on other nations, delivered in the form of military disasters, suffering, and exile, the Lord would be with the faithful survivors of His people and restore them to their land.

Why does Isaiah tell us he legally recorded the child’s name and had marital relations with his wife (“the prophetess”)? Isa. 8:1-3.

The timing of this son served as a significant sign. As with the sign of Immanuel, from the time the son was conceived and born until the time Assyria defeated Syria and Israel would be less time than it would take for the boy to reach an early developmental stage, in this case learning to call for his father or mother (vs. 4). When Isaiah legally recorded the boy’s name before his conception, he made the child and his name a public prophecy that could be tested by subsequent events.

Despite repeated mistakes on the part of His professed people, the Lord still was willing to save them. How can we take this principle and apply it to ourselves, personally, especially when we fail and fall in our own spiritual life?
IV. The Inextinguishable Light.

Striving to break through their crust of defiance, God told His people that they need neither flounder nor grope in darkness. They

Inductive Bible Study


1. Why did Ahaz suffer hardship after refusing to trust God? Was this hardship direct punishment from God or simply the will of mortal humans carried out under the influence of false gods? *Lam. 3:33, Heb. 12:10.*

2. Read Proverbs 9:10. As the lesson pointed out, there are different kinds of fear. What can we learn about the importance of having a correct fear of God? *Exod. 20:19-21, Deut. 6:1-3, 1 Chron. 16:25, 2 Cor. 7:1.*

3. When we do not exercise, our bodies become weak. Then we suffer disease and broken bones that could have been prevented if we had kept ourselves fit. It is the same with our minds. If we do not condition ourselves to be spiritually fit, we will have little or no defense against the attacks of the devil. How can we develop a healthy mind? *Prov. 4:5-7; 9:10, 11; 16:3; Phil. 2:5, 15; 2 Tim. 2:15.*

4. Monday’s study points out that by turning down deliverance offered freely by God, Ahaz was guaranteed defeat. What have you experienced that proves this point? What brought you back to God? Or if you have not fully returned yet, what is keeping you from doing so?

5. Spiritualism comes in many forms. It is evident in movies, commercials and programs, children’s entertainment, etc. It has even crept its way into Christianity. In an article entitled “Reincarnation Goes to Church,” by Betsy Mayer (*Last Generation*, vol. 13, no. 1), she cites a survey that reports that approximately one-fifth of Christians “who declared ‘Jesus is risen’ expect to overcome death through reincarnation, not through resurrection.”

List and discuss other spiritualistic concepts that are confusing Christians today. How can we protect ourselves from such influences, while sharing God’s love and truth with others? (See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 290–292; *Prov. 2:11, 2 Tim. 4:2-4, 1 John 4:1-3.*
Nothing to Fear When We Fear God Himself (Isa. 8:11-15).

In his first inaugural address, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt told a nation disheartened by the Great Depression: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”—U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., (March 4, 1933). Isaiah’s message to depressed people is similar: “We have nothing to fear when we fear God Himself.”

God warned Isaiah not to fear what his people feared, but to fear Him (Isa. 8:12, 13). This is an important theme in Scripture. For example, in Revelation 14:6-12, three angels proclaim a worldwide message: Fear God and give glory to Him, rather than fearing and giving glory to the earthly beast power described in chapter 13.

**How** do you understand the idea of “fearing” God? What does that mean, especially in light of the command that we love God, as well (Matt. 22:37)?

True fear of God means that you recognize Him as the ultimate Power in the universe. Such fear overcomes any other fear. If He is for you, nobody else can touch you without His permission. If He is against you because you have rebelled against Him, you can run, but you can’t hide!

**Doesn’t** the idea that we should fear God contradict 1 John 4:18: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love” (NRSV)?

There are different kinds of fear. If someone with awesome power is your friend, with whom you share mutual love, you do not fear that person in the sense you think he or she will hurt you. But you have a kind of fear in the sense that you know and respect the power of that person and the boundaries of your relationship.

As Christians we aren’t to love the things of the world, the things that people of the world love (1 John 2:15). Thinking, then, along parallel lines, as Christians, are there things the world fears that we as Christians shouldn’t fear? If so, what are they, and why shouldn’t we fear them? At the same time, what things does the world not fear that we, as Christians, should?

See, for instance, Matt. 10:28; Jer. 10:2, 3.
need only turn to the law and the testimony and listen to the prophets who speak in harmony with His revealed Word (see Isa. 8:20; compare Deut. 4:1-10, 1 Cor. 14:32, 1 John 4:1). Those who despise God’s law, on whatever theological pretext, are setting up camp on spiritual quicksand. A careful reading of Psalm 119, Luke 16:17, John 14:15, 15:10, Romans 8:1-4, and other similar passages, would be highly therapeutic to such a mind-set. While the law has no saving merit in itself, it does define righteousness and systemize the practical operations of love (see Matt. 22:23-40; Rom. 13:10, 11). Unsaved sinners cannot keep the law, and many take refuge in the false doctrine that faith in Christ releases us from obedience to the law instead of from subjection to the power of sin (see Rom. 8:7, Heb. 8:10-12, 1 John 2:2-6, 5:1-3).

Witnessing

If you live in farming country, you know the importance of predicting the weather. Weather conditions can either make or break a crop.

You learn the importance of planting only during certain times of the year according to your weather zone. You also appreciate that weather conditions determine whether the infant crop will grow well.

Those of us who benefit by the hard work of the farmers also understand what happens if they experience a hard year. Food prices skyrocket, and some products become scarce.

Our lesson this week opens up to us the subject of predictions. We learn that the child Immanuel, who is spoken of throughout the book of Isaiah, refers to the coming of Christ Himself. However, not only is Christ’s birth predicted but also we learn that His second coming is referred to as well!

Because it is our human desire to know the future, Satan has found ways to mislead us through false methods of prediction. We lose a beloved family member or friend in death, and he provides someone who can help us communicate with him or her from the grave. He is the mastermind behind clever and creative ways to lure our children to believe it is OK to dabble in spiritualism.

Take time this week to share with your children, grandchildren, or other little ones with whom you come in contact the blessings that come from focusing on Jesus. Let them know that only He can save the world, predict our future, and prepare for us a place to live that is far beyond our imagination.
Gloom of the Ungrateful Living Dead
(Isa. 8:16-22).

Read the above passage. What is it talking about? What has this to do with King Ahaz? Summarize the ideas.

Ahaz was deeply involved in pagan religion (2 Kings 16:3, 4, 10-15; 2 Chron. 28:2-4, 23-25), which was heavily interconnected with the occult (compare Deut. 32:17, NRSV—"They sacrificed to demons..."); 1 Cor. 10:20). Various aspects of modern witchcraft have striking parallels in ancient Near Eastern rituals, as witnessed by ancient writings outside the Bible. Indeed, even many of today’s New Age practices are simply contemporary manifestations of these ancient occult practices.

Isaiah’s description of despair resulting from reliance on spirits other than the Lord (Isa. 8:21, 22) fits Ahaz well (compare 2 Chron. 28:22, 23). Isaiah foretells of people becoming enraged and cursing their king (Isa. 8:21). This would warn Ahaz that his people would curse him for leading them into the occult. In fact, when Ahaz died, an exception was made regarding his burial due to lack of respect for him: “They did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel” (2 Chron. 28:27, NRSV).

What do these texts say about the occult? Lev. 20:27, Deut. 18:9-14.

Separation from the occult is a matter of loyalty to God. First Chronicles 10:13, 14 applies this principle to the case of King Saul: “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord; moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (NRSV).

Look around at your own life, at the influences around you. In what subtle ways are you exposed to the principles behind the occult and various manifestations of spiritualism? And even if you can’t totally avoid them, what can you do to minimize their influence upon you, or your family?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Read or have your class sing Hymn 115 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, “O Come, O Come, Immanuel.”

The cry of God’s people throughout the ages has been the same: “Come, Lord Jesus. Save us from fear, suffering, false teachings, and beliefs.”

Why does it seem so hard for us to accept what He offers, to rejoice when He performs, and to believe when He delivers?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Christ plans to redeem His earthly children. Satan wants to destroy them. Are we concentrating too hard on Satan’s obvious traps so that we are making it easier to become ensnared in his subtler ones? Explain. What is our most effective weapon against this danger?

2. How might we be like King Ahaz and the children of Judah? How might we let seemingly innocent activities engulf our lives at the expense of our relationship with God? How can such activities lead to more destructive behaviors?

**Application Questions:**

1. Our world has seemingly become smaller in recent years. Positive outcomes will result from this new cohesiveness. However, this close blending of cultures and religions also will present certain challenges to Christians. Discuss areas in which we must exercise caution in order to remain true to Christ. Also discuss how can we embrace this smaller world and, at the same time, avoid the practices Scripture tells us to avoid.

2. “A friend once asked Dr. E. J. Pace whether he believed in a personal devil. The doctor replied with emphasis, ‘No’. . . . Then Dr. Pace proceeded to clear himself, saying, ‘I most certainly believe that there is a personal devil, but far be it from me to believe in him, for he is a liar and the father of lies, as Jesus said.’ ” —H.M.S. Richards, *What Jesus Said* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1957), p. 117. “The father of lies” is an appropriate title for Satan. Why is it impossible to dabble in his world just a bit without becoming his slave?
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?”, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 551–562.

“In the days of the Hebrews there was a class of people who claimed, as do the spiritualists of today, to hold communication with the dead. But the “familiar spirits,” as these visitants from other worlds were called, are declared by the Bible to be ‘the spirits of devils.’ (Compare Numbers 25:1-3; Psalm 106:28; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 16:14.) The work of dealing with familiar spirits was pronounced an abomination to the Lord, and was solemnly forbidden under penalty of death. Leviticus 19:31; 20:27. The very name of witchcraft is now held in contempt. The claim that men can hold intercourse with evil spirits is regarded as a fable of the Dark Ages. But spiritualism, which numbers its converts by hundreds of thousands, yea, by millions, which has made its way into scientific circles, which has invaded churches, and has found favor in legislative bodies, and even in the courts of kings—this mammoth deception is but a revival, in a new disguise, of the witchcraft condemned and prohibited of old.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 556.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Discuss the issue of spiritualism as it appears in movies, books, TV, and popular culture. If nothing can be done to stop it, how can we alert others to the dangers of what, for so many people, seem like harmless distractions, nothing more? Why is a proper understanding of the state of the dead so important in being protected against these deceptions?

2. Read Isaiah 8:20. Prayerfully, rephrase it in your own words. Let different people in the class read their versions aloud. What is the Lord telling us here?

3. Dwell more on this idea of loving and fearing God at the same time. In what ways does our love stem from that fear? Or does our fear stem from our love? Discuss.

**Summary:** Through Isaiah’s actions and family, as well as his words, God reinforced the message of warning and hope: The only safe course is to trust that God knows what He is doing. He has both the love and the power to guide, protect, and provide for those who let Him. For those who turn to other powers, there is only gloom.
Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, who supervised the creation of the first atomic bomb, appeared before a Congressional Committee [in the United States]. They inquired of him if there were any defense against the weapon. ‘Certainly,’ the great physicist replied.

‘And that is—’


Peace is an elusive dream for the human race. In 1895 Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, provided for a trust to establish a prize for individuals who make an outstanding contribution to peace (Paul Lee Tan, p. 988, adapted). In recent years, however, even some winners of the Nobel Peace Prize have been involved in violent conflict. This week we’ll read about the only One who can bring true, and everlasting, peace.

**The Week at a Glance:** Who is the Child prophesied of in Isaiah 9? What kind of deliverance would He bring? How are both of Christ’s comings presented in Isaiah 11?

**Memory Text:** “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 1.*
End of Gloom for Galilee (Isa. 9:1-5).

**Why** does Isaiah 9:1 begin with a word (“But”/“Nevertheless”) that indicates a contrast to what precedes it?

Isaiah 8:21, 22 describes the hopeless condition of those who turn to the occult rather than to the true God: Wherever they look, they will “see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness” (vs. 22, NRSV). By contrast, there will come a time when “there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish” (Isa. 9:1, NRSV). The people of the Galilee region are singled out here as receiving the special blessing of “a great light” (vs. 2, NRSV). The nation will be multiplied and rejoice because God will have broken “the rod of their oppressor” (vs. 4, NRSV).

The region of Lake Galilee is depicted here because it was among the first territories of Israel to be conquered. In response to Ahaz’s request for aid, Tiglath-pileser III took the Galilee and Transjordanian regions of northern Israel, carried some of the people captive, and turned the territories into Assyrian provinces (2 Kings 15:29). So, Isaiah’s message is that the first to be conquered would be the first to see deliverance.

**Who** does God use to deliver His people? Isa. 9:6, 7.

**When** and how was the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-5 fulfilled? Matt. 4:12-25.

Not by accident, Jesus’ early ministry was in the Galilee region, where He gave hope by announcing the good news of God’s kingdom and by healing people, including delivering demoniacs from bondage to the occult (vs. 24).

Here we see a perfect example of how the Bible takes events that happened in Old Testament times and uses them to prefigure things that will happen in New Testament times. The Lord mixes images from one era with those of another, such as in Matthew 24, where Jesus mingles the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, with the end of the world.

If someone were to ask you, What has Jesus delivered you from, what would you answer? What personal testimony can you give regarding the power of Christ in your life?
**Key Text:** Isaiah 9–12.

**Teachers Aim:**
1. To show how God uses different methods to call His people back to Him.
2. To convey that none are blameless but that all have hope of salvation through the provision of Christ.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Wake-Up Calls.
   A. God woos His people through love and mercy.
   B. God allows punishment to fall upon His people to call them back to Him.

II. God’s Provision of Salvation.
   A. God’s Word points to Christ and the salvation that is found only in Him.
   B. We can do nothing but are called only to believe in God as He reveals Himself. Neither those leading others astray nor those allowing themselves to be led astray are blameless for not having a proper understanding of God’s revelation.

**Summary:** God chooses to reveal Himself; yet, all too often our preconceived notions about how He should look and act distract us from His revelation. It is a matter of eternal life or death that, as we continue to look toward His second advent, we must not fall into the trap of being so sure of our own interpretation of the Word that we miss its very incarnation and salvation.

**COMMENTARY**

**Introduction: Noble Prince of Peace.**

The misery and rebellion God sees confirm humanity’s need for a Redeemer. In the most loving and attractive terms, He reveals the nature of His plan unfolded in the Person and work of the Messiah. Those who accept salvation receive the benefits for all eternity. Those who reject it doom themselves to misery in this life and extinction in the final judgment. Meanwhile, God pleads with us all to accept the Savior (see John 10:1; Acts 4:8-12).

**I. God’s Glorious “Nevertheless.”**

Were justice and nature to run their course, humanity would be doomed. God’s intervention constitutes our only hope. When people look earthward for hope and guidance, they “behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness” (Isa. 8:22). But God introduces a note of hope that splits the curtain of darkness that Satan stretches over the earth. (Compare Isa. 9:1, 2 with Matt. 4:12-17 and Eph. 2:1-6.)
A Child for Us (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Here is the third special birth in the book of Isaiah, following mention of the births of Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

What is special about the Child found in these verses? Isaiah 9:6, 7.

Notice that this Deliverer has several names/epithets that describe Him in various ways. In the ancient Near East, kings and deities had multiple names to show their greatness.

He is “wonderful,” just as the divine Angel of the Lord described His own name to Samson’s father as “‘wonderful’” (Judg. 13:18, RSV; the same Hebrew root) and then ascended toward heaven in the sacrificial flame on Manoah’s altar (vs. 20), thereby prefiguring His offering of Himself more than 1,000 years later.


He is a King of the dynasty of David; His kingdom of peace will be eternal.

Given these attributes, who alone could this Child be? See Luke 2:8-14.

Some have attempted to identify him with King Hezekiah, but the description far surpasses any ordinary human being. Only one Person fits: Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God and Creator (John 1:1-3, 14; Col. 1:5-17; 2:9; Heb. 1:2), who was born to us in order to save us and give us peace. He has received all authority in heaven and on earth, and He is with us always (Matt. 28:18-20). While retaining His divinity, He has also become human for all time, ever able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). “Unto us a child is born” . . . forever!

“When Christ came to our world, Satan was on the ground, and disputed every inch of advance in His path from the manger to Calvary. Satan had accused God of requiring self-denial of the angels, when He knew nothing of what it meant Himself, and when He would not Himself make any self-sacrifice for others. This was the accusation that Satan made against God in heaven; and after the evil one was expelled from heaven, he continually charged the Lord with exacting service which He would not render Himself. Christ came to the world to meet these false accusations, and to reveal the Father.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 406, 407.

What does this quote tell us about the character of God?
“The Son of God, looking upon the world, beheld suffering and misery. With pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. He looked with compassion upon those who were being corrupted, murdered, and lost. They had chosen a ruler who chained them to his car as captives. Bewildered and deceived, they were moving on in gloomy procession toward eternal ruin,—to death in which is no hope of life, toward night to which comes no morning. . . . Such was the prospect upon which the world’s Redeemer looked. What a spectacle for Infinite Purity to behold!

“Sin had become a science, and vice was consecrated as a part of religion. Rebellion had struck its roots deep into the heart, and the hostility of man was most violent against heaven. It was demonstrated before the universe that, apart from God, humanity could not be uplifted. A new element of life and power must be imparted by Him who made the world.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 36, 37.


This Messianic prophecy is jostled on either side by verses that describe the raging elements of a world determined to have its own way (see Isa. 9:3-5, 9-13). However, God’s promise rises like a tranquil anthem above the turbulent storm.

“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” (Isa. 9:6). Christ is God’s supreme gift to the world (John 3:16, 1 John 2:2), not just to one family, tribe, or nation.

“The government shall be upon his shoulder” (vs. 6; compare Isa. 22:22). The word shoulder in Hebrew means a place of burden bearing. Christ is the Prince of burden bearers. He bore the Cross and all our sins on Calvary (see 1 Pet. 2:24). He invites us to cast our burdens on Him (see Ps. 55:22, 1 Pet. 5:7). In exchange, He gives us His yoke and burden—the sustaining power He imparts to His true disciples so that they might shoulder burdens in God’s service that demand more than human strength (see Matt. 11:28-30).

“His name shall be called Wonderful” and His testimonies are wonderful (Ps. 119:129; compare John 14:21-23). Because He is “wonderful in counsel” and works, He is worthy of all our praise and thanksgiving (see Ps. 107:8, 15, 21, 31; Isa. 28:29). Christ came as the flawless representation of how God’s truth is to be translated into human experience.

“Counsellor” In earthly governments, rulers are all too often dictators. Christ, however, does not force His will upon us. He counsels us, and His counsel indicates His desire for fellowship (see Ps. 16:5-7, 32:8, Rev. 3:18).

“The mighty God.” Jesus truly is God, not a mere representative of God or an exact copy of God (see Isa. 33:22, Phil. 2:5-11, John 1:1-4, 20:28, Heb. 1:1-3). “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed,
The Rod of God’s Anger (Isa. 9:8–10:34).

This section explains Isaiah 9:1-5, which predicts deliverance for the gloomy, anguished people who had trusted in the occult and fallen prey to military conquest and oppression: “the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian” (vs. 4, NRSV).

Read through the sufferings of God’s people as shown in the above texts. Compare the curses in Leviticus 26:14-39. Why did God punish His people in stages rather than all at once? What does this indicate about His character and goals?

If God had wanted to destroy His people, He could have given them up to the Assyrians right away. But He is patient, “not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, NRSV). As in the period of the “judges,” God let the people of Judah and Israel experience some results of their folly, so they could understand what they were doing and have a chance to make a better choice. When they persisted in evil and hardened their hearts against Him and the appeals He sent through His messengers, He further withdrew His protection. But they continued to rebel. This cycle was repeated in a downward spiral until there was nothing more God could do.

Read through Isaiah 9:8–10:2. What sins are the people guilty of? Against whom have they committed them? Who is guilty among them?

What we see here, as seen all through the Bible, is the reality of free will. God made humans free (He had to; otherwise, they could never truly love Him), and freedom involves the option to do wrong. Though time and again God seeks to woo us by revealing His love and character, He will also allow us to face the fruit of our wrong decisions; i.e., pain, suffering, fear, turmoil, and so forth, all in order to help us realize just what turning away from Him leads to. Yet, even then, how often these things don’t make people put away sin and come to the Lord. Free will is wonderful; we couldn’t be human without it. Woe to those, however, who use it wrongly.

How has God used suffering in your own life to turn you away from a wrong course?

“The everlasting Father.” We are born again through Christ. He is the Father of our new nature (see *John 13:33, 2 Cor. 6:18, Eph. 1:5, Heb. 2:11-14*).

“The Prince of Peace.” The peace that Christ offers goes beyond all understanding. Those who possess it are ambassadors for His kingdom and examples of His character. How desperately these examples are needed today. (See *John 14:27, Phil. 4:7*, also *Mic. 5:2-5, Rom. 5:1, 1 Thess. 5:23*, see also *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 27, 28.)

Under Christ’s dominion, we experience within our heart a continual expansion of His government and peace (see *Phil. 1:9-11, Col. 1:9-11*).

**III. The Root of Restoration.**

Isaiah 11:1-10 traces the gospel blessings to the “rod out of the stem of Jesse [David’s father],” the “Branch [that] shall grow out of his roots.” Through full dependence on the Father, the Root will have wisdom, patience, counsel, and might to carry out the ministry

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Text for Discovery:** *Psalm 119:165.*

1. Hardhearted, stubborn, blind, prideful, presumptuous, and bold in their sin. This describes the people of Judah and Israel during the time of Isaiah. How much of what was described in Isaiah 9 and 10 exists today, even among the people of God? Do we expect God to deal with us any differently than He did with ancient Israel? Explain. What does Isaiah reveal about God’s character, and how does having this revelation keep us on the right path?

2. Based on Isaiah 9 and 10, outline the pattern or process God goes through in order to save us. Include His mercy, His appeal, and the outcome based on our response.

3. *Peace* can be defined as “freedom from or a stopping of war . . . freedom from public disturbance . . . law and order . . . freedom from disagreement or quarrels . . . an undisturbed state of mind.”—*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, second college edition, p. 1044. Satan is at war for our minds, but Scripture tells us in Isaiah 26:3 that God will “keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.” (*Read also Ps. 119:165*). What is the sum of all of these definitions of peace, and how does this sum point to Jesus as our salvation?
Root and Branch in One (Isaiah 11).

Who is the “shoot” that comes out “from the stump of Jesse” (NRSV) in Isaiah 11:1? See also Zech. 3:8, 6:12.

Isaiah 11:1 picks up on the imagery of a felled tree in 10:33, 34. The “stump of Jesse” represents the idea that the dynasty of David (son of Jesse) would lose its power (Dan. 4:10-17, 20-26). But there would arise a “shoot/branch” from the apparently doomed “stump”; that is, a ruler descended from David.

Why is the new Davidic ruler also called the “root of Jesse” (Isa. 11:10)? What sense does this make? Rev. 22:16.

The description fits only Jesus Christ, who is both “the root and the descendant of David” (Rev. 22:16, NRSV). Christ came from the line of David (Luke 3:23-31), who was descended from Adam, who was the “son of God” (Luke 3:38), in the sense that Christ created him (compare John 1:1-3, 14). So, Christ was David’s ancestor, as well as his descendant!

In what ways does the new Davidic ruler reverse the evil effects of sin and apostasy? Isaiah 11.

He thinks and acts in harmony with the Lord, judges fairly, punishes the wicked, and brings peace. He will bring back, restore, and unite a faithful remnant of Israel and Judah (compare Isa. 10:20-22). There will be a strong, united monarchy as in the days of King David, who defeated the Philistines and others. But the new ruler will be greater than David in that He will restore peace even to the essence of creation itself: Predators will no longer be carnivorous, and they will coexist in tranquility with their former prey (Isa. 11:6-9).

In Isaiah 11, both comings of Jesus are presented as one picture. They are tied together, because they are two parts of a whole, like the two sides of a plane. The plan of salvation, to be completed, requires both comings: the First, which already happened; and the Second, which we await as the consummation of all our hopes as Christians.

What did Christ accomplish at the First Coming that gives us such assurance about the Second Coming? What sense did the First Coming have if it doesn’t result in the Second?
of redemption. This results in the implanting of every grace in the redeemed and the removal of sin from their lives (see Mic. 4:8; Revelation 21, 22). “The very essence of the gospel is restoration.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 824.

IV. Hymn to Salvation.

Isaiah 12 is a hymn of praise to the Savior. It magnifies the truth that the Messiah’s redemption is freely offered to all the world (vss. 4, 5). May we also praise the Savior for His goodness, grace, and redeeming power. May He be our science and song.

Witnessing

“For He Himself is our peace... and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Eph. 2:14, NKJV).

When citizens of East and West Berlin toppled the Berlin Wall with shovels, axes, and bare hands, it was a day of rejoicing for freedom lovers. But even harder than dismantling the wall was building a united peace for a once-divided nation.

Peace is an elusive dream for the human race. How blessed we are to know that the Prince of Peace is the Source of peace on whom we all can count.

Each of us struggles to find a peaceful heart. Perhaps we are facing difficulties at work, home, or school. Perhaps there is division in our church, on the school or church board, or even at our potluck dinners.

Is real peace possible?

Yes. Through Christ, it most certainly is possible.

During the next week, look for ways to bring a bit of peace into one person’s life. Perhaps you live next door to a single parent struggling to be all things at all times to his or her children. Offer to baby-sit one evening a month so that this person can have time alone. Or maybe you know of a coworker who has a serious health problem. Cook that person’s favorite meal or clean house for him or her. When you witness in such ways, you will discover that as you invite the Prince of Peace into the lives of others, you will have invited Him into yours, too!
**Thursday**

**April 29**

“**You Comforted Me**” (Isa. 12:1-6).

Isaiah 12 is a short psalm (song) of praise to God for His merciful and powerful comfort. The psalm, put in the mouth of a member of the restored remnant, compares the promised deliverance to that of the Hebrews in the Exodus from Egypt (*see Isa. 11:16*); it is like the song of Moses and the Israelites when they were saved from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea (*see Exodus 15*).

**Compare** this song in Isaiah 12 to Revelation 15:2-4, the song of Moses and of the Lamb. What are they both praising God for?

Isaiah 12:2 comes close to identifying the coming Deliverer as Jesus. It says that “God is my salvation” and “he has become my salvation” (*NRSV*). The name Jesus means “The Lord is Salvation” (*compare Matt. 1:21*).

**What** is the significance of the idea, contained in the name of Jesus, that the Lord is salvation?

Not only does the Lord bestow salvation (*Isa. 12:2*); He Himself is salvation. The Presence of the Holy One of Israel in our midst (*vs. 6*) is everything to us. God is with us! Not only did Jesus do miracles; He “became flesh and lived among us” (*John 1:14, NRSV, emphasis supplied*). Not only did He bear our sins on the cross; He became sin for us (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Not only does He make peace; He is our peace (*Eph. 2:14*).

No wonder “the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples” (*Isa. 11:10, NRSV*). When He is lifted up on the cross, He draws all people to Himself (*John 12:32, 33*)! A remnant shall return to the “mighty God” (*Isa. 10:21, NRSV*), who is the Child born for us, the “Prince of Peace” (*Isa. 9:6*).

Dwell more on this idea that Jesus is our salvation. Read Romans 3:24. It says that redemption is in Jesus; redemption is something that happened in Him, and it is through God’s grace and mercy that we can have an eternal share in that redemption, as well. In other words, that redemption that was in Him can become ours by faith, and not by works, because no works we do are good enough to redeem us. Only the works that Christ did, which He credits to us by faith, can bring redemption. How does this truth give you hope and assurance of salvation, especially when you feel overwhelmed by your own sense of unworthiness?
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “While Satan can solicit, he cannot compel to sin...”

“...The tempter can never compel us to do evil. He cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control. The will must consent, faith must let go its hold upon Christ, before Satan can exercise his power upon us. But every sinful desire we cherish affords him a foothold. Every point in which we fail of meeting the divine standard is an open door by which he can enter to tempt and destroy us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 125. As our lesson this week states, we are to use free will wisely. We must use it to cultivate and graft our relationship with the “shoot” and “root” of David.

**Thought Questions:**

1. *Lost.* The very word conjures up feelings of helplessness and fear. While the *Titanic* sank into the Atlantic, people clung to any floating surface, hoping to be rescued. How can we cling to the Root of David, Jesus Christ, to be rescued from sin? What is it about Jesus’ name that assures us that He is capable of saving us? (Read Matt. 1:21.)

2. Read John 3:18, 19. How does this assure us that salvation is available to everyone? Accepting Christ brings us out of darkness into light. Discuss why this act of acceptance seems so difficult for so many.

**Application Questions:**

1. Why can we not obtain salvation through our good intentions and works?

2. On the cross, Christ was flanked by two sinners, one of whom sought salvation from Him. Jesus told him that he would, indeed, be in Paradise with Him. This individual had lived a life of crime horrible enough to merit capital punishment. So, what made this thief believe that Christ would forgive him? What did he do to gain salvation?
Further Study: “The heart of the human father yearns over his son. He looks into the face of his little child, and trembles at the thought of life’s peril. He longs to shield his dear one from Satan’s power, to hold him back from temptation and conflict. To meet a bitterer conflict and a more fearful risk, God gave His only-begotten Son, that the path of life might be made sure for our little ones. ‘Herein is love.’ Wonder, O heavens! and be astonished, O earth!”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

“Christ was the one who consented to meet the conditions necessary for man’s salvation. No angel, no man, was sufficient for the great work to be wrought. The Son of man alone must be lifted up; for only an infinite nature could undertake the redemptive process. Christ consented to connect himself with the disloyal and sinful, to partake of the nature of man, to give his own blood, and to make his soul an offering for sin. In the counsels of heaven, the guilt of man was measured, the wrath for sin was estimated, and yet Christ announced his decision that he would take upon himself the responsibility of meeting the conditions whereby hope should be extended to a fallen race.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 5, 1896.

Discussion Question:
As we saw in Isaiah 11, the Lord presented in one picture both comings of Christ. This can help explain, at least somewhat, why some of the Jews didn’t accept Christ at His first coming, because they expected Him to do the things that will happen only at the Second Coming. What does this tell us about how important it is that we have a proper understanding of the nature of Christ’s advent? How can false views, for instance, of His second coming set people up for Satan’s great end-time deception? See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, chap. 39.

Summary: In the days of Isaiah, whose name means “Salvation of the Lord,” God promised salvation for the remnant of His people from the oppression that was coming upon them as a result of national apostasy. This prophecy of hope finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, whose name means “The Lord is Salvation.”
After a minister had preached a searching sermon on pride, a woman who had heard the sermon waited upon him and told him that she was in much distress of mind, and that she would like to confess a great sin. The minister asked her what the sin was.

“She answered, ‘The sin of pride, for I sat for an hour before my mirror some days ago admiring my beauty.’

“Oh,’ responded the minister, ‘that was not a sin of pride—that was a sin of imagination!’”—C. E. MaCartney, compiled by Paul Lee Tan, p. 1100.

Ever since sin was born in the heart of a mighty angel, pride has not respected the boundaries of reality (in angels or people). Nowhere is this problem seen worse than in those who harbor spiritual pride, a rather sorry trait in beings so corrupted that their salvation can be found only in the works of another in their behalf.

This week, among other things, we’ll take a look at the origin of pride and self-exaltation, the two truly original sins.

**The Week at a Glance:**

What will be the fate of Babylon?

Why is sin punished so harshly? What caused Lucifer’s downfall?

What is the key element that distinguishes true religion from false religion? Does God really destroy the wicked?

**Memory Text:** “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” *(Isaiah 25:9, NRSV).*

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 8.*
Doom on the Nations (Isaiah 13).

Isaiah 13:1 contains a new designation that names Isaiah as the author (compare 1:1, 2:1); it seems, also, to begin a new section of his book. Chapters 13–23 contain oracles of judgment against various nations. Let’s take a look.

Why do the prophecies against the nations begin with Babylon?

Isaiah 10:5-34 had already announced judgment against Assyria, which posed the greatest danger in Isaiah’s day. While Isaiah 14:24-27 briefly reiterates the Lord’s plan to break Assyria, chapters 13–23 deal mainly with other threats, Babylon being the most important.

Endowed with a rich and ancient cultural, religious, and political legacy, Babylon later emerged as the superpower that conquered and exiled Judah. But from the human perspective of Isaiah’s time, it would not have been readily apparent that Babylon would threaten God’s people. During much of Isaiah’s ministry, Assyria dominated Babylon. From 728 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III took Babylon and was proclaimed king of Babylon under the throne name Pulu (or Pul; see 2 Kings 15:19, 1 Chron. 5:26), Assyrian kings retook Babylon several times (710 B.C., 702 B.C., 689 B.C., and 648 B.C.). Babylon, however, eventually would become the great superpower in the region, the power that would destroy the Judean kingdom.

Read through Isaiah 13. Notice how strong the language is. Why does a loving God do these things, or allow these things to happen? Certainly some innocent people will suffer, as well, wouldn’t they (see vs. 16)? How do we understand this action by God? What should these texts, and all the texts in the Bible that talk about God’s anger and wrath against sin and evil, tell us about the egregious nature of sin and evil? Isn’t the mere fact that a God of love would respond this way enough evidence to show us just how bad sin is? We have to remember that this is Jesus speaking these warnings through Isaiah, the same Jesus who forgave, healed, pled, and admonished sinners to repent. How, in your own mind, have you come to understand this aspect of a loving God’s character? Ask yourself this question, as well: Could not this wrath actually stem from His love? If so, how so? Or, look at it from another perspective, that of the Cross, where Jesus Himself, bearing the sins of the world, suffered worse than anyone else ever has suffered, even those “innocents” who suffered because of the sins of the nation. How does the suffering of Christ on the cross help answer these difficult questions?
**Key Text:** Isaiah 13, 14, 24–27.

**Teachers Aim:**

1. To illustrate the connection between literal and symbolic Babylon in prophecy.
2. To show how human agents are used in the great controversy to serve the purposes of either God or Satan.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. God’s Love *(Isaiah 24–27).*
   A. Often we talk of God’s love and judgment as opposites. But God’s revelation shows them to be complementary.
   B. Judgment is the necessary result of the inability of God’s love to accept sin.

II. Choose Ye This Day . . .
   A. Throughout prophecy, human agents are portrayed as fulfilling either God’s or Satan’s purposes. This is particularly so in Ezekiel 28 and in Isaiah 14, where the pride of rulers is compared to Lucifer’s pride in challenging the Most High.
   B. Leaders must be particularly aware of how their influence impacts others.

**Summary:** In the great controversy between good and evil, there is no middle ground. The path you follow and whom you choose to serve determine your end in the judgment. In His mercy, God has let us know that He already has the victory. He has called us out of darkness into His light. What is our response today?

**COMMENTARY**

**Introduction: Playing God.**

In Isaiah 13–27, God presents a picture of judgment upon the nations, especially those that have had intimate contact with His truth and people. Judgment befalls these nations because of their disrespect for God (see Isa. 13:11; 14:5, 6). Behind all this wickedness is Satan.

**I. God and Babylon.**

God loved Babylon but not its ways. He would gladly have healed that nation of all its sin *(Jer. 51:8, 9)*. After Isaiah’s day, God brought Judah into captivity to Babylon, in order to bring His people and the people of Babylon to repentance. *(Review Jeremiah 50, 51; Daniel 1–6.)*

There is so much for us to learn from ancient Babylon’s rise and fall. For example, consider Revelation 13–18.
The Late Great City of Babylon (Isa. 13:2-22).

In 626 B.C. the Chaldean Nabopolassar restored Babylonian glory by making himself king in Babylon, beginning the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, and participating (with Media) in the defeat of Assyria. His son, Nebuchadnezzar II, was the king who conquered and exiled Judah.

**How did the city of Babylon finally end?**

In 539 B.C., when Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon for the Medo-Persian Empire (see Daniel 5), the city lost its independence forever. In 482 B.C. Xerxes I brutally suppressed a revolt of Babylon against Persian rule. He removed the statue of Marduk, the chief god, and apparently damaged some fortifications and temples.

Alexander the Great took Babylon from the Persians in 331 B.C. without a fight. In spite of his short-lived dream to make Babylon his eastern capital, the city declined over several centuries. By 198 A.D. the Roman, Septimus Severus, found Babylon completely deserted. So, the great city came to an end through abandonment. Today some Iraqi villagers live on parts of the ancient site, but they have not rebuilt the city as such.

The doom of Babylon, described in Isaiah 13, liberates the descendants of Jacob, who have been oppressed by Babylon (Isa. 14:1-3). The event that accomplished this was the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C. Although he did not destroy the city, this was the beginning of the end for Babylon, and it never threatened God’s people again.

Isaiah 13 dramatizes the fall of Babylon as a divine judgment. The warriors who take the city are God’s agents (vss. 2-5). The time of judgment is called “the day of the Lord” (vss. 6, 9), and God’s anger is so powerful it affects the stars, sun, moon, heavens, and earth (vss. 10, 13).

Compare Judges 5, where the song of Deborah and Barak describes the Lord as going forth with quaking of the earth and rain from the heavens (vs. 4). Verses 20, 21 depict the elements of nature, including stars, as fighting against the foreign oppressor.

Imagine someone living in Babylon at the height of its glory reading these words of Isaiah 13, particularly verses 19-22. How foolish and impossible they would have seemed! What other prophecies, yet unfulfilled, seem foolish and impossible to us now? Why would we be foolish, however, to dismiss them as impossible?
II. The Main Foe Unmasked; His Kingdom Toppled.

Read Isaiah 14:12-27. Behind the puzzle of political and military conspiracies among the ancient and modern countries of the world, Satan is at work to deceive, degrade, and destroy. But God's plan ultimately prevails.

Driven by an obsession for power, Lucifer strove to exalt himself above God (Ezek. 28:12-19). The degree of success he had with many angels should serve as a warning to us to trust God fully (Prov. 3:5, 6; 2 Cor. 11:2-4).

“Through apostasy, fallen men and fallen angels are in the same confederacy, leagued to work against good. They are united in a desperate companionship. Through his evil angels, Satan contrives to form an alliance with professedly pious men, and thus he leaves the church of God. He knows that if he can induce men, as he induced the angels, to join in rebellion, under the guise of servants of God, he will have in them his most successful allies in his enterprise against heaven. Under the name of godliness, he can inspire them with his own accusing spirit, and lead them to charge God's servants with evil and guile. They are his trained detectives; their work is to create feuds, to make charges which create discord and bitterness among brethren, to set tongues in active service for Satan, to sow seeds of dissension by watching for evil, and by speaking of that which will create discord.

“I beseech all who engage in the work of murmuring and complaining because something has been said or done that does not suit them, and that does not, as they think, give them due consideration, to remember that they are carrying on the very work begun in heaven by Satan. They are following in his track, sowing unbelief, discord, and disloyalty; for no one can entertain feelings of disaffection, and keep them to himself. He must tell others that he is not treated as he should be. Thus they are led to murmur and complain. This is the root of bitterness springing up, whereby many are defiled.

“Thus Satan works today through his evil angels. He confederates with men who claim to be in the faith; and those who are trying to carry forward the work of God with fidelity, having no man’s person in admiration, working without hypocrisy and partiality, will have just as severe trials brought against them as Satan can bring through those who claim to love God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1142.

But Satan’s kingdom shall be toppled, and, by divine decree, all his followers will share his fate, which is simply a result of their own repeated choices (see Prov. 5:22, 23; 13:6; Mal. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:9; Revelation 20).

III. Two Destinies.

Isaiah 13–27 shows the contrasting destinies of nations and peoples. Those who follow the Lord are His remnant, because they are
Fall of the Mountain “King” (Isaiah 14).

In response to the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 13), which frees God’s people (Isa. 14:1-3), Isaiah 14:4-23 utters a figurative taunt (see also Mic. 2:4, Hab. 2:6) against the king of Babylon. It is poetic, not meant to be literal, obviously, as it portrays dead kings greeting their new colleague in the realm of death (vss. 9, 10), where maggots and worms are his bedding (vs. 11). This is, simply, the Lord’s dramatic way of telling the haughty king that he shall be brought low, as other proud monarchs before him—it is not a commentary on the state of the dead!

**How could Isaiah 14:12-14 apply to a king of Babylon?**

Babylonian kings did not suffer from lack of self-esteem (Daniel 4–5). But aspiring to “be like the most High” (Isa. 14:14) would be beyond even the most inflated ego. While kings claimed strong connections with the gods, they were subservient to them. This was dramatically demonstrated every year on the fifth day of the Babylonian New Year Festival, in which the king was required to remove his royal insignia before approaching the statue of Marduk so his kingship could be reaffirmed. The idea of displacing even a lesser god would be crazy and suicidal.

As in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28 identifies heaven-daring arrogance with the ruler of a city. Here also, the description goes beyond that of an earthly monarch, and God’s crosshairs come into sharper focus: The proud potentate was in the Garden of Eden, an anointed, covering, or guardian cherub on God’s holy mountain, perfect from the day he was created until sin was found in him, cast out by God, and who will eventually be destroyed with fire (Ezek. 28:12-18). Applied to any human being, the specific terms of this rhetoric are so figurative as to be meaningless. But Revelation 12:7-9 does tell of a mighty being who was cast out of heaven with his angels: “Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (vs. 9, NRSV), who deceived Eve in Eden (Genesis 3).

Satan has a proud imagination: “. . . you have said, ‘I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a mortal, and no god” (Ezek. 28:2, NRSV). His death will prove he is no god. Unlike Christ, Satan will perish in the heart of a sea of fire (Rev. 20:10), never to haunt the universe again.

**Compare Isaiah 14:13, 14 with Matthew 11:29, John 13:5, and Philippians 2:5-8. What does this contrast tell us about the character of God as opposed to the character of Satan? What does this contrast tell us about how the Lord views pride, arrogance, and the desire for self-supremacy?**
TEACHERS COMMENTS

victorious over trial and opposition. They are preserved by God’s mercy and pledge to honor those who honor Him (see Isa. 14:1, 2; 17:6-8; 24:13-15). However, the most powerful and exalted of nations and peoples who dishonor God will come to ruin (see Prov. 14:34, Isa. 24:3-6).

Isaiah 13–27 points to the end of the age-old conflict between truth and error, righteousness and evil. On Calvary, Christ resolved the conflict with a thoroughness that transcends time and encompasses eternity (see 2 Cor. 5:20, 21; 1 Pet. 2:24). In the corporate life of God’s people, the conflict is resolved in the final work of the church militant as it undergoes purifying trials to become the church triumphant, victorious over sin through the power of the Cross. (See Ellen G. White, “A View of the Conflict,” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, pp. 41–47.) On a personal basis, the conflict is resolved through complete submission to Christ (see Romans 6).

Inductive Bible Study


1 In Thursday’s study, we read that “sin carries the seeds of self-destruction.” Pride also carries the same seeds. That is why pride is a sin. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18, NRSV). Discuss why pride is so terrible. What does Luke 18:9-14 teach us about pride?

2 Pride is fundamental to many other sins. When pride is sown, it reaps arrogance. Arrogance causes presumptionfulness and complacency. Pride also reaps contempt for others, as well as suspicion, jealousy, covetousness, and discontent. If we are proud, we will reject wisdom. What is God’s remedy to counteract the fruit of pride? 2 Pet. 1:5-8.

3 Pride leads to self-deception and the conscious manipulation of others to preserve our position, especially when our position has to do with our role as a leader or otherwise influential person. Read Ellen G. White, “The Origin of Evil,” in The Great Controversy (pp. 492–504). What does Ellen White say about the onset, resulting actions, and judgment of pride in the life of Lucifer, the first of the covering cherubs?

4 How can we avoid pride in our lives? What steps can we take to preserve ourselves against this invasive and often subtle sin? Prov. 16:5, 6; 19:20; Col. 3:12; Phil. 2:5-8.
**Wednesday**  
May 5

**Heaven’s Gate** (*Isaiah* 13–14).

In Isaiah 14 a taunt against Satan, the fallen “Day Star [in KJV, “Lucifer”], son of Dawn” (*Isa. 14:12, NRSV*) is blended into a taunt against the king of Babylon. Why? Compare Revelation 12:1-9, where a dragon identified as Satan (vs. 9) tries to destroy a Child as soon as it is born. In verse 5 the Child clearly is Christ. But it was King Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a young child (*Matthew* 2). The dragon is both Satan and the Roman power represented by Herod, because Satan works through human agents. Similarly, he was the power behind the king of Babylon and the prince of Tyre.

Why does “Babylon” later refer to Rome (*1 Pet. 5:13*) and to an evil power in Revelation (*Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21*)?

Like literal Babylon, Rome and the Babylon of Revelation are proud, ruthless powers that oppress God’s people. See especially Revelation 17:6, for it is “drunk with the blood of the saints” (*NRSV*). They rebel against God, an idea implied in the name Babylon itself. In the Babylonian language, the name is *bab ili*, which means: “the gate of god(s),” referring to the place of access to the divine realm. Compare Genesis 11, where people built the Tower of Babel (Babylon) so that by their own power they could rise to the divine level of immunity from any accountability to God.

When Jacob awoke from a dream in which he saw a ladder connecting heaven and earth, he exclaimed: “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (*Gen. 28:17, NRSV*). Notice that the “house of God” is “the gate of heaven”; that is, the way of access to the divine realm. Jacob named the place Bethel, which means “house of God.”

The “gate of heaven” at Bethel and the “gate of god(s)” at Babylon were opposite ways to reach the divine realm. Jacob’s ladder originated in heaven, revealed from above by God. But Babylon, with its towers and ziggurat temples, was built by human beings from the ground up. These opposite ways represent contrasting paths to salvation: divinely initiated grace versus human works. All true religion is based on the humble Bethel model: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (*Eph. 2:8, 9, NRSV*). All false “religion,” including legalism and “secular” humanism, is based on the proud Babylon model. For the contrast between the two approaches, see Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican (*Luke 18:9-14*).

Even after a few years in a Zen monastery, songwriter Leonard Cohen said, “I’m not saved.” In the context of today’s study, define his problem and solution.
TEACHERS COMMENTS

IV. God the Righteous Redeemer.

None would be reclaimed from his or her fallen state but for God’s continuously extended mercy. The tension on earth is between former rebels who have repented through the grace of God and rebels who have refused to repent and who have become increasingly offended by divine offers of pardon and salvation. (See Isa. 25:1-4, 26:1-13, 27:4-9, Eph. 2:1-8; compare 1 Pet. 4:1-4, 17-19.)

Witnessing

Pride is a word with many meanings and emotions. We take pride in our country and all it represents. We take pride in our work accomplishments. We especially take pride in our denomination’s growth and the way Christ’s love is spreading around the globe. Pride can move us to tears, motivate us to do more, and bring satisfaction to our lives.

Pride can be good or bad.

This week, we studied the dangers of pride—pride that turns inward, that boasts of one’s own accomplishments, that elevates humanness to the level of God and excludes Him from our gratefulness.

Such pride causes the fall of great nations. Isaiah introduces us to Babylon, whose world position seemed indestructible. Nevertheless, Scripture accurately predicted its downfall. Pride in its accomplishments placed Babylon beyond God’s mercy and patience. Read Jeremiah 49:16 to your class.

When we focus on Jesus and give Him credit for leading us, we avoid destructive pride. “Praise to God and the Lamb will be in our hearts and on our lips; for pride and self-worship cannot flourish in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 661.

Every morning, look in the mirror and repeat two words: “Remember Calvary.” During the day, find ways to remind those around you to do the same. By the end of the first week, you will experience a difference in how you, and those you have touched in this way, perceive both the world around you and your Savior. Then destructive pride no longer will have a place in your lives.
Final Triumph of Zion (Isaiah 24–27).

Following oracles against individual nations in Isaiah 13–23, chapters 24–27 describe on a worldwide scale the climactic defeat of God’s enemies and the deliverance of His people.

Why does Isaiah’s description of the desolation of the earth (Isaiah 24) look like John’s description of events connected with 1,000 years that follow Christ’s second coming (Revelation 20)?

As in Isaiah 13–14, aspects of literal Babylon apply to later powers, and the “king of Babylon” represents fusion of human rulers with the mastermind behind them, Satan himself. So, a message that Babylon is fallen (Isa. 21:9) can be repeated at a later time (Rev. 14:8, 18:2), and Satan is finally destroyed after Christ’s second coming (Rev. 20:10). While the destruction of literal Babylon was a judgment “day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:6, 9), another “great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31, Mal. 4:5, compare Zeph. 1:7) is on the way.

Similarly, in Isaiah 24 the prophet’s vision reaches through conditions with which he is familiar to the time when “the moon will be abashed, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem” (vs. 23, NRSV). Isaiah undoubtedly thought the vision applied to the Jerusalem he knew, but the book of Revelation explains that it will actually be fulfilled in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2): “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (vs. 23, NRSV).

Does God really destroy the wicked?

Look at Isaiah 28:21, where God’s work of destruction is His strange “deed” (NRSV). It is strange for Him, because He doesn’t want to do it, but it is, nevertheless, a deed, or an act. It is true that sin carries the seeds of self-destruction (James 1:15). But because God has ultimate power over life and death, and He determines the time, place, and manner of final destruction (Revelation 20), it is pointless to argue that He ultimately terminates the curse of sin in a passive way, by simply allowing cause and effect to take its natural course.

What we see in chapters 24–27 of Isaiah is what we see reflected in the entire Bible, which is, that in the end, no matter the suffering, pain, and desolation now, God and goodness will triumph over evil. What, then, is the only thing we can do if we, ourselves, want to be part of that final victory? Prov. 3:5-7, Rom. 10:9.
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Have you ever had to do something you really did not want to do? However, you bowed your head anyway and moved along with the unpleasant deed, because you knew it was necessary to do.

God often finds Himself in the same predicament, as we read in the lesson this week. Let us discuss a bit more why God finds it necessary to exact punishment.

Thought Questions:

2. When suffering strikes us, we are inclined to ask, “Why me?” Perhaps a better question would be, “Why not me?” Discuss the following quote: “Can it be then that the suffering is part of our necessary education in our highly imperfect world? Is it the means that enables us to help one another toward the kingdom?” —Dorothy Minchin-Comm, *Glimpses of God*, (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1998), p. 371. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Application Questions:
1. “All earthly powers are under the control of the Infinite One. To the mightiest ruler, to the most cruel oppressor, He says, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.’ Job 38:11. God’s power is constantly exercised to counteract the agencies of evil; He is ever at work among men, not for their destruction, but for their correction and preservation.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 694. Identify times you have faced life-altering personal suffering. Isolate the things in your life that brought you to that point. How did God support you during those times?

2. Babylon is destroyed and God’s prophecies fulfilled. Scripture tells us that Babylon represents nations in the future who also will disregard His leading. The ruin of these nations also is predicted. We believe we are living in the last days of earth’s history. What are you doing to demonstrate your belief that the earth will soon end? Will your neighbors be able to turn to you when Jesus appears and say, “You prepared me for this event”?
**Further Study:** “Is it by conditions that we receive salvation? Never by conditions that we come to Christ. And if we come to Christ, then what is the condition? The condition is that by living faith we lay hold wholly and entirely upon the merits of the blood of a crucified and risen Saviour. When we do that, then we work the works of righteousness. But when God is calling the sinner in our world, and inviting him, there is no condition there; He draws by the invitation of Christ, and it is not, Now you have got to respond in order to come to God. The sinner comes, and as he comes and views Christ elevated upon that cross of Calvary, which God impresses upon his mind, there is a love beyond anything that is imagined that he has taken hold of.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 32.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Look at the above quote from Ellen White; read it in the context of Wednesday’s study. What is she telling us there? Notice in her statement both elements of the Christian walk: faith and then works. How does she differentiate between them?

2. Why are pride and arrogance such dangerous sins? Why are they so hard to put away? Can it be because by their very nature they blind people to their need to put them away? After all, if you are proud, you think you are OK, and if you think you are OK, why bother changing? How can dwelling upon the Cross, and what it represents (the only means of saving any person), be a powerful cure for pride and arrogance in anyone?

3. Does Isaiah see hope for people of other nations? See, for example, Isa. 25:5; 6; 26:9 (compare Rev. 19:9).

**Summary:** Isaiah saw that following Assyria, Babylon would conquer Judah. But he also saw that in spite of superhuman rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph. 6:12) working through God’s human enemies and presuming to play God, the Lord would decisively prevail and bring eternal peace to our troubled planet.
Lesson 7

Defeat of the Assyrians

*Sabbath Afternoon*

A gaunt man walks barefoot with his two sons. Another family has loaded all their belongings onto an oxcart pulled by emaciated oxen. A man leads the oxen while two women sit on the cart. Less fortunate people have no cart, so they carry their possessions on their shoulders. Soldiers are everywhere. A battering ram smashes into the city gate. Archers on top of the ram shoot at defenders on the walls. Hectic carnage reigns supreme.


These pictures, which once adorned the walls of Sennacherib’s “Palace Without a Rival,” are now in the British Museum, and what a story they tell about the plight of God’s professed people.

The Week at a Glance: How hopeless did the situation in Judah appear? How did the Assyrians try to undermine the morale of the people in Judah? How did Hezekiah respond? What happened to him during prosperity?

Memory Text: “‘O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth’” (Isaiah 37:16, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 15.*
Strings Attached (Isa. 36:1).


When faithless Ahaz died and his faithful son Hezekiah succeeded him, Hezekiah inherited a kingdom that had lost full independence. Having purchased Assyrian aid against the alliance of Syria and northern Israel, Judah was forced to continue paying “protection money” in the form of tribute to Assyria (see 2 Chron. 28:16-21). When the Assyrian king Sargon II died on a distant battlefield and was succeeded by Sennacherib in 705 B.C., Assyria appeared vulnerable. Evidence from Assyrian and biblical texts reveals that Hezekiah seized this opportunity to revolt (compare 2 Kings 18:7), taking aggressive action as the ringleader of an anti-Assyrian revolt among the small nations in his region.

Unfortunately for him, Hezekiah had underestimated the resilience of Assyria’s might. In 701 B.C., when Sennacherib had subdued other parts of his empire, he lashed out against Syria-Palestine with devastating force and ravaged Judah.


When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib intended to take Jerusalem, the capital city, he made extensive preparations for a confrontation with Assyria. He strengthened his fortifications, further equipped and organized his army, and increased the security of Jerusalem’s water supply (see also 2 Kings 20:20, 2 Chron. 32:30). The remarkable Siloam water tunnel, commemorated by an inscription telling how it was constructed, almost certainly dates to Hezekiah’s preparation for a potential siege.

Just as important as military and organizational leadership, Hezekiah provided spiritual leadership as he sought to boost the morale of his people at this frightening time. He encouraged them by saying: “Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chron. 32:7, 8, NRSV).

If Hezekiah trusted the Lord so much, why did he put forth so much effort on his own? Did his works negate his faith? See Philippians 2:12,13 on cooperating with God, who provides the power that is truly effective.
**Key Text:** Isaiah 36–39.

**Teachers Aim:**
1. To demonstrate the significance of leadership.
2. To show faith’s response.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Truths, Half-Truths, Lies.
   A. The Assyrian king sent messages of truths, half-truths, and the lie that God could no more save Jerusalem than could any of the other gods conquered by Assyria.
   B. Such tactics are reminiscent of Satan’s methods.

II. Significance of Leadership.
   A. Hezekiah’s response of faith—encouraging his people, laying the matter before the Lord, and calling for the prophet’s intercession—is in contrast to his father’s lack of faith.
   B. Hezekiah provides his own contrast in the significance of leadership when he has the opportunity to tell the Babylonian envoy of God’s awesome power but instead focuses on his own glory. This focus ultimately lays the groundwork for the Babylonian captivity.

**Summary:** From his first deception in Eden, Satan has perhaps been most successful not with blatant falsehoods but with simple manipulation of the truth. How often do we surrender without a fight? In the life of Hezekiah, we see both an example of the response of faith in times of trouble, as well as self-glorification in times of prosperity.

**COMMENTARY**

**Introduction: Defeat of the Assyrians.**

It is revealing that Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah followed a time of great revival and reformation under Hezekiah’s reign (see 2 Chronicles 30, 31; 32:1, 2). Satan was laying siege to a people whose far-reaching spiritual influence he feared. Were it not for this consecrated little nation of Judah, it seemed that the whole world would be under his dominion. This resembles the persecution of the early church (Acts 8:1-4) and the persecution of God’s final remnant (Rev. 12:17). In all ages, this struggle has called for the whole armor of God (see 2 Cor. 10:3-5, Eph. 6:10-18).

**I. A Formidable Foe.**

Judah was under tribute. Assyria had conquered and dispersed the ten northern tribes and was beginning to make raids into Judah. Hezekiah saw that it would not be long before Assyria, coveting the
Propaganda (Isa. 36:2-20).

The rulers of Assyria were not only brutal, they were intelligent. Their goal was wealth and power, not simply destruction (compare Isa. 10:13, 14). Why use resources to take a city by force if you can persuade its inhabitants to surrender? So, while he was engaged in the siege of Lachish, Sennacherib sent his rabshakeh, a kind of high officer, to take Jerusalem by propaganda.

What arguments did the rabshakeh use to intimidate Judah? Isa. 36:2-20; see also 2 Kings 18:17-35, 2 Chron. 32:9-19.

The rabshakeh made some rather powerful arguments. You cannot trust Egypt to help you because she is weak and unreliable. You cannot depend on the Lord to help you because Hezekiah has offended Him by removing His high places and altars throughout Judah, telling the people to worship at one altar in Jerusalem. In fact, the Lord is on Assyria’s side and told Sennacherib to destroy Judah. You don’t even have enough trained men to handle 2,000 horses.

To avoid a siege in which you have nothing to eat and drink, give up now and you will be treated well. Hezekiah cannot save you, and because the gods of all the other countries conquered by Assyria have not saved them, you can be sure that your God will not save you either.

Was the rabshakeh telling the truth?

Because there was much truth in what he was saying, his arguments were persuasive. Backing him up were two unspoken arguments. First, he had just come from Lachish, only 30 miles away, where the Assyrians were showing what happened to a strongly fortified city that dared resist them. Second, he had a powerful contingent of the Assyrian army with him (Isa. 36:2). Knowing the fate of armies and cities elsewhere (including Samaria, the capital of northern Israel: 2 Kings 18:9, 10) that had succumbed to Assyria, no Judahite would have reason to doubt that from a human point of view Jerusalem was doomed (compare Isa. 10:8-11). The rabshakeh was also right in saying that Hezekiah had destroyed various places of sacrifice in order to centralize worship at the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:4, 2 Chron. 31:1). But had this reform offended the Lord, who was the only hope His people had left? Would He, and could He, save them? It was up to God to answer this question!

Have you ever been in a “similar” situation, where, from a human standpoint, all seemed lost? What’s your only recourse?
wealth of Jerusalem’s temple, would mount a full-scale attack. Therefore, he decided to depend totally on God. He also realized, though, that it was his duty to fortify Jerusalem, gather his army, and accumulate supplies, especially plenty of water, for the threatening siege (see 2 Chron. 32:1-5). Then Hezekiah nobly exhorted his people: “Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles” (2 Chron. 32:7, 8; compare 2 Kings 6:16, Rom. 8:31). The people took comfort and courage from Hezekiah’s words.

II. Bold and Blasphemous Defiance.

The situation looked hopeless. To all appearances, Assyria had an unstoppable war machine. Nation after nation toppled under Sennacherib’s attacks. While busy pushing his whole army against Lachish, a fortified city of northern Judah (2 Chron. 11:5-9), Sennacherib sent the rabshakeh to intimidate the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In one breath, the rabshakeh pretended to be speaking at the behest of Yahweh. In the next, he classed Israel’s God with the pagan deities of the other lands Assyria had conquered. But little did the rabshakeh realize with whom he was trifling. With every blasphemous word, he was piling up a heavier judgment from the Lord of hosts. The rabshakeh placed all his confidence in military might. What he failed to understand was that he was defying the God of Creation and redemption—and God accepted the challenge. The rabshakeh’s threats were nothing more than the shriek of a male peacock in full strut—just so much noise. Well might the challenge recorded later in Isaiah against all who defy God’s purposes be applied to the rabshakeh and Sennacherib: “Against whom do ye sport yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth and draw out the tongue? Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood?” (Isa. 57:4). Truly, “the triumphing of the wicked is short” (Job 20:5).

III. A King’s Submission and Soul Searching.

But if God did not come to Judah’s rescue, the rabshakeh’s threats would be fulfilled to the letter. This was a time of heart-searching and prayer for Judah. The calamity they faced brought them closer to the Lord. “To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God’s work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their day of adversity. Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on God.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 174, 175. Consider the end-time parallels of these events as depicted in Revelation 13, 14, 17, and 19.
Shaken but Not Forsaken (Isa. 36:21–37:20).


Shaken to the core and mourning in distress, Hezekiah turned to God, humbly seeking the intercession of Isaiah, the very prophet whose counsel his father had ignored.


The message was brief, but it was enough! God was on the side of His people! Isaiah predicted that Sennacherib would hear a rumor that would distract him from his attack on Judah. This was immediately fulfilled.

Temporarily frustrated, but by no means giving up for long, Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a threatening message: “Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. . . . Have the gods of the nations delivered them . . .?” (Isa. 37:10, 12, NRSV; see also 2 Chron. 32:17).

This time Hezekiah went straight to the temple and spread the message out before the Lord of hosts, “enthroned above the cherubim” (Isa. 37:14-16, NRSV).

How did Hezekiah’s prayer identify what was at stake in Jerusalem’s crisis? Isa. 37:15-20.

Sennacherib had pointedly attacked Hezekiah’s strongest defense: faith in his God. Rather than buckling under, Hezekiah appealed to God to demonstrate who He is, “so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the Lord” (Isa. 37:20).

Read prayerfully Hezekiah’s prayer (Isa. 37:15-20). What aspects of God does he focus on? What principle do we see in this prayer that can give us encouragement and strength to stay faithful in our own personal crises?
IV. Heaven’s King Intervenes.
Hezekiah and his people prayed. God’s prophet counseled. Hezekiah trusted and obeyed, and the Lord took the whole situation in hand (see Exod. 23:20-22, 2 Thess. 1:6-8), “‘The pride of Assyria and its fall are to serve as an object lesson to the end of time. . . .

‘‘The pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart away.’ Zechariah 10:11. This is true not only of the nations that arrayed themselves against God in ancient times, but also of nations today who fail of fulfilling the divine purpose. In the day of final awards, when the righteous Judge of all the earth

Inductive Bible Study


1. There will come a time in life when we will feel forsaken by God because of the apparent hopelessness of our situation. Or we may feel that because we have done something to offend God, we should not even call on Him. What has God promised, however, to all who trust in Him? What must we do first to reestablish ourselves with our heavenly Father? What is His response? Josh. 1:5, Isa. 55:7, 2 Cor. 4:7-9.

2. Sometimes we fail the Lord and may even offend Him in a public way. Doing so makes it difficult to believe He is still with us. When we are in such a state of mind, Satan tries to destroy our faith further, hoping we will give up completely. However, God has a plan for each of our lives, and He always is willing to guide us along the way. What encouragement can you draw from this text? 2 Cor. 12:9.

3. When Sennacherib challenged God, God proved Himself. Ask the class to give reasons it was necessary for God to do so. Then summarize with these ideas: God responded (1) to show He was not like the other gods who were ultimately destroyed, as were the people who trusted in them; (2) to show Hezekiah that his prayer for help could be answered despite the fact he had failed God in the past; and (3) to show the people of Judah that their faith in Him was rewarded by His protection.

4. Had God not protected His people, many would have died, and others would have lost hope in the coming of a Messiah. Then what would have been the future of God’s people? How might the other beings of the universe have viewed God if He had allowed Satan to claim victory over His people?
The Rest of the Story  (Isa. 37:21-38).


Scholars admit that even if we did not have the biblical record, we would be compelled to admit that a miracle must have taken place. The fact that Sennacherib lined the walls of his “Palace Without a Rival” with reliefs (carved pictures) vividly depicting his successful siege of Lachish appears to be due to his need for a face-saving device. But for the grace of God, these pictures would have shown Jerusalem instead! Sennacherib did not tell the rest of the story, but the Bible does.


In response to Hezekiah’s prayer of total faith, God sent him a message of total assurance for Judah that boils over with molten fury against the proud Assyrian king who had dared slap the divine King of kings in the face (Isa. 37:23). Then God promptly fulfilled His promise to defend Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35-37; 2 Chron. 32:21, 22; Isa. 37:36-38).

A big crisis calls for a big miracle, and big it was! The body count was high: 185,000. So Sennacherib had no choice but to go home, where he met his own death (compare Isaiah’s prediction in 37:7 to vs. 38).

If Sennacherib had conquered Jerusalem, he would have deported the population in such a way that Judah would have lost its identity, as northern Israel did. From one perspective, then, there would have been no Jewish people to whom the Messiah could be born. Their story would have ended right there. But God kept hope alive.

What do you say to someone who, not yet believing in the Bible, or the God of the Bible, asks this question: Was it fair that these Assyrian soldiers, who just happened to be born where they were, should die en masse like this? How do you, personally, understand the Lord’s actions here?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

shall ‘sift the nations’ (Isaiah 30:28), and those that have kept the truth shall be permitted to enter the City of God, heaven’s arches will ring with the triumphant songs of the redeemed.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 366 (see also pp. 348–366).

V. Hezekiah’s Greatest Test.

Ironically, Hezekiah’s greatest test came not on the battlefield but on the sickbed. His miraculous recovery in answer to his desperate prayer made him complacent in glorifying God when visited by Babylon’s ambassadors, who wanted to hear about God’s gracious dealings with him (see 2 Chron. 32:31). Instead, Hezekiah displayed his royal wealth, thus forfeiting a God-given opportunity to testify of His salvation (compare 1 Kings 10:1-24). Hezekiah repented, but the aftermath of his error devastated his nation. (Read Isaiah 38, 39.)

Witnessing

*Disinformation. Misinformation. False information. Propaganda. Lies. Half-truths.* These words are loaded with meaning. For those promoting the effect behind the words, the words are an essential source of communication. In the hands of promoters, the words also may become a *weapon* that when fully loaded, renders death.

The spreading of propaganda occurs every day, everywhere. Consider how the tobacco companies denied for decades that their products were dangerous to a person’s health.

In our lesson this week, we learned that Hezekiah and the people of his kingdom faced an avalanche of misinformation and propaganda promoted by the enemy to dilute their faith and dependence on God. However, we can take comfort in knowing that God does not engage in questionable marketing blitzes, half-truths, or lies as He spreads His message to the world! His methods of communicating love, peace, and eternal life include the Bible, the life and ministry of Jesus, and the witness of His followers as they are filled with His Holy Spirit. He also has provided truth through the writings of Ellen White.

This week, share the truth with someone around you so this person might gain the needed defense to ward off the lies and misinformation from the master of deception, Satan.
In Sickness and in Wealth (Isaiah 38, 39).

The events of Isaiah 38 and 39 (2 Kings 20) took place very close to the time God delivered Hezekiah from Sennacherib, even though the deliverance, as depicted in Isaiah 37 (see also 2 Kings 19) had not yet occurred. Indeed, Isaiah 38:5, 6 and 2 Kings 20:6 show that they still faced the Assyrian threat.

“Satan was determined to bring about both the death of Hezekiah and the fall of Jerusalem, reasoning no doubt that if Hezekiah were out of the way, his efforts at reform would cease and the fall of Jerusalem could be the more readily accomplished.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 240.

What does the above quote tell us about how important good leadership is for God’s people?

What sign does the Lord give Hezekiah to confirm his faith? 2 Kings 20:8-10, Isa. 38:6-8.

By rejecting signs offered by God (Isaiah 7), Ahaz had started the course of events that led to trouble with Assyria. But now Hezekiah had asked for a sign (2 Kings 20:8), so God strengthened him to meet the crisis his father had brought upon Judah. Indeed, reversing the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz was possible only through a miracle.

The Babylonians studied movements of heavenly bodies and recorded them accurately. Thus, they would have noticed the sun’s strange behavior and wondered what it meant. The fact that King Merodach-baladan sent envoys at this time is no accident. The Babylonians had learned of the connection between Hezekiah’s recovery and the miraculous sign.

Now we know why God chose this particular sign. Just as He later used the star of Bethlehem to bring wise men from the East, he used a solar shift to bring messengers from Babylon. This was a unique opportunity for them to learn about the true God. Merodach-baladan spent his entire career trying to win lasting independence from Assyria. He needed powerful allies, which explains his motivation for contacting Hezekiah. If the sun itself moved at Hezekiah’s request, what could he do to Assyria?

How did Hezekiah lose an incredible opportunity to glorify God and point the Babylonians to Him? What was the result? Isaiah 39. Hezekiah, who should have been witnessing to them about the Lord, pointed, instead, to his own “glory.” What is the lesson for us?
**Icebreaker:** How are faith, action, and belief in miracles a powerful defense when navigating the challenges and disappointments in life?

**Thought Questions:**
1. Isaiah shows that God is loving and merciful. Repeatedly, He offered both His chosen people and their enemies a chance to repent and accept His leadership. But repeatedly, they chose to ignore Him. So God finally reached a point where He would no longer permit this affront to His kingship. How can we apply this lesson to our lives? In what situations have you experienced both God’s mercy and His righteous anger?

2. In the end, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, was denied Jerusalem. His loss was a miracle for God’s people—a miracle similar to that of a tornado that destroys everything in its path but spares a church by veering away at the last instant. What miracles has God performed on behalf of our church? In what ways is church leadership capitalizing, or not capitalizing, on these extraordinary blessings from God? Do you believe that God has performed miracles in your life? If so, how have these signs of God’s love and protection changed your life?

**Application Questions:**
1. Hezekiah clung to his faith despite the threatened onslaught of the Assyrian army. Nevertheless, he prepared his country for war. Our lesson asks the probing question, “Do works negate faith?” In other words, did Hezekiah’s preparations demonstrate a lack of faith? What does Philippians 2:12, 13 say about this? Share a time in your life when you wrapped your faith strongly around you while, at the same time, your actions went into overdrive.

2. When we are faced with adversity, we do not hesitate to ask God to supply us with what we need to relieve our pain and suffering. But what happens when He answers our prayer? Are we like the nine lepers who failed to thank Jesus for His healing mercy? Or are we like the one who returned to bless His name? What does our response say about our character?
Further Study: “Only by the direct interposition of God could the shadow on the sundial be made to turn back ten degrees; and this was to be the sign to Hezekiah that the Lord had heard his prayer. Accordingly, ‚the prophet cried unto the Lord: and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.‘ Verses 8-11.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 342.

“The visit of these messengers from the ruler of a faraway land gave Hezekiah an opportunity to extol the living God. How easy it would have been for him to tell them of God, the upholder of all created things, through whose favor his own life had been spared when all other hope had fled! . . .

‘But pride and vanity took possession of Hezekiah’s heart, and in self-exaltation he laid open to covetous eyes the treasures with which God had enriched His people. The king ‚showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not.’ Isaiah 39:2. Not to glorify God did he do this, but to exalt himself in the eyes of the foreign princes.”—Pages 344, 345.

Discussion Questions:

1. How is Satan like the Assyrian *rabshakeh*? Does he tell the truth when he says that you have sinned (Zech. 3:1)? How does God respond? *See* Zech. 3:2-5. What is our only hope against these accusations? *Rom. 8:1.*

2. Does Satan stop his accusations when you are forgiven? *See* Rev. 12:10. After you are forgiven, when Satan goes on saying that you belong to him because of your sin, what is the nature of his accusation? *See* Deut. 19:16-21 (law of a lying, malicious witness).

Summary: In response to the cry of a faithful king, God saved His people and showed who He is: the omnipotent King of Israel who controls the destiny of earth; not only does He destroy those who attempt to destroy His people, He also provides opportunities for others to become His people, no matter how “Babylonian.”
Lesson 8

*May 15-21

“Comfort My People”

Sabbath Afternoon

World War II ended in 1945 while a Japanese soldier named Shoichi Yokoi hid in the jungle on the island of Guam. Leaflets dropped from U.S. planes proclaimed peace, but Yokoi thought it a trick. A loyal, patriotic soldier of the emperor, he vowed never to surrender. He had no contact with civilization and lived on what he could find in the jungle.

In 1972, 27 years after the end of World War II, hunters came across Yokoi while he was fishing, and he only then learned that the message of peace had been true. While the rest of his people had been enjoying peace for decades, Yokoi had been enduring decades of privation and stress.—Roy Gane, Altar Call (Berrien Spring, Mich.: Diadem, 1999), p. 304, adapted.

Many centuries earlier, through the prophet Isaiah, God announced that the time of His peoples’ stress and suffering was really over: “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isa. 40:1, 2). Let’s take a look at what this means.

The Week at a Glance: With what promise does Isaiah 40 begin? What good news is revealed in this chapter? How does the New Testament apply Isaiah 40? Why is idolatry such a sin against God?

Memory Text: “Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ ” (Isaiah 40:9, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 22.
In Isaiah 40:1, 2 God comforts His people. Their time of punishment has finally ended. What punishment is that?

There are many answers to this question. There was the punishment administered by Assyria, the rod of God’s anger (Isaiah 10), from which God delivered Judah by destroying Sennacherib’s army in 701 B.C. (Isaiah 37). There was the punishment administered by Babylon, which would carry away goods and people from Judah because Hezekiah had displayed his wealth to the messengers from Merodach-baladan (Isaiah 39). And there was the punishment administered by one of the other nations against which Isaiah wrote messages (Isaiah 14–23).

Meanwhile, though “Assyria” and “Assyrian(s)” are mentioned 43 times from Isaiah 7:17 to 38:6, this nation appears only once in the rest of Isaiah, where chapter 52:4 refers to past oppression by Egypt and then by “the Assyrian.” In the latter part of Isaiah, deliverance from exile in Babylon is mentioned (Isa. 43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20), and it is Cyrus, the Persian who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., who is to free the exiles of Judah (Isa. 44:28, 45:1, 45:13).

Isaiah 1–39 emphasize events leading up to deliverance from the Assyrians in 701 B.C., but at the beginning of chapter 40, the book leaps ahead a century and a half to the end of Babylon, in 539 B.C., and the return of the Jews shortly thereafter.

Is the theme of return from Babylon linked with anything earlier in Isaiah? If so, how?

Isaiah 39 serves as a transition to the following chapters by predicting a Babylonian captivity, at least for some of Hezekiah’s descendants (vss. 6, 7). Furthermore, the oracles of Isaiah 13, 14, and 21 predict the fall of Babylon and the liberty this would bring to God’s people: “But the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land... When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon” (Isa. 14:1, 3, NRSV). Notice the close connection with Isaiah 40:1, 2, where God promises His people there is an end to their suffering.

What do Bible promises about the end of suffering mean to you now, amid your present suffering? What good would our faith be without those promises?
Key Text: Isaiah 40.

Teachers Aim:
1. To show that God’s promises are true.
2. To demonstrate the necessity of God’s mercy and power.
3. To apply Isaiah 40 to Christ’s first and second advents.

Lesson Outline:
I. His Promises Are True.
   A. God promises His comfort and deliverance, even before His people are taken captive.
   B. Beyond its immediate meaning, Isaiah 40 promises to deliver His people from spiritual captivity through the first advent of Jesus, who was preceded by those such as John the Baptist who came to prepare His way.
   C. Likewise, preparation is needed for Christ’s second coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

II. Mercy and Power.
   A. In His mercy, God desires our salvation even while we are in the midst of our sins. He puts His omnipotence (which could just as easily be used to destroy us) at the disposal of His merciful ends.
   B. God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are among the many traits that idols do not possess and that we cannot convey through feeble human means.

Summary: It is the combination of God’s mercy and power that makes our deliverance possible.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: Comfort For the Future.
Isaiah 40 marks a turning point in the book of Isaiah. From this point to the conclusion, Isaiah receives an unfolding vision of God’s triumph. The vision depicts His people’s legacy as joint heirs with Christ and brings the earthly conflict into cosmic perspective. Isaiah 40–66 is similar to Jesus’ last talk with His disciples (John 14–16) in that it states God’s plan to evangelize the world with the gospel. This is accomplished through the exaltation of a crucified and risen Savior who, through the Spirit, directs all His efforts toward saving humanity. Use a concordance to discover how often Isaiah refers to God’s Spirit in these chapters and contemplate its significance.

An unnamed herald announces that God is coming to reveal His glory (vss. 3-5). Another voice proclaims that although humans are transient like foliage, “the word of our God will stand forever” (vs. 8).

After the exile, God’s people gain back what they had received at Mt. Sinai and then rejected through the apostasy for which they were punished: God’s Presence and His Word. These are the basic ingredients of God’s covenant with Israel, which were enshrined at His sanctuary in their midst (Exod. 25:8, 16). Because they had violated His Word, God had abandoned His temple (Ezekiel 9–11), but He is coming back. His Presence and His eternally dependable Word bring comfort, deliverance, and hope.

What preparation is necessary for the Lord’s coming? Isa. 40:3-5.

It is not fitting for a king to be jolted by a rough road. So his coming is preceded by roadwork. The more so for the King of kings! His coming, apparently from the east, where He has been in exile with His people as a sanctuary to them (Ezek. 11:16), would require major rearrangement of the terrain. Construction of a literal, level superhighway through the rugged hills east of Jerusalem would be daunting, even with dynamite and bulldozers. God is the only One who can do the work: It is He who turns “the rough places into level ground” (Isa. 42:16, NRSV). But He doesn’t need a literal road for transportation, because He has an airborne chariot of cherubim (Ezekiel 1, 9–11).

The New Testament explicitly applies Isaiah’s prophecy to the spiritual roadwork accomplished through the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:3). His message was: “ ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’ ” (vs. 2, NRSV) and the baptism that he performed was “of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4, NRSV). So, the roadwork was repentance, willingness to turn away from sin, in order to receive the comfort of God’s forgiveness and presence.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 proclaimed the same spiritual message in plenty of time for the exiles of Judah to understand the spiritual nature of roadwork for God. In this passage, the Lord promises a fresh start to those who are willing: a “new covenant” in which He puts His law in their hearts and pledges to be their God. They know Him and His character, because He has forgiven them.

Read carefully Isaiah 40:6-8. What hope can you, who fades away as does the grass, derive from what the verses say?
I. Divine Comfort.
Although Judah was far from repentant at this time (see Isa. 29:13, 59:1-15), God was looking to the day when they would return to Him, so He would have a receptive people to whom He could declare words of pardon and comfort. (Read Isa. 40:1, 2.)

II. The Word and the Work.
God looked forward to the day when His truth would be declared and welcomed in preparation for receiving the Messiah. This was not to be a Messiah who would cater to the schemes of priests or other people but One who would reveal God’s entire counsel as it relates to redemption. John the Baptist’s work as a forerunner of the Messiah is prophesied in Isaiah 40:3-5. Gabriel revealed this fact before John’s birth.

God’s message reveals His glory (Exod. 33:19-22, 34:5-7) so that we may behold and be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:17, 18). Isaiah 40:6-8 highlights that this world’s glory is an illusion that rapidly fades. God’s Word, however, endures forever, and those in whom its power resides also endure (see John 15:7, 1 Pet. 1:23-25, 1 John 2:15-17, Rev. 14:12).

III. The Great Commission.
If we are willing, God will liberate us from sin and fill us with His own nature (see 2 Pet. 1:3, 4). When this transaction and transformation occur, they will urge us to bring others to the Savior, for He wishes to save everyone (1 Tim. 2:4, 5). Salvation for everyone is presented on exactly the same terms. This involves abandoning anything we might once have thought of as righteousness within ourselves, total acceptance of Christ as our Savior, and total submission to His grace and authority (see Rom. 9:29–10:13). To the legalist, this seems heretical, because it does not commend human merit. To the hedonist, it seems fanatical, because it makes no concessions to the carnal nature. But to the one who actually experiences salvation through the power of the gospel, the joy of liberation and redemption is real and lasting.

God does not say “I know that you have embraced My salvation, but I fear you will do a poor job of explaining the gospel to others. So please keep quiet, and let my angels do all the witnessing. They are sinless and flawlessly competent.” Instead, He declares to us, as He did to the healed demoniacs, “ ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you’ “ (Mark 5:19, NKJV).

“There are many who need the ministration of loving Christian hearts. Many have gone down to ruin who might have been saved if their neighbors, common men and women, had put forth personal effort for them. . . . In the very family, the neighborhood, the town, where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ.
What kind of event is described in Isaiah 40:9-11?

Later in Isaiah there appears a male herald with good news for Jerusalem (41:27, 52:7). But in Isaiah 40:9 the herald to proclaim “Here is your God!” (NRSV) from a mountain is a female, a fact brought out in the Hebrew.

In Psalm 68, David praises God because He “gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity” (vs. 6, NRSV). Though these words here apply to the Exodus from Egyptian bondage, Isaiah uses the same ideas with reference to proclamation of a second “Exodus”—the return from Babylonian captivity.

Is there also a later application of Isaiah’s prophecy? If so, what is it?

The New Testament applies Isaiah 40:3-5 to John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ, the eternal Word who became the Lord’s presence in flesh among His people (John 1:14).

Even earlier than John, others spoke about the good news of His coming. Among the first of these were the elderly Simeon and Anna, who met baby Jesus when He was dedicated at the temple (Luke 2:25-38). Like Isaiah’s heralds, they were male and female. Simeon was looking forward to the consolation/comfort of Israel in the form of the Messiah (Luke 2:25, 26).

In light of Isaiah’s prophecy, it does not appear coincidental that Anna, a prophetess, was the very first to announce publicly at the temple mountain to the people of Jerusalem that the Lord had come: “At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38, NRSV). This was the birth of Christian evangelism as we know it: proclamation of the gospel, the good news, that Jesus Christ has come to bring salvation. Later, Christ entrusted to another woman, Mary Magdalene, the first tidings of His triumphant resurrection (John 20:17, 18), which ensured that His gospel mission to Planet Earth was accomplished. Flesh is like grass, but the divine Word who became flesh is eternal (compare Isa. 40:6-8)!

Look at Isaiah 40:11. What kind of imagery is presented here? Write out for yourself a paragraph on how you, personally, have experienced shepherding by the Lord. Why is it good to recount in your mind the way the Lord has led you?
If we are Christians, this work will be our delight. No sooner is one converted than there is born within him a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus. The saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 141.

Note the emphasis on Christ’s identity as the Good Shepherd, a recurring motif in Scripture (*see Ps. 23:1, 2; Ezek. 34:11-16; John 10:11-18,*).

**IV. The Creator-Redeemer’s Might and Mercy.**

Read Isaiah 40:11-31. God’s mercy, humility, and tenderhearted love do not detract from His power and justice. With the expanding emphasis on Christ as the suffering Servant and world’s Redeemer in Isaiah 40–66, it is appropriate to underscore the power, wisdom, and authority of God. Even the mightiest of nations and empires is of microscopic strength in comparison to God. No alliance of

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**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Psalms 77:12; 119:50, 105; Romans 15:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Philippians 4:8.

1. When God gives us a time of peace in our lives, we should rejoice and enjoy this gift. But why do we so often borrow trouble from tomorrow? Why do we worry about another time of trouble to come or forget that it is God who has given us this peace and other blessings we now enjoy? How can we enjoy the peace of God on a steady basis? *Ps. 77:12, Phil. 4:8.*

2. How does staying in God’s Word comfort us in the midst of hardship? How does Scripture affect our view of those hardships and trials? What promises do we have from God about His Word? *Ps. 119:50, 105; Rom. 15:4; 2 Cor. 1:3-5.*

3. Wednesday’s study enforces the truth that the Sabbath commemorates God as our Creator. What does the Sabbath say about who we are to Him? How can we be comforted by knowing these truths?

4. Think of something you have created with your own hands. Though it may not have turned out perfect, did you want to destroy it? What fragile things do you own that you take special care of? Compare this to our relationship with an all-powerful God who has created us.
Merciful Creator (Isa. 40:12-31).

How does Isaiah 40 develop the themes of God’s mercy and power?

Throughout this chapter, God’s mercy and power are interwoven (see below) and even blended together, because they are both necessary in order for God to save His people. He wants to save them, because He is merciful; He is able to save them, because He is powerful.

| Mercy (vss. 1-5): comfort, coming of the Lord to deliver. |
| Power (vss. 3-8): glory, permanence versus human weakness. |
| Mercy (vss. 9-11): good news of deliverance, Shepherd of His people. |
| Power (vss. 12-26): incomparable Creator. |
| Mercy (vss. 27-31): as Creator, gives power to the faint. |

Having introduced God’s might in terms of His glory and permanence (vss. 3-8), Isaiah elaborates on His power and superior wisdom, which make earth and earthlings appear puny (vss. 12-17). Here Isaiah’s style, with rhetorical questions and vivid analogies referring to the earth and its parts, sounds like God’s answer to Job (Job 38–41).

What is the answer to Isaiah’s rhetorical question: “To whom then will you liken God” (Isa. 40:18)?

For Isaiah, as for Job, the answer goes without saying: no one. God is incomparable. But Isaiah picks up on his question and refers to the answer that many ancient people implied by their actions, which is that God is like an idol (vss. 19, 20).

To this notion Isaiah responds. Already it looks foolish to use an idol as a likeness of God, but just to be sure people get the point, he elaborates on God’s uniqueness and brings in the unanswerable argument that He is the holy Creator (vss. 21-26).

How does verse 27 reveal the attitude of the people addressed by Isaiah’s message? How are we guilty of having the same?

The purpose of God’s message is to comfort people who need it! Like Job, their suffering had made them confused and discouraged concerning His character.

Why is the truth about God as Creator so important to understand? How does the Sabbath, help reinforce this point?
nations, no earthly system of beliefs, can overturn His authority or make void His gospel. No form of idolatry will prevent God from revealing salvation to the world (see Isa. 45:22-25).

Idolatry is blasphemous and degrading. In character and conduct, idolaters fall below the level of the things they worship (see Ps. 115:1-8; Rom. 1:18-32). Idolatry includes the exaltation of human ideas and passions above divine counsel and revelation (see 1 Sam. 15:23; Ezek. 14:3-7, Col. 3:5; Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 583–585). Those who reject idols and wait on the Lord may be sorely tried and scorned by the world, but their strength shall be renewed like the eagles’, and they shall rise to heights of character development the world knows nothing about (John 15:15-21, 1 John 3:1-3, 5:18-21).

Witnessing

You are watching the evening news when suddenly the anchor lifts her hand to her earpiece and listens intently to what is being said from the control booth. Her face registers complete shock as she announces, “After many years of research into the cause and complexities of pain, loneliness, and grief, scientists at the End of the Line Research Center in Heartbreak, Foreverland, announce that they have discovered a cure for all of humanity’s suffering. Regardless of its cause, duration, or intensity, suffering now can be totally eliminated by ingesting one small gel cap each day. If you miss a day’s dosage, however, suffering will return with a vengeance.”

Madness, right?

Not exactly. You see, God already has prepared the antidote to help us cope with suffering and pain. This antidote is not a small pill you swallow. Rather, it is in the form of a gift that completely envelops us. He freely offers us this gift and urges us to accept it—no strings attached. All you need to do is “set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed [returns]” (1 Pet. 1:13, NIV).

How much easier can it possibly be?

As you go about your life this coming week, look for someone who is lonely or who is experiencing pain or grief. Do something nice for that person and share with him or her the hope you have found in Christ when you have experienced similar times. Continue to be this person’s friend. Christian friendship, like the gel cap from End of the Line Research Center, is meant to be taken daily.
The Problem With Idolatry (Isa. 40:19, 20).

Idolatry destroys a unique, intimate relationship with God by replacing Him with something else (Exod. 20:4, 5; Isa. 42:8). So, prophets refer to idolatry as spiritual “adultery” (Jer. 3:6-9, Ezek. 16:15-19).

Read Isaiah 41:29. How does Isaiah characterize idols? How do you understand what he is saying there about them? Why is that such an accurate depiction of any idol, no matter what it is?

Ancient idolators believed they worshiped powerful divine beings through images or symbols of them. Worship of an idol representing another god breaks the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3, NRSV). But if an idol is intended to represent the true God, as the golden calf was (Exod. 32:4, 5), the Lord rejects it as a likeness of Himself, for nobody knows how to depict Him (Deut. 4:15-19), and nothing can represent His incomparable glory and greatness. Thus, an idol itself functions as another god, and worshiping it breaks the first and second commandments.

God’s people don’t need idols, because they have His real Shekinah presence with them in His sanctuary. To worship an idol is to replace and, therefore, deny His real presence.

Also, an idol not only fails to represent the Lord but it represents really nothing, because all those other gods have no existence (Isa. 44:6). As in Isaiah, Psalm 115:8 is clear: those who make idols “are like them; so are all who trust in them” (NRSV).

What kinds of idolatry do we, as a church today, face? Does idolatry appear in more subtle forms in the church today? If so, how?

We know from ancient writings that idolatry was attractive, because it was about materialism: Using modes of worship people could relate to, idolaters honored forces they believed could give them fertility and prosperity. It was self-help religion. Sound familiar?

Just before the Lord comes again, with His way prepared by the roadwork of a final Elijah message of reconciliation (Malachi 4), the choice will be the same as in the days of Isaiah: Will you worship the Creator, or will you worship something else (Revelation 13–14)? For, in the end, we always worship something.
Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** What is the common thread running throughout the following verses? *Exod. 20:3, 4; Ps. 96:4; Jer. 50:38; 1 John 5:21.*

These verses show us that we are not to allow idols and graven images into our lives. Why are such things detrimental to our Christian experience? Why is repentance so crucial in achieving salvation’s goal?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Read Luke 15:7, 10. It seems that, at times, we place a great deal of emphasis on the number of individuals brought into the faith through baptism. Instead, what does the Bible focus on?

2. Consider the principle of cause and effect. *Cause:* losing faith in God. *Effect:* hopelessness. Without faith or hope, we search for something to fill the void. This searching creates a perfect opportunity for Satan to tempt us with an alternative to faith and hope—idolatry. Perhaps our type of idolatry is dabbling in the occult. Perhaps it is material gain. Whatever the alternative, Satan intends to lead us as far away from God as possible. When that happens, is there any way to get back to God? Explain.

**Application Questions:**

1. What idols are present in your life? How can you remove those idols from your life? How can you help others rid themselves of their idols?

2. Review Hymn 294 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.* How do you interpret the phrase “pow’r in the blood,” and what is its message for today’s world?

“In Isaiah’s day the spiritual understanding of mankind was dark through misapprehension of God. Long had Satan sought to lead men to look upon their Creator as the author of sin and suffering and death. Those whom he had thus deceived, imagined that God was hard and exacting. They regarded Him as watching to denounce and condemn, unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there was a legal excuse for not helping him. The law of love by which heaven is ruled had been misrepresented by the archdeceiver as a restriction upon men’s happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they should be glad to escape. He declared that its precepts could not be obeyed and that the penalties of transgression were bestowed arbitrarily.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 311.

“Many who bear the name of Christians are serving other gods besides the Lord. Our Creator demands our supreme devotion, our first allegiance. Anything which tends to abate our love for God, or to interfere with the service due Him, becomes thereby an idol.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 1011.

Discussion Questions:

1. Summarize in your own words the message of Isaiah 40:12-31. Write it using modern images, such as modern scientific discoveries that show even more graphically the awesome power of our God. Share your summary with the class.

2. How does Isaiah’s description of the permanence of God’s Word versus the fragile transience of human life (Isa. 40:6-8) speak to your fear of death? How does it relate to your hope of resurrection (Job 19:25-27, Dan. 12:2, 1 Cor. 15:51-57, 1 Thess. 4:13-18)?

3. By taking Isaiah 40:12-31 to heart, how could one be cured of pride and arrogance?

Summary: Through Isaiah, God brought comfort to those who had been suffering. Their time of trouble had ended, and God was returning to them. Rather than being discouraged and confused, they could trust God to use His creative power on their behalf.
Lesson 9  *May 22-28

To Serve and to Save

SABBATH AFTERNOON

In northern Iraq, near an old Christian monastery, lie small holes in the ground where hermits stayed for decades without coming out, in order to better focus on God.

In the steamy slums of Calcutta, Mother Teresa had a different approach to focusing on God. “Jesus comes to meet us,” she said. “To welcome him, let us go to meet him.

“He comes to us in the hungry, the naked, the lonely, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the prostitute, the street beggars. . . .

“If we reject them, if we do not go out to meet them, we reject Jesus himself.”—Mother Teresa: In My Own Words, compiled by José Luis González-Balado (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), p. 29.

Isaiah spoke of a servant of the Lord with a similar mission of mercy: “a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench: . . . to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isa. 42:3, 7, NRSV). Who is this Servant, and what does He accomplish?

The Week at a Glance: How is Christ prefigured in Isaiah? Why is Cyrus deemed a “Messiah”? How are the first and second comings of Jesus meshed in some of these prophecies? What does Isaiah teach us about God’s power to predict the future?

Memory Text: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1, NRSV).

*Study this lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 29.
Isaiah 41:8 God speaks of “Israel, my servant,” and in 42:1 he introduces “my servant.” Who is this servant?

Is it Israel/Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelites? The nation of Israel? The Messiah/Christ, identified in the New Testament as Jesus?

There are two kinds of references to servants of God woven through Isaiah 41–53. One servant is named “Israel” or “Jacob,” as in 41:8; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20. Because God addresses Israel/Jacob in the present, it is clear he represents the nation descended from him. This is confirmed by the fact that redemption for the Lord’s “servant Jacob” is accomplished at the time when he is to go out from Babylon (Isa. 48:20).

In other instances, such as Isaiah 42:1, 50:10, 52:13, 53:11, God's servant is not named. When he is first mentioned in Isaiah 42:1, his identity is not immediately apparent. However, as Isaiah develops his profile in later passages, it becomes clear that he is an individual who restores the tribes of Jacob (Israel) to God (Isa. 49:5, 6) and dies sacrificially on behalf of sinners (Isa. 52:13–53:12; see also 49:5, 6). Therefore he cannot be the same as the nation. So it is clear that Isaiah speaks of two servants of God. One is corporate (the nation) and the other is individual.

What is the role of the servant nation? Isa. 41:8-20.

God assures Israel that the nation is still the servant of the Lord: “I have chosen you and not cast you off” (Isa. 41:9, NRSV). Then God gives to Israel one of the most magnificent promises in the Bible: “Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand” (vs. 10, NRSV). Here and in the following verses one of the basic roles of Israel is to trust the true God to save them (as King Ahaz did not) rather than to trust in other gods and their images as other nations do (Isa. 41:7, 21-24, 28, 29).

Notice how in Isaiah 41:14, the Lord calls the nation a worm. What point is He making? Look at the whole text to get a better answer. What should this teach us, as well, about our need to depend totally upon the Lord?
**Key Text:** Isaiah 44, 45, 49.

**Teachers Aim:**
1. To explore the role of prophecy in building hope and faith.
2. To apply Isaiah’s messages of service to Christian ministry today.

**Lesson Outline:**

1. **Prophecy as a Source of Hope and Faith.**
   A. The use of Cyrus, a foreign king, to act on Israel’s behalf demonstrates God’s control and ability to use anyone to fulfill His purposes.
   B. God contrasts self and idols, who can neither predict the future nor tell the past.
   C. How God led His people in the past provides reason to believe He will again deliver His people according to His promises.

2. **Ministry of Service.**
   A. Christ, as depicted in the suffering-servant songs, is our model for a ministry of service.
   B. Christ won the victory, so we could point others to Him through Christian service.

**Summary:** We can look forward with hope to Christ’s return because of how God has led His people in the past. In the time we are given on earth, however, we are to follow Christ’s example of humble service to those in physical and spiritual need.

**COMMENTARY**

**Introduction: To Serve and to Save.**

Jesus “came to this world as the unwearied servant of man’s necessity. He ‘took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,’ that He might minister to every need of humanity. Matthew 8:17. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character. “Varied were the circumstances and needs of those who besought His aid, and none who came to Him went away unhelped. From Him flowed a stream of healing power, and in body and mind and soul men were made whole. “[Jesus] knew that unless there was a decided change in the principles and purposes of the human race, all would be lost. This was the burden of His soul, and none could appreciate the weight that rested upon Him. . . . “He came to live in our behalf the life of the poorest and to walk and work among the needy and the suffering. Unrecognized and
Unnamed Individual Servant  
(Isa. 42:1-7).

What is the role and character of God’s unnamed servant, whom God chooses and on whom He puts His spirit? Isa. 42:1-7.

Choose the best answer or combination of answers:
1. He provides justice for the nations.
2. He accomplishes his goals quietly and gently, but successfully.
3. He is a teacher.
4. He serves as a covenant between God and the people.
5. He gives light/hope by healing blindness and liberating prisoners.
6. All of the above.

How does the role and character of this servant compare with that of the shoot from the stump of Jesse, on whom the spirit of the Lord also rests (Isaiah 11)?

As in Isaiah 42, the Davidic ruler of chapter 11 acts in harmony with God, providing justice and deliverance for the oppressed, as well as wisdom and knowledge of God. We found that this shoot and root of Jesse is the Messiah, the divine child of Isaiah 9:6, 7, who also brings “peace for the throne of David and his kingdom” with “justice and with righteousness” (vs. 7, NRSV). The servant in Isaiah 42 is, obviously, the Messiah.


Matthew 12 quotes from Isaiah 42 and applies it to the quiet healing ministry of Jesus, God’s beloved Son, in whom He delights (Isa. 42:1; Matt. 3:16, 17; 17:5). It is He whose ministry reestablishes God’s covenant connection with His people (Isa. 42:6, Dan. 9:27).

Jesus and His disciples gained justice for people by delivering them from suffering, ignorance of God, and bondage to evil spirits, caused by Satan’s oppression (Luke 10:19). Then Jesus died to ratify the “new covenant” (Matt. 26:28) and to gain justice for the world by casting out Satan, the foreigner who had usurped the position of “ruler of this world” (John 12:31-33).

Look at Isaiah 42:1-4, the depiction of Christ. Spend some time dwelling on the life of Jesus. What specific characteristics of His ministry so aptly fulfilled this prophecy? What lessons can we learn about how we should be ministering to others, as well?
unhonored, He walked in and out among the people for whom He had done so much.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, pp. 17–19.

I. Israel My Servant.

God made it clear in His covenant with Israel that they were to be examples of His character and share the plan of redemption with the world (see Gen. 12:1-3, 17:1-9, Deut. 4:1-9, 5:29-33). He would teach them His statutes, laws, and judgments, which they were to practice diligently and faithfully (see Neh. 9:13-16, 23-31). He also gave Israel a system of worship that reflected the truths of salvation. He unfolded these truths in prophecy, poetry, song, practical precepts, and ceremonial laws (see Pss. 63:1-3, 77:13-15). This plan included salvation for every believer, the extermination of evil, and the establishment of His righteousness on a secure basis. Israel’s distinctiveness was rooted in their fidelity to God’s covenant with them, instead of in any superiority they themselves possessed. All who adopted the covenant’s purposes, conditions, and provisions were numbered with His people (see Lev. 19:33, 34; Isa. 56:1-8).

II. A Merciful and Just Servant.

In Isaiah 42:1-7, God outlines His purposes for sending the Messiah. Filled with God’s Spirit, the Messiah will bring justice and judgment to all humanity. In a world of crime, cruelty, injustice, and oppression, this goal is crucial (see Isa. 59:14, 15). He will right all wrongs and acquit all righteousness, which, in many cases, will involve the reversal of human judgment (see Psalms 35 and 37).

This Messiah will go about His work without fanfare or political gimmicks, but He will be aware of His divine calling and authority (see Matt. 12:14-30). He will reach out in love and mercy to the weakest, most brokenhearted people whom the world views as unimportant. Review Christ’s treatment of such people in Mark 10:46-52; Luke 8:26-36, 43-48; and John 8:1-12. He came as the Liberator and Redeemer of all who would open their hearts to Him (see Isa. 42:6, 7; Matt. 11:28-30; Luke 4:18; John 6:37; 7:37, 38).

III. A Gentile Deliverer Foreshadows the Messiah.

God chose Cyrus (Korush, in Old Persian, meaning “sun”), the founder of the Persian Empire, to destroy Babylon and pave the way for captive Jews to return to Jerusalem. Cyrus’s strategy to break Babylon’s hold was to divert the Euphrates, which ran through the city. He marched his army through the dry riverbed into the unguarded capital. (See Revelation 16:12, which refers symbolically to the drying up of the Euphrates in mystic Babylon just before Jesus comes.)
Persian “Messiah” (Isa. 44:26–45:6).

What stunning prediction appears in Isaiah 44:26–45:6?

Isaiah’s ministry lasted from about 745 B.C. to about 685 B.C. After mentioning a conqueror from the east and from the north (Isa. 41:2, 3, 25) and implying that this was to be good news for Jerusalem (vs. 27), Isaiah accurately predicted Cyrus by name and described his activities. He did come from north and east of Babylon to conquer it in 539 B.C.; he did serve God by releasing the Jews from their Babylonian exile; and he did authorize the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (compare Ezra 1).

Put this prediction into perspective. Since there are about 146 years from the time of Isaiah’s death to the fall of Babylon, his prophecy was a century and a half ahead of its time. Because the actions of Cyrus are well attested from a variety of ancient sources, including Babylonian chronicles, his own report in the “Cyrus Cylinder,” and the Bible (2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1; Daniel 5; 10:1), the accuracy of Isaiah’s prophecy is beyond dispute. This confirms the faith of people who believe that true prophets receive accurate predictions from God, who knows the future far in advance.

Why does God call Cyrus His “anointed” (Isa. 45:1)?

The Hebrew word for “anointed” here is the word from which we get the word “Messiah.” Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this word could refer to an anointed high priest (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16: 6:22), an anointed Israelite king (1 Sam. 16:6; 24:6, 10; 2 Sam. 22:51), or the Messiah, a future ideal Davidic king and deliverer (Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:25, 26). From Isaiah’s perspective, Cyrus was a future king, sent by God to deliver His people. But he was an unusual messiah, because he was non-Israelite. He would do some things the Messiah would do, such as defeat God’s enemies and release His captive people, but he could not be the same as the Messiah, because he was not descended from David.

By predicting Cyrus, God proved His unique divinity by demonstrating that He alone knows the future (Isa. 41:4, 21-23, 26-28; 45:6). He also reached out to Cyrus: “I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name” (Isa. 45:3, NRSV).

Think about some other Bible prophecies that have come to pass as predicted (such as all the kingdoms of Daniel 2 except the last, Daniel 7, or regarding the time of Christ in Daniel 9:24-27). What kind of hope do these prophecies offer us as individuals?


**TEACHERS COMMENTS**

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Isaiah 41:9-11, Galatians 4:7.

1. Define the word *servant*. How does being a servant of God take away the negative connotation that is associated with this word? How is God as Master different from earthly masters? What does He offer His servants? *Reexamine Isaiah 41:9-11. Read also Galatians 4:7.*

2. In Isaiah 45:3, God proves Himself to Cyrus by giving Cyrus things that could come only from Him. Ask the class to give examples of how God has blessed them in ways that made them know it could have come only from Him, particularly those things that first brought them into a relationship with Him.

3. Analyze Isaiah 42:1-4. In many ways, God wants us to follow the example of Christ and His ministry. Verse 2 points out that He did not make a big fuss or work to be noticed or heard “in the street.” Yet, His ministry was strong and powerful. Neither did He seek to discourage those who were hurting and barely holding on to their faith. With this in mind, discuss specific ways we can witness to, and care for, the spiritually weak.

4. A servant does the bidding of his or her master. So we are to aid in the work of saving souls. People who want to be ministers “should not take upon themselves the responsibility of teaching the truth unless they are qualified for the work. Before engaging in, or devoting themselves to, the work they should become Bible students. If they have not an education so that they can speak in public with acceptance, and do justice to the truth, and honor the Lord whom they profess to serve, they should wait till they are fitted for the position.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 556. How can we prepare to serve in any capacity that has influence over souls for Christ?

5. The lesson points out that the servant of God was a collective body—(His chosen people) and an individual (His only Son). How does this compare to the work of the church as a whole and to our individual duty to minister to others and serve God? What can we learn from Christ’s example?

6. How can self-righteousness get in the way of our ministry and service? What dangers does complacency present? How can remembering that Christ served in order to save but that we were saved in order to serve help us to be more effective?
Hope in Advance

The fact that Isaiah accurately predicted Cyrus by name disturbs people who do not believe that prophets receive predictions from God. To cope, they accept the theory that a “second Isaiah,” another prophet living in the time of Cyrus, wrote Isaiah 40–66. Thus, the book of Isaiah is “sawn in two,” the same fate traditionally understood to have befallen the prophet himself (compare Heb. 11:37).

There is, however, no historical witness to the existence of a second “Isaiah.” If he did exist, it would be strange for the Bible not to mention him, because his message is profoundly important, and his literary artistry is phenomenal. Not even the oldest Bible manuscript, the Isaiah scroll from Qumran, has any break between Isaiah 39 and 40 that would indicate a transition to the work of a new author.

Isaiah’s basic message is consistent throughout his book: Trust the true God, including His messianic Deliverer, rather than other powers. Scholars rightly emphasize the shift in focus from the Assyrian period in Isaiah 1–39 to the Babylonian period in chapters 40 and following. But we have found that Isaiah 13–14 and 39 already envisage a Babylonian captivity. It is true Isaiah 1–39 emphasizes judgment and 40–66 emphasizes consolation. But in the earlier chapters, divine comfort and assurance is abundant also, and later passages, such as Isaiah 42:18-25, 43:22-28, 48:1-11, speak of God’s judgments on Judah for forsaking Him. In fact, Isaiah’s predictions of future comfort imply suffering in the meantime.

Though the nation did face terrible calamity because of their sins, some people among them did not give up hope. They clung to God’s promises, such as found in Leviticus 26:40-45. Read the texts carefully. Put yourself in the place of those Hebrews who are alive after the nation’s defeat by Babylon. What hope could you find in these words?

Read once more through Leviticus 26:40-45. What spiritual principle do you see at work in those verses? What is the Lord saying to them there? How does the same principle work in our own lives?
Cyrus was a broad-minded and religious man, who accepted his prophetic role as a deliverer of God’s people (see Isa. 44:28, 45:1-3). God declared of Cyrus, “I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward” (Isa. 45:13; compare Ezra 1:1-5).

Witnessing

Job descriptions outline the role and function of a particular position and help supervisors search for the best candidate to fill that position. The search for finding the best individual for a job is often difficult. Such a person must not only possess certain skills but also must be willing to take the job.

Have you ever wondered about Jesus’ job description? Perhaps it looked like the one below.

JOB DESCRIPTION

NAME: Jesus, Son of God
SUPERVISOR’S NAME: God the Father
JOB STATUS: Full time
POSITION TITLE: Savior of humankind

Job Summary: Work consists of saving humankind, present and future, from sin. Must perform work under terrible conditions. At the end of the assignment, life will be sacrificed in a most cruel way for the good of others.

Essential Job Functions:
• Lead a group of 12 men.
• Heal the sick; raise the dead; feed the hungry.
• Preach, teach, and labor for others without ceasing.
• Bear the burdens and sins of humanity.
• Die so that humanity may live.

Education, Skills, Abilities:
• Carpentry required; fishing skills preferred.
• Never suppress the truth; always speak with love.
• Exhibit great dignity, tact, and compassion.
• Denounce hypocrisy, sin, and unbelief.
• Never be cruel or rude.
• Treat each person as if he or she were the only one you came to save.

Clearly we see that the only possible candidate for this job is Jesus. What if He had not accepted this assignment? What if He had not fulfilled it?

Such verses as Galatians 5:22, 23 and 1 Corinthians 13 call us to be like Christ. As guided by the Holy Spirit, which of the skills and abilities in the above job description can you exhibit to someone next week?
A Feeling and a Suffering Servant
(Isa. 49:1-12).

Who is God’s servant in Isaiah 49:1-12?

God calls and names him before he is born, makes his mouth like a sword, and will be glorified in him. God uses the servant to bring the nation of Israel back to Himself, to be a light of salvation to all the world, to be a covenant, and to release prisoners. There is plenty of overlap between this description and that of Isaiah 42, where we identified the servant as the Messiah. The New Testament finds the servant’s attributes in Jesus Christ, in both comings: Matt. 1:21; John 8:12, 9:5, 17:1-5, Rev. 1:16, 2:16, 19:15.

If this servant is the Messiah, why does God call Him “Israel” here (Isa. 49:3)?

Earlier we found that in this section of Isaiah, God’s servant “Israel/Jacob” refers to the nation. But here the name “Israel” (without a parallel reference to “Jacob”) clearly applies to the individual servant, who restores the nation to God (Isa. 49:5). The individual servant has become the ideal embodiment or representative of the nation, whose failure has compromised its use of the name “Israel” (Isa. 48:1).


Here is the first intimation of the difficulty involved in the servant’s task. He laments, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity” (vs. 4, NRSV), an idea echoed in Daniel 9:26: “an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing” (NRSV). But he clings to faith: “Yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God” (Isa. 49:4, NRSV). Isaiah 49:7 is startling. The servant is “deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers,” but God says to him: “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (NRSV).

Look back at Christ’s ministry. Right up until the end, didn’t He have reasons for discouragement? Yet, He stayed faithful, despite outward appearances. How are we to do the same—despite outward appearances?
IV. A Servant Triumphant Through Suffering.

Read Isaiah 49:1-12. The Messiah would be born of a woman (and thus be human, as well as divine). His words would be power to heal, to liberate, to unmask deception, and to declare truth (vs. 2; compare John 7:46, Heb. 4:12, Rev. 1:16). His mission, embodying the whole purpose of Israel’s religion (John 5:39-47), would find a poor reception among His nation, making His work seem largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, God would strengthen Him through His Spirit, so that He could make salvation accessible to all the world. His love and grace will overcome the ignorance and resistance of all who accept His truth. The slander and ridicule of His enemies will not discourage Him from bringing deliverance to those longing for release from sin. Mercifully and tenderly, He will guide those who receive Him as Lord and Savior.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Of what value is a promise? Discuss whether one promise can be of greater value than another promise. For example, what value would you place on the following promises, and why? (1) “I’ll love you forever.” (2) “I’ll be home on time tonight.” (3) “I don’t do drugs!” (4) Liberty and justice for all. (5) Eternal life is yours.

Thought Question:

More than five hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Isaiah said Jesus would be reviled, despised, enslaved, and weighed down by the very creatures He had created. Knowing for all those centuries that He was the sacrificial Lamb, He still came to this earth to fulfill His promise. Discuss how it is possible to ever understand such love.

Application Question:

Mother Teresa commented, “I know God will not give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish He didn’t trust me so much!” God did trust her, however. He trusted her to feed His flock, to clothe them, to instruct them, to help them learn to help themselves, and when all else failed, to wrap them in loving Christian arms when they closed their eyes in death. Read Matthew 25:31-40. Discuss how the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and Adventist World Radio are fulfilling these verses. What are some creative ways you have applied these verses to your life?

“In the work of soul-winning, great tact and wisdom are needed. The Saviour never suppressed the truth, but He uttered it always in love. In His intercourse with others, He exercised the greatest tact, and He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight. He bore Himself with divine dignity; yet He bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, souls whom it was His mission to save.”—Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 117.

Discussion Questions:
1. As a class, read over what Ellen White wrote above about how Christ ministered to others. Discuss the principles there and then as a class discuss how well your local church, corporately, reflects those principles.

2. Do you know a “bruised reed” or “dimly burning wick” (Isa. 42:3)? How can you help this person without “breaking” or “quenching” him or her? In what ways can you point this person to the Lord? What would you tell him or her, in a practical sense, to do, in order to receive healing and help?

3. The argument for different authors of Isaiah originated from the premise that people cannot tell the future the way Isaiah did. What is the fundamental problem with this argument, and why, as Christians, must we reject its premise outright?

Summary: Deliverance requires a Deliverer. God’s servant nation would be delivered by two deliverers: Cyrus, who would set the captives free from Babylonian exile, and an unnamed Servant, whose identity as the Messiah is progressively revealed. This Servant would restore justice and bring back the community of survivors to God.
Lough Fook, a Chinese Christian, was moved with compassion for those of his compatriots who had become slaves in African mines. He wanted to give them the hope of the gospel, but how could he have access to them? His solution was to sell himself for a term of five years as a slave. He was transported to Demerara, where he toiled in the mines and told his fellow workers about Jesus.

Lough Fook died, but not until 200 people were liberated from hopelessness by accepting Jesus as their Savior.

Talk about self-sacrifice for the good of others. What an example!

By doing the unthinkable, that is, humbly “taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7, NRSV), Jesus, too, had reached the unreachable—you and I and all the world steeped and lost in the abyss of sin.

This week we’ll see this incredible event prophesied hundreds of years before it happened.

**The Week at a Glance:** How does Isaiah prepare us for what’s coming in regard to the death of Jesus? How is Jesus presented in these verses? What’s the key theme in Isaiah 53? How is the idea of substitutionary atonement presented there?

**Memory Text:** “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 5.*
Isaiah’s Testing Truth (Isa. 50:4-10).

If Isaiah intended to convey only information, he would have laid out all the details regarding the Messiah at once. But in order to teach, persuade, and give his audience an encounter with the Servant of the Lord, he develops a rich fabric of recurring themes in symphonic fashion. He unfolds God’s message in steps so that each aspect can be grasped in relation to the rest of the picture. Isaiah is an artist whose canvas is the soul of his listener.

Read Isaiah 50:4-10. Summarize what these verses are saying. How do you see Jesus in there?

We found in Isaiah 49:7 that God’s servant is despised, abhorred, and “the slave of rulers” (NRSV) but that “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves” (NRSV). Here in chapter 50 we learn that the valley is deeper for the gentle Teacher whose words sustain the weary (vs. 4): His path to vindication leads through physical abuse (vs. 6).

This abuse sounds bad to those of us in modern Western cultures. But in an ancient Near Eastern culture, honor was a life and death matter for a person and his or her group. If you insulted and mistreated someone like this, you better be well protected: If given half a chance, the victim and/or his or her clan would surely retaliate.

King David attacked and conquered the country of Ammon (2 Samuel 1–12) because its king had merely “seized David’s envoys, shaved off half the beard of each, cut off their garments in the middle at their hips, and sent them away” (2 Sam. 10:4, NRSV). But in Isaiah 50 people strike the servant, painfully pluck out hairs from his beard, and spit at him. What makes these actions an international, intercosmic incident is that the victim is the envoy of the divine King of kings. In fact, by comparing Isaiah 9:6, 7 and 11:1-16 with other “servant” passages, we find that the servant is the King, the mighty Deliverer! But with all His power and honor, for some unthinkable reason, He does not save Himself! This is so strange that people didn’t believe it. At Jesus’ cross, leaders mocked him: “‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’” (Luke 23:35, NRSV); “‘Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him’” (Matt. 27:42, NRSV).

Read through Isaiah 50:4-10. Write down the spiritual principles depicted here that should be applied to our own lives. Look at yourself in light of the list you make. In what areas could you do better? If discouraged, then read on for the rest of the week.
**Key Text**: Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

**Teachers Aim:**
1. To tie together Messianic themes woven throughout Isaiah and climaxing in Isaiah 53.
2. To convey the hope of God’s salvation through the image of the suffering servant.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Messianic Climax.
   A. Isaiah foretells the coming of a Messiah, in chapters 7, 9, and 11, and through the first three *servant songs* of chapters 42, 49, and 50.
   B. The *suffering servant* imagery contrasts with more regal images, such as the imagery used in association with Cyrus in Isaiah 45.

II. Hope of Salvation.
   A. Our only hope lies in Christ’s complete degradation at the Cross. He descended that we might ascend. (*Compare the valley forms of Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2:5-11.*)
   B. Complete salvation—sacrifice and reparation required by a guilt offering—could be accomplished only by God.

**Summary**: The Bible is history, with all things pointing to salvation through Christ. This climax is reached in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, which speaks of the redeeming work of Christ. The Christian’s life is to be transformed by the realization that the hope and the joy of salvation are intrinsically interwoven with Christ’s suffering on our behalf.

**Commentary**

**Introduction: Doing the Unthinkable.**
Isaiah 52:13–53:12 details the sacrifice of Christ. It forms a kind of triptych (a picture or carving in three panels side by side) painted by a master Artist. On the first panel, we see Christ’s obscure and despised origins linked with His ministry of restoration. On the second panel, we witness the treatment He was subjected to from His arrest to His crucifixion. Finally, the third panel reflects the redemption of believing souls.
Isaiah 50:4-10 is a meditative prelude to the more intense depiction of Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

I. Gracious Counselor Ungraciously Scorned (*Isa. 50:4-10*).  
Christ’s “messages of mercy were varied to suit His audience. He knew ‘how to speak a word in season to him that is weary’
The Suffering Servant Poem (Isa. 52:13–53:12).

Isaiah 52:13–53:12, known as the “Suffering Servant Poem,” confirms Isaiah’s reputation as “the gospel prophet.” In harmony with the excellency of the gospel, the poem towers above other literature.

Though breathtakingly short, every phrase is packed with profound meaning that reveals the core of God’s unthinkable quest to save a race steeped and lost in sin.

This is not the “milk” of Isaiah’s word. He has prepared his audience by developing the Messianic theme from the early part of his book. Following the overall course of the Messiah’s life on earth, the prophet started with His conception and birth (Isa. 7:14), introduced His identity as a divine Davidic king (Isa. 9:6, 7), and elaborated on His work of restoration for Israel (Isa. 11:1-16) and quiet ministry of liberation from injustice and suffering (Isa. 42:1-7). Then Isaiah revealed that the Messiah’s grand drama includes the contrast of tragedy before exaltation (Isa. 49:1-12, 50:6-10). Now the Suffering Servant Poem plumbs the depths of the tragedy.

Go back over those sections listed in the above paragraph. Review what they tell us about the Messiah, Jesus. How do they help prepare us for what’s coming in Isaiah 52 and 53? Or do they simply make what happens in Isaiah 52 and 53 more striking?

Isaiah 52:13–53:1 introduce the poem with a preview containing a stunning contrast: The Servant will prosper and be exalted, but His appearance will be marred beyond recognition. Who can believe it?

Verses 2 and 3 begin a painful descent from the Servant’s origin and ordinary appearance to His sorrow and rejection. Verses 4-6 pause to explain that His suffering is our punishment, which He bears to heal us. Verses 7-9 continue the innocent Servant’s descent to the grave.

In verses 10-12, the Servant ascends to the exalted reward foreseen at the beginning of the poem starting in Isaiah 52:13, with the added insight that His sacrifice to save others is the will of God.

Compare the “valley” shape of Philippians 2:5-11, where Jesus begins in the form of God but descends by emptying Himself to take on the bondage of human form, humbling Himself down to death, and the lowest of all deaths: death on a cross. Therefore, God highly exalts Him so that everyone should acknowledge Him as Lord (compare Isa. 49:7).

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Write down everything the poem says that Jesus has done for us. Dwell on what those actions in our behalf mean to us.
TEACHERS COMMENTS

(Isa. 50:4); for grace was poured upon His lips, that He might convey to men in the most attractive way the treasures of truth. He had tact to meet the prejudiced minds, and surprise them with illustrations that won their attention.

“Christ never flattered men. He never spoke that which would exalt their fancies and imaginations, nor did He praise them for their clever inventions; but deep, unprejudiced thinkers received His teaching, and found that it tested their wisdom. They marveled at the spiritual truth expressed in the simplest language. The most highly educated were charmed with His words, and the uneducated were always profited. He had a message for the illiterate; and He made even the heathen to understand that He had a message for them.

‘His tender compassion fell with a touch of healing upon weary and troubled hearts. Even amid the turbulence of angry enemies He was surrounded with an atmosphere of peace. The beauty of His countenance, the loveliness of His character, above all, the love expressed in look and tone, drew to Him all who were not hardened in unbelief. Had it not been for the sweet, sympathetic spirit that shone out in every look and word, He would not have attracted the large congregations that He did. The afflicted ones who came to Him felt that He linked His interest with theirs as a faithful and tender friend, and they desired to know more of the truths He taught.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 254, 255.

Though the enemies of truth opposed Jesus’ actions and words, nothing could stop Him from pursuing His mission of mercy. Many trusted Him despite the fury this aroused in the religious leaders.

II. Despised Wisdom and Undiscerned Beauty. (Isa. 52:13–53:3).

Christ’s wisdom surpassed that of all the scholars and prophets of history, for He is the Source of wisdom and grace (see John 1:14, Col. 2:3). Truth-hating people, especially those who thought themselves wise and superior, looked upon Jesus with contempt (see John 15:20–25, Rom. 15:3, 1 Cor. 1:18–24). One of the marvels of the gospel is that, knowing all He would be subjected to, Christ still was willing to carry out the plan of salvation (see Zech. 6:12, 13; John 3:16). This is love like no other. Jesus was born into sinful humanity; His redeeming mercy imparted new life to us so that we might become trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to bring forth fruit to His glory (see Isa. 53:2; 61:3; John 15:8, 16).

III. Our Merciful Substitutionary Sacrifice. (Isa. 53:4–9).

Christ’s suffering was not caused by a misconception on His part as to how His work would be received but by a misconception on humankind’s part as to the nature of His mission

In Isaiah 52:13 God’s Servant is highly exalted, but without warning, the next verse describes His appearance as so disfigured He cannot be recognized as one of the “sons of men.” The New Testament describes the factors that marred Jesus’ appearance, including scourging, a crown of thorns, crucifixion, but, above all, bearing the sin of the human race. Sin was never intended to be natural for humans; bearing it made the “Son of Man” appear inhuman.

Compare the story of Job, who suddenly plummeted from a position of great wealth, honor, and power to a miserable wretch sitting among ashes on the ground and scraping his painful sores with a potsherd (Job 1–2). The contrast was so great that not even Job’s friends recognized him at first (Job 2:12). The question is: Why does Job suffer? Why must God’s Messiah suffer? Neither deserves it. Both are innocent. Why, then, the suffering?

Read through the text for today and write down the places where the theme of the innocent suffering for the guilty appears. What is the essential message there for us?

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Look at the questions in Isaiah 53:1. These questions emphasize the challenge of believing the unbelievable (compare John 12:37-41) and warn us to sit down for the rest of the story. But the questions also imply an appeal. In this context, the parallel between the two questions implies that the Lord’s arm/power of salvation (compare Isa. 52:10) is revealed to those who believe the report. Do you want to experience God’s saving power? Then believe the report.

Look carefully at Isaiah 53:6. What is the specific message there? What is that text saying to you, personally, that should give you hope despite your past sins and failures?

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TEACHERS COMMENTS

(see 1 Cor. 2:6-8). He voluntarily laid down His life for our redemption. It was not snatched from Him against His will (see John 10:17, 18). By merciful design and omniscient forethought, the Godhead agreed to let the iniquity of us all rest on Him (Isa. 53:6). Christ and His Father envisioned mighty results from the atoning sacrifice. These results include:

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 44:21; Jeremiah 17:9, 10.

1. As you read “In Pilate's Judgment Hall,” from Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, contrast in two columns Christ's demeanor with the demeanor of others (Herod, Pilate, etc.). Share this list with the class. Ask class members how they respond when being persecuted. Also, ask them what they do when others ask them, against their conscience, to join in the condemnation of another person.

2. To understand fully the suffering of Christ and His sacrifice, we must consider His mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish. Consider the results of such stress and grief on the body. Discuss with the class the physical ailments caused by severe grief, stress, depression, fear, etc. For example, such emotions can cause our skin to turn dull or gray or make us look worn and aged. Stress can cause strokes and can weaken our immune system, making our body a friendlier host to cancer, colds, etc. Imagine how Christ agonized over the weight of our sins. See Isa. 52:14.

3. Christ was “made... to be sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). What does sin look like? Is it pretty when seen from a spiritual perspective? Contemplate how God must see us when we walk around with unconfessed sin. Does He see our beauty we portray through the masks we display to our fellow humans? How does this bring home the point of 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 44:21; and Jeremiah 17:9, 10?

4. Consider the role of a father and how he makes sacrifices for his children on a regular basis that they, being so young, hardly recognize or appreciate. He aches when they suffer pain. He aches when they cause him pain. Only when children become adults do they fully understand the sacrifices their father made for them, and only then do they realize how their father shaped them to be who they are. How does that compare to our heavenly Father and us as growing (childlike) Christians? What are the signs that tell us we have become adults in Christ?
WEDNESDAY

The Unreachable Is Us! (Isa. 53:3-9).

Like a vulnerable plant, apparently of no special value, and despised (Isa. 53:2, 3)—that’s the depiction we are given here of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah has quickly brought us through innocent youth to the brink of the abyss. Even with the background provided earlier, we are not prepared in the sense that we are resigned to the Servant’s fate. To the contrary! Isaiah has taught us to cherish the Child born to us, the supreme Prince of Peace. Others despise Him, but we know who He really is.

As someone has said: “We have met the enemy and they are us.” The Servant is not the first to be despised, rejected, or a man of suffering. King David was all those when he fled from his son, Absalom (2 Sam. 15:30). But the suffering borne by this servant is not His own and does not result from His own sin. Nor does He bear it merely for another individual; “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6, NRSV).

The answer to the question “Why?” is Isaiah’s testing truth: Because of God’s love, His Messiah would choose to suffer. But why? Isaiah drives the “golden spike” to complete the unthinkable truth: He would choose to suffer in order to reach the unreachable, and the unreachable is us!

Those who do not understand regard the servant as “struck down by God” (Isa. 53:4, NRSV). Just as Job’s friends thought his sin must have caused his suffering, and just as Jesus’ disciples asked Him “‘who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” (John 9:2, NRSV), those who saw Jesus on the cross assumed the worst. Didn’t Moses say that “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deut. 21:23; compare Num. 25:4)?

Yet, all this was God’s will (Isa. 53:10). Why? Because “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13, NRSV). Because God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Imagine that! In a sense, Christ became sin! He bore every evil passion and selfish degradation of the billions of people who have ever inhabited our planet. With that overwhelming deluge of misery collected upon Him and identified with Him as if He were the personification of all evil, He gave Himself up for destruction in order to wipe out all sin and all of its consequences.”—Roy Gane, Altar Call, p. 77, author’s emphasis.

The punishment for the sins of the whole world—every sin, by every sinner—fell upon Christ at the Cross, at once, as the only means to save us! What does this tell us about how bad sin is that such a price had to be paid? What does it tell us about God’s love that He would do this for us, even at such a great cost?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

1. The salvation of every sinner who accepts His sacrifice (see 1 Cor. 15:1-3, 2 Cor. 5:21, Col. 1:20-22, 1 Pet. 2:24).
2. The charges Satan brings against God’s government will be proven false, which will result in eternally restored harmony throughout the universe (see Eph. 1:7-10; 3:13, 14; Col. 1:20).
3. The permanent elimination from the universe of evil (see Neh 1:9, John 1:29, Rom. 6:6, 2 Thess. 1:7-9, Heb. 9:26).


No one can fathom the horrors Christ experienced as He died for the salvation of the human race (see Psalm 22). For this outcome, He was willing to endure the Cross and suffer its shame (Heb. 12:1-3). Scripture guarantees that by virtue of Christ’s sacrifice the “pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (Isa. 53:10). That is, the plan of salvation will bring forth eternal fruit from all the world, thus fulfilling God’s purpose (see Rev. 7:9-17).

Witnessing

While growing up, a young child became accustomed to her mother’s misshapen hands. Yet, she often longed for hands to hold that were smooth and pretty. Sometimes she silently pouted, Why do I have a mother with such ugly hands?

One night, while sitting on her mother’s lap before bedtime, the youngster asked, “Mother, why are your hands so rough and scarred?”

Smiling, the mother replied, “One night, a terrible fire burned in our house. The firefighters couldn’t reach your room, because of the heat and smoke. I found a way into your room, and, together, you and I found our way out of the fire. But when the blanket you were wrapped in caught fire, there was no way to put out the flames except with my hands.”

The child gently reached out and picked up her mother’s hands. She placed a soft kiss on each one then looked up into her mother’s eyes. “They’re the most beautiful hands in the world, because they saved my life!”

While there is no denying this mother’s deep love for her child, her gift of life was the result of an unplanned act during a crisis. Jesus, on the other hand, had known of His Father’s plan for earth’s salvation for centuries. Yet, during all that time, He never wavered at the thought of His own scarred hands as payment for our salvation.

Just before you pray each morning, examine your hands. How will you use them to help someone next week?
A Transforming Reparation Offering
(Isa. 53:10-12).

What does it mean that the Servant’s life is “an offering for sin” (vs. 10, NRSV)?

The Hebrew word refers to a “guilt/reparation offering” (Lev. 5:14–6:7, 7:1-7), which could atone for deliberate wrongs against other people (Lev. 6:2, 3). Such sins were singled out by Isaiah (Isaiah 1–3; 10:1, 2; 58). Also, the sinner must restore to the wronged person that which was taken, plus a penalty, before offering the sacrifice to receive forgiveness from God (Lev. 6:4-7; compare Matt. 5:23, 24). In a case of inadvertent misuse of something that belongs to God, the reparation goes to Him (Lev. 5:16).

Now we can understand Isaiah 40:2, where God comforts His exiled people by telling them they have paid enough reparation for their sins.

But following the reparation, there must be a sacrifice. Here it is in Isaiah 53: God’s Servant, instead of a ram, is led like a sheep to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7) on behalf of people who have gone astray (vs. 6).

Although “cut off from the land of the living” (vs. 8, NRSV; compare Dan. 9:26), completely consumed in the sacrifice that kindles the flame of hope for us, the Servant comes forth from death, the land of no return, to receive exaltation, see His “offspring,” and prolong his days (Isa. 53:10-12).

Look up each of the following verses. How does each one reflect the same basic message as Isaiah 53?

Ps. 32:1, 2
Rom. 5:8
Gal. 2:16
Phil. 3:9
Heb. 2:9
1 Pet. 2:24

If someone were to ask you to summarize in a single paragraph the good news of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, what would you write?
**TEACHERS COMMENTS**

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** When H. M. S. Richards visited Christ’s tomb, he spent a few minutes there alone. When he left, he signed the guest book and wrote this comment: “It is empty!”

A short time later, another minister visited the tomb. While signing the guest book, he noticed Richards’s comment, which inspired his own: “Thank God!”

Read John 11:25. What hope does this text give us?

**Thought Question:**

Crucifixion was particularly cruel. Jim Bishop writes, “Wine, slightly drugged [was prepared] . . .

“[Jesus] looked at the wine . . . and shook his head. He would not drink it. He had to feel the fullness of pain . . .

“The executioner laid the crossbeam behind Jesus and brought him to the ground quickly . . .

“The executioner probed the wrist of Jesus to find the little hollow spot. When he found it, he took one of the square-cut iron nails from his teeth and held it against the spot . . . Then he raised the hammer over the nail head and brought it down with force . . . [The same procedure was used for the second hand.] When the crossbeam was set firmly [the executioner] knelt before the cross. Two soldiers hurried to help, and each one took hold of a leg at the calf. The ritual was to nail the right foot over the left . . . The Romans learned to push the feet upward on the cross, so that the condemned man could lean on the nails and stretch himself upward. This prolonged the period of dying.”—*The Day Christ Died* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), pp. 295–298.

Jesus was also weighed down with the enormity of sin, plus His sense of separation from God. How does knowing all this help you understand His sacrifice better? How does this knowledge make His sacrifice more personal?

**Application Question:**

What might be stopping you from fully accepting Christ’s salvation? Have you admitted that you are one of the unreachable ones mentioned in this week’s lesson? Be cautious in thinking that only those who personify our definition of lowest of the low qualify for this category. We are all tainted by Satan’s ways. We are all lost unless we unconditionally accept Christ’s salvation and live the new life He requires of us. Honor this new life by practicing hands-on humility this week toward others around you.
Further Study: “What a price has been paid for us! Behold the cross, and the Victim uplifted upon it. Look at those hands, pierced with the cruel nails. Look at His feet, fastened with spikes to the tree. Christ bore our sins in His own body. That suffering, that agony, is the price of your redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 172.

“Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree. . . . What must sin be, if no finite being could make atonement? What must its curse be if Deity alone could exhaust it? The cross of Christ testifies to every man that the penalty of sin is death. . . . Oh, must there be some strong bewitching power which holds the moral senses, steeling them against the impressions of the Spirit of God?”—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 44.

“The law of God’s government was to be magnified by the death of God’s only-begotten Son. Christ bore the guilt of the sins of the world. Our sufficiency is found only in the incarnation and death of the Son of God. He could suffer, because [He was] sustained by divinity. He could endure, because He was without one taint of disloyalty or sin. Christ triumphed in man’s behalf in thus bearing the justice of punishment. He secured eternal life to men, while He exalted the law, and made it honorable.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 302.

Discussion Questions:


2. Look at the last quote above by Ellen White about Christ’s death magnifying the law. What does she mean by that? How do we understand His death as proof of the perpetuity of the law?

Summary: Having told about the birth, identity, and career of God’s Deliverer, Isaiah finally reveals the supreme tragedy that gives us hope: To reach, save, and heal lost people, including us, God’s Servant voluntarily bears our suffering and punishment.
**Lesson 11**

*June 5–11*

**Waging Love**

**Sabbath Afternoon**

A Jewish cantor (worship leader) and his wife who lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, began receiving threatening and obscene phone calls. They discovered the calls came from a leader of an American hate group, the Ku Klux Klan. Knowing his identity, they could have turned him in to the police. But they decided on a more radical approach. When they learned that he was crippled, they showed up at his door with dinner! He was utterly flabbergasted. His hatred melted before their love. The couple kept visiting him, and the friendship grew. He even thought of becoming Jewish!

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry . . . ?” (Isa. 58:6, 7, NRSV). Ironically, the couple in Lincoln kept such a fast by sharing their feast with a hungry oppressor, thereby setting him free from his own bonds of unjust prejudice! Let’s learn more about this important spiritual principle as depicted by the prophet Isaiah.

**The Week at a Glance:** What did salvation cost? Why was the Lord unhappy with His people’s worship? How does the Lord expect us to treat the poor and needy among us? What is true religion all about? What are the blessings that come to those who give of themselves for others?

**Memory Text:** “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (Isaiah 58:10, NRSV).

*Study this lesson to prepare Sabbath, June 12.*

Read this text: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isa. 55:1, NRSV). What contradiction do you see there?

Suppose you took food and stood on the street in a big city and announced to the hungry and homeless there: “Yo, you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” But how can they buy if they have no money?

However, if you add the words, as Isaiah did: “without money and without price” (vs. 1, NRSV), the point becomes clearer. Isaiah appeals to people to accept forgiveness (vs. 7) freely. Yet, the word buy emphasizes that what God offers people to meet their needs and desires is valuable, so receiving it requires a transaction (transfer of something of worth). God freely offers forgiveness within the framework of a restored covenant relation with His people, but not because it was free for Him: He bought it at the terrible, blood-drenched price of His own Servant. Though free, it came with a terrible cost to Himself.

What was the price for our salvation? See 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.


Isaiah encapsulates the gospel in the Old Testament, which is the same as the gospel in the New Testament. There was no “old-covenant” salvation by works, to be superseded by “new-covenant” salvation by grace. Ever since God’s promise of a Deliverer to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), there has been only one way to salvation: by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8); “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23, NRSV). From the ancient Gilgamesh, who did heroic exploits in a vain search for eternal life, to modern actors who believe in reincarnation, people have tried all different routes to salvation, but all are fruitless. This is why they need to know about Jesus and what He has accomplished for them at the Cross.

Salvation is free, in that there’s nothing we can do to earn it. Our works can never be good enough to save us. Yet, at the same time, it can cost us everything. What does that mean? See, for instance, Matt. 10:39, Luke 9:23, 14:26, Phil. 3:8.
**Key Text:** Isaiah 55, 58.

**Teachers Aim:**

1. To explore the cost of salvation.
2. To contrast nominal with true religion.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Come and “Buy.”**

A. The invitation to “buy” *(compare Rev. 3:18)* reminds us that salvation is obtained by those who give themselves to Christ as His purchased possessions.

B. God Himself is the only One who could pay the price for sin. Fortunately for us, then, it was He who bought our salvation.

**II. The Cost of Discipleship.**

A. While we never can buy our own salvation, upon receiving His Spirit at our conversion, our proper response is to take up the cross of discipleship.

B. Isaiah 58 contrasts nominal religion—outward shows of piety—with the true response of faith, which is caring for others and reverencing God.

**Summary:** Anything short of the true worship God calls us to is idolatry. In response to His gift of salvation, God expects us to give freely of ourselves, both in service to others and in reverence to Him. These are not acts of obligation but heartfelt responses to a God who invites us to share a covenant relationship with Him.

**COMMENTARY**

**Introduction: Waging Love.**

The hallmarks of true religion are consistent, selfless, compassionate care for others *(see James 1:27, 1 John 3:16-18)*. “All around us are heard the wails of a world’s sorrow. On every hand are the needy and distressed. It is ours to aid in relieving and softening life’s hardships and misery.

“Practical work will have far more effect than mere sermonizing. We are to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the homeless. And we are called to do more than this. The wants of the soul, only the love of Christ can satisfy. If Christ is abiding in us, our hearts will be full of divine sympathy. The sealed fountains of earnest, Christlike love will be unsealed.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 417.

**I. Without Money and Without Price, Though Infinitely Precious.** *(Isa. 1:18, 19; 55:1-7).*

“Salvation is a free gift, and yet it is to be bought and sold. In
High Thoughts and Ways (Isa. 55:6-13).

**Why** does God say His thoughts and ways are higher than ours, “as the heavens are higher than the earth” (vss. 8, 9, NRSV)? What do you think that means?

There’s no question that the God who created a universe in which even some of the simplest things contain mysteries that our minds cannot begin to fathom is a God whose ways are beyond what we can ever begin to fully grasp. This knowledge of His infinite superiority should, therefore, make it easier for us to humbly receive His help. See Isa. 57:15.

**Read** Isaiah 55:6-9. What is the context in which the Lord talks about how His ways and thoughts are higher than what we can imagine? What is He saying He does that is so hard for us to grasp?

Of all the great mysteries of the universe, no doubt the greatest one of all is the plan of salvation, a mystery we can barely begin to understand. (See Eph. 6:19.) That the Creator of the universe would stoop to clothe Himself in humanity, live a life of toil and suffering, only to die then in our behalf, a sacrifice for sin, all in order that He could pardon us and show mercy to us is a truth that will, for all the ages of eternity, thrill the hearts of God’s created beings.

“The theme of redemption is one that angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now? . . .

“The subject is inexhaustible. The study of the incarnation of Christ, His atoning sacrifice, and mediatorial work will employ the mind of the diligent student as long as time shall last; and looking to heaven with its unnumbered years, he will exclaim, ‘Great is the mystery of godliness.—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 360.

**Look at the bad things you have done:** the people whom you have hurt, the unkind words you have spoken, the ways in which you have disappointed others, not to mention yourself. And yet, through Jesus, you can be forgiven all these things and stand, right now, perfect and righteous in the sight of God. If that isn’t a mystery, what is?
the market of which divine mercy has the management, the precious pearl is represented as being bought without money and without price. In this market all may obtain the goods of heaven. . . .

“...The gospel of Christ is a blessing that all may possess. The poorest are as well able as the richest to purchase salvation; for no amount of worldly wealth can secure it. It is obtained by willing obedience, by giving ourselves to Christ as His own purchased possession.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 116, 117.

God’s salvation is free not because it is valueless to us or of little cost to Him. He purchased our redemption and access to the gospel at infinite sacrifice and suffering. If the eyes of our heart are open to this revelation, we shall see more and more of the value of salvation and the privileges that are ours through the sacrifice of Christ (see Rom. 8:32, 2 Cor. 8:9, Eph. 1:17-20). We also will have the power through the Holy Spirit to refrain from any indulgence, activity, or expenditure that would detract from our calling or hinder the advancement of the gospel.


God’s wisdom is infinite in every field of knowledge, but what He most desires to reveal to us is a saving knowledge of His character and truth (see Pss. 36:5-10; 40:5-10; 139:17, 18; Col. 2:1-8). God has decreed that the words that go forth from His mouth shall accomplish His will. Those who accept His words will be guided into all truth and work in harmony with God’s will (John 15:7-16, 16:13, 1 Thess. 2:13). God’s Word is the great remedy for sin, ignorance, and spiritual indifference. That is why the psalmist so often refers to the “quickening,” or life-giving influence, of God’s Word (see Pss. 119:25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). By nourishing our hearts and minds with His Word, we bring forth fruit for God’s glory through the power of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 6:17-22, 1 Pet. 1:22-25). We no longer produce thorns that wound others, but healing balm instead (see Isa. 55:13; compare Rom. 6:20-22, Heb. 6:8).

III. Vital Religion.

Isaiah 58 is a call to repentance, revival, and reformation. God is describing a religious experience full of practical benefits and joy for everyone concerned. He condemns a somber piety that is full of malice, jealousy, and self-exaltation. Hypocrisy is both sickening and deadly. The fast that He approves is not the Pharisaic show of moral superiority (see Luke 18:11, 12) but a heartfelt interest in the well-being of others. True charity does not make a parade of benevolence or sacrifice. Its purpose is not to find favor with God or other people. It is simply the fruit of God’s love in the heart, the outflow of His grace operating within the depths of our being.
Fast Friends (Isa. 58:1-8).

What is the “fast” referred to in verse 3?

This must be the fast of the Day of Atonement, the only fast commanded by God (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27-32). This is confirmed in Isaiah 58:3 by the parallel expression “humble ourselves” (NRSV), which follows the terminology of Leviticus. Humbling oneself referred to various forms of self-denial, including fasting (compare Ps. 35:13; Dan. 10:2, 3, 12).

The Day of Atonement setting explains God’s command to “Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (Isa. 58:1, NRSV). This kind of ram’s horn trumpet, called a shofar, was to be blown as a memorial or reminder ten days before the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:24). Furthermore, every fiftieth year, on the Day of Atonement, it was to announce the beginning of the Jubilee year of freedom (Lev. 25:9, 10; compare Isa. 27:13).

Read Isaiah 58:3-7. What is the Lord complaining to them about? What was wrong with their “fast”?

______________________________________________________________

It seems the people were expecting the Lord to congratulate them for their “piety.” Of course, they had it all backwards. Practicing self-denial on the Day of Atonement was to express their gratitude and loyalty to Him on the day the high priest went before God to cleanse the sanctuary and thereby cleanse them from sins for which they had already been forgiven (Levitus 16; compare chapter 4). Their acts should have been done in thankfulness and gratitude to the God who saved them in the day of judgment, not in order to get God’s approval for their “piety” and “devotion.” After all, it was the sins of the people that had defiled God’s sanctuary. It had to be cleansed with blood that was shed because of what they had done.

One of the crucial lessons that comes from these texts regards the difference between being religious and truly being a follower of Christ. How do we see the difference there? How do we, as individuals, face the same danger as those presented here, which is believing that our religious rituals somehow show we are really following the Lord as He asks us to?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

IV. True Compassion (Isa. 58:7-11).
Real love does not oppress its recipients or make demands but seeks to lighten cares and liberate from anxieties. Truly loving people unselfishly share their time, means, and hospitality in a spirit of affectionate regard. They are compassionate toward others in their sufferings, struggles, and defeats. Those who sincerely practice such love glow with vitality and a sense of intimacy with God that is alien to self-centered people. God’s servants have the water of eternal life springing perpetually from within (see Ps. 87:7, Isa. 58:11, John 4:14, 7:37-39).

V. His Rest Is Glorious.
Those who serve God based on the terms described in Isaiah 58:6-11 have truly entered into His spiritual rest and are well able

Inductive Bible Study


1. In Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, Ellen White states that God “is to be glorified, His authority respected. . . . God reserved the seventh day as a period of rest for man, for the good of man as well as for His own glory.”—Page 532. Discuss how the Sabbath reveals God’s love toward us. How does our observance of the Sabbath reveal our love toward Him? Discuss the nature of true Sabbath keeping.

2. We must be careful to balance faith and works as expressions of our love for, and loyalty to, God. What does God say about making sacrifices to/for Him? What does He require and accept from us? Ps. 51:17, Hos. 6:6, Rom. 12:1, Heb. 13:16. Based on these texts, what changes must we make in our individual lives? In the denomination and our congregation?

3. What can we learn from the following quote as it relates to Matthew 11:29 and the example Christ gave while on earth? “Human nature is ever struggling for expression, ready for contest; but he who learns of Christ is emptied of self, of pride, of love of supremacy, and there is silence in the soul.”—Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 15.

4. What place does the Sabbath have in the plan of salvation? How do the plan of salvation and the Sabbath speak to God’s character and His love for us? In your answer, consider the purpose of each and how each helps us to prepare for Christ’s return.
Fast Fight (Isa. 58:1-12).

Ten days after trumpet blasts have reminded God’s people that the Lord is acclaimed as their King and, on the very Day of Atonement when their humility through self-denial is to affirm their loyalty to Him as King, the prophet lifts up his voice like a trumpet to declare that they are rebelling against Him (Isa. 58:1).

Read through Isaiah 58:6-12. What are acts that God considers true acts of self-denial? After all, what’s harder—to skip a few meals or to use your own time and money to feed the homeless in your town? What is the principle to be seen behind these acts? How do these acts compose true religion?

Anyone can be religious; anyone can go through religious rituals, even the right rituals, at the right time, with all the right formulas. But that alone is not what the Lord wants. Look at the life of Jesus. However faithful He was to the religious rituals of His time, the gospel writers focused so much more on His acts of mercy, healing, feeding, and forgiveness to those in need than on His faithfulness to ritual.

The Lord seeks a church, a people, who will preach truth to the world. But what is going to better attract people to the truth as it is in Jesus: strict adherence to dietary laws or a willingness to help the hungry? Strict rest on the Sabbath or a willingness to spend your own time and energy helping those who are in need?

Read Matthew 25:40 and James 1:27. What do they tell us?

Look at the blessings in Isaiah 58 that God says will come to those who seek to minister to the less fortunate. What do you think the Lord is saying to us here? Are these promises of supernatural intervention for our lives if we do these things? Or, perhaps, is He telling us of the natural blessing we receive by giving of ourselves to others as opposed to being selfish, greedy, and self-absorbed? Explain your answer.
to appreciate God’s sacred gift of time, the Sabbath. To them, observing this holy time is no more legalistic than keeping a date with a favorite person. People with this type of Sabbath experience are repairers of the breach. Their lives are not a barren trail through a dry wilderness. They are a causeway paved with love that leads to Paradise, but never by way of a detour from meeting human needs (see Ps. 25:10, Prov. 3:17, Phil. 3:14-16, 1 Cor. 11:1).

Witnessing

Review Isaiah 55:6-13 with your class.

Our fascination with the heavens has prompted Hollywood to develop such films as Star Trek, Star Wars, and Planet of the Apes. Through the imaginations of scriptwriters and movie directors, worlds have been created that go far beyond our imaginations.

But no Hollywood creation ever could compare with what this world would be like if we followed God’s thoughts and ways. Isaiah 58 describes what our world is like when we do not follow God’s thoughts and ways (vss. 1-5) and when we do (vss. 6-14). Review the characteristics of the world when we do not follow God’s ways and when we do.

Regarding Isaiah 58, Ellen G. White wrote, “All around us are afflicted souls. Let us search out these suffering ones, and speak a word in season to comfort their hearts. Here and there—everywhere—we shall find them. Let us ever be channels through which may flow to them the refreshing waters of compassion. To those who minister to the necessities of the hungry and afflicted, the promise is, ‘Then shall thy light rise in obscurity.’ ”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1151.

As you go about your daily life this week, imagine the world as Isaiah describes it in Isaiah 58:6-14. Make use of the opportunities God will send your way to make that world a reality. Such a world is perhaps the best witness to the difference God can make in a person’s life.
A Time for Us (Isa. 58:13, 14).

**Why** does Isaiah discuss the Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13, 14? What connection does this have with the Day of Atonement setting of the earlier verses?

The yearly Day of Atonement was a Sabbath day. This special ceremonial Sabbath was like the weekly Sabbath in that all work of any kind was prohibited (Lev. 23:27-32). Therefore, as recognized by early Seventh-day Adventists, the rule that the Day of Atonement period of rest lasted from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32) informs us that the same must be true of the weekly Sabbath. Similarly, although the primary context of Isaiah 58:13, 14 is the ceremonial Day of Atonement Sabbath, its message also applies to the weekly Sabbath.

**Read** Isaiah 58:13. What kind of day is the Sabbath supposed to be? How can we make our Sabbath experience like the one depicted here? Also, when you think about what the Sabbath represents, why should it be the kind of day described in this text?

Isaiah 58 deals with three main themes: self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath.

What are the connections between them?

First, all three involve concentration upon God, His priorities, and recognition of dependence upon Him. Second, by doing all three, humans pursue holiness by emulating God (see Lev. 19:2), who, in the form of Christ, humbled Himself (Phil. 2:8), who demonstrates self-sacrificing kindness (John 3:16), and who ceased from labor on the Sabbath at the end of the Creation week (Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:11).

Look at these other ties between the themes of self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath, as depicted in Isaiah 58: Sabbath freedom from weekly toil is kind to people because it lets them be refreshed (Exod. 23:12, Mark 2:27); Jesus showed that kind acts are appropriate on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-5, John 5:1-17); true Sabbath keeping brings joy (Isa. 58:14), as does helping others (vss. 10, 11). What must change in your own life in order to experience these blessings yourself?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: At Christmas, it is traditional in many countries to exchange gifts. The size of the gift is immaterial—what matters is the joy it brings to both giver and receiver. Although the gift is free to the receiver, it cost the giver a price. So, in reality, the gift carries a price tag. Our lesson this week reminds us that Jesus paid a heavy price for our gift of salvation. “His blood atones for our sin.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 372.

Thought Questions:
1. Discuss the differences between practicing Christianity and claiming to be a Christian. Review the following chart in order to put into perspective Christ’s instructions on caring for His flock.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Self-Denial</th>
<th>Real Self-Denial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting those in prison</td>
<td>Working toward removing the chains of injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving a holiday lunch</td>
<td>Volunteering year-round in a shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denouncing oppression</td>
<td>Working toward letting the oppressed go free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving a small donation</td>
<td>Paying someone’s mortgage after he/she was laid off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Our church publishes a number of manuals that are meant to standardize certain religious functions, practices, and activities within the denomination. While these are helpful in many circumstances, how might they at times limit how, when, and where we minister to others?

Application Question:
The Sabbath provides a time-out from daily stresses, so we can focus completely on God. With that thought in mind, how might we use the Sabbath to introduce the Adventist faith to non-believers? Discuss ways we can involve them in practicing with us the joys of the Sabbath while, at the same time, honoring its sanctity.
Further Study: “No one can practice real benevolence without self-denial. Only by a life of simplicity, self-denial, and close economy is it possible for us to accomplish the work appointed us as Christ’s representatives. Pride and worldly ambition must be put out of our hearts. In all our work the principle of unselfishness revealed in Christ’s life is to be carried out. Upon the walls of our homes, the pictures, the furnishings, we are to read, ‘Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house.’ On our wardrobes we are to see written, as with the finger of God, ‘Clothe the naked.’ In the dining room, on the table laden with abundant food, we should see traced, ‘Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?’ Isaiah 58:7.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 206.

Discussion Questions:

1. Look at the question Isaiah asked the people of his time: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (Isa. 55:2, NRSV). Ask yourself, in what ways, if any, are we doing the same thing, laboring for that which does not satisfy? Why is it so easy to get caught up in that very trap?

2. If self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath were important on the day of atonement in Isaiah’s day, are they just as important in the end-time Day of Atonement (Dan. 8:14), during which God’s Jubilee trumpet will signal ultimate freedom at the second coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:52; compare Lev. 25:9, 10)? Explain your answer.

3. Open up a discussion on the question of Sabbath keeping. What do you think Isaiah means when he says we should turn away from doing our own pleasure on the Sabbath, and yet at the same time call it a “delight” (Isa. 58:13)? How can we do both? Keep in mind the context of the complete text of Isaiah 58.

Summary: In Isaiah 55 and 58, the prophet appeals to his people to give up their thoughts and ways and return to God, whose ideal for their happiness is so much higher than their own. God mercifully pardons and then insists that the pardoned be merciful, in harmony with the spirit of the Day of Atonement and the Sabbath, because the gift of God’s forgiveness transforms the heart if it is truly received.
Desire of Nations

SABBATH AFTERNOON

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. . . . The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” (Isa. 59:2-4, 61:1-3).

This week we look at how the Lord planned to take His people from one spiritual place to another.

The Week at a Glance: How does sin separate us from God? What is the only basis of redemption? What was God’s plan for the Hebrew nation? How was Jesus revealed in Isaiah 61:1-3? How do we understand God’s vengeance?

Memory Text: “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:3, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 19.
The Effects of Sin *(Isaiah 59).*

In Isaiah 58:3 the people asked God: “‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’” *(NRSV).*

In contrast, Isaiah 59:1 implies another question, something like: “Why do we call for the Lord’s hand to save us, but He does not? Why do we cry to Him, but He does not hear?” Isaiah answers that God is able to save and hear *(vs. 1).* His failure to do either is, however, another matter entirely.

*Read* Isaiah 59:2. What message is being given here that answers the question in verse 1?

God chooses to “ignore” His people, not because that is His desire, but because, as Isaiah reveals, “your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God” *(vs. 2, NRSV).* Here is one of the clearest statements in the Bible regarding the effect of sin on the divine-human relationship. Isaiah spends the rest of chapter 59 elaborating on this point, which is seen all through human history: Sin can destroy our relationship with the Lord and thus lead to our eternal ruin—not because sin drives God away from us, but that it drives us away from God.

*Read* Genesis 3:8. How does this example reveal the principle expressed in the above paragraph?

Sin is primarily a rejection of God, a turning away from Him. The sin act actually feeds upon itself in that not only is the act a turning away from God but the result of the act causes the sinner to turn away even more from the Lord. Sin separates us from God, not because God wouldn’t reach out to the sinner (indeed, the whole Bible is almost nothing but the account of God reaching out to save sinners) but because sin causes us to reject His divine overtures to us. That is why it is so important that we tolerate no sin in our lives.

In what ways have you experienced the phenomenon of sin causing a separation from God? What, in your own experience, is the only solution to the problem?
Key Text: Isaiah 59–61.

Teachers Aim:
1. To show we are saved by grace and judged by works.
2. To convey the significance of the “year of the Lord’s favor” and the “day of judgment.”

Lesson Outline:
I. Redemption’s Story.
   A. Sin separates us from God as a consequence of our actions and choices.
   B. The Bible tells of God’s endless efforts to reconcile sinful humans to Him.

II. Judged by Works.
   A. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith also is a gift of God.
   B. Our response to Christ’s sacrifice is love and obedience through works.

III. The Lord’s Favor and Judgment.
   A. God’s love and final judgment go hand in hand, as shown in the relationship between the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance.
   B. Jesus proclaimed the year of the Lord’s favor during His ministry on earth.

Summary: Jesus declared the year of the Lord’s favor more than two thousand years ago. So it should be clear that we are living on borrowed time. Not willing that any should perish, God mercifully delays His coming. Let us accept His grace and live according to His will, so we may be able to stand in the day of vengeance.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: Desire of Nations.
Isaiah 54–66 ring with God’s assurance of future glory and His promise to bring evil to an end. These chapters describe the effects of, and the events set in motion by, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. They envision the day when “the Lord shall be [our] everlasting light, and the days of [our] mourning shall be ended. [God’s] people also shall be all righteous: . . . that [He] may be glorified” (Isa. 60:20, 21).

I. Sin, the Separator (Isa. 59:1-3, 12, 13).
Sin is an evil force, originated by Satan, that causes alienation from God and hostility toward Him. The gospel is the only force that can penetrate this alienation and hostility; wherever it does, it reveals itself in ways that inspire the wonder of morally enlightened beings (see Rom. 5:6-11, Rev. 5:9-14). It is God’s goodness alone that leads sinners to repent (Rom. 2:4), conquering the will, not by
Who Is Forgiven?

Isaiah 59 presents a startling picture of the problem of sin. Fortunately, the Bible also presents the hope of redemption.

To begin, the first question is, How many of us have sinned? The Bible is unequivocal: All of us have. Redemption, therefore, cannot be based on lack of sin; it must be based on forgiveness (Jer. 31:34). Paul agrees. All have sinned (Rom. 3:9-20, 23), so there can be no distinction on that basis (Rom. 3:22). Those who are justified can be judged as just, only because they receive by faith the gift of God’s righteousness through the sacrifice of Christ.

Read Romans 3:21-24. What are those texts telling us about how we are saved? What hope should they give us in the judgment?

Most people think the question in the judgment is: Who has sinned? But that is not a question that needs to be asked, because everyone has sinned. Instead, the question is: Who is forgiven? God is just when He justifies “the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26, NRSV). The deciding factor in the judgment is, Who has received and continues to receive forgiveness by having faith in Jesus?

Now, it is true we are judged by works, but not in the sense that works save us. If so, then faith is made void (Rom. 4:14). Instead, our works reveal whether we truly have been saved (James 2:18).

Why can’t works save us, either now or in the judgment? See Rom. 3:20, 23.

It is too late for good works, or obedience to the law, to redeem anyone. The purpose of the law in a sinful world isn’t to save but to point out sin. Instead, “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6, NRSV), love that is poured into the heart by God’s Spirit (Rom. 5:5), demonstrates that a person has living faith in Jesus (compare James 2:26).

Works are an outward expression, the human manifestation of a saving faith. Hence, a true Christian experience is one in which faith is expressed in a daily commitment to the Lord that is revealed by obedience to the law. In the judgment, God uses works as evidence for His creatures, who cannot read thoughts of faith as He can. But for the converted person, only works following conversion, when the life is empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit, are relevant in the judgment. The preconversion life of sin has already been washed away by the blood of the Lamb (see Romans 6).
force but by love and holy reason, changing us from “children of wrath” to “new creatures” in Christ, “partakers of the divine nature” (see Is. 1:18, 2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:1-6, 2 Pet. 1:4).

II. Fountain of Forgiveness.

One truth that can hardly be overstated is that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5; see vss. 1-7).

“As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ’s atonement in his behalf and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to conform his will entirely to God’s will and keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

“Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, not because of an inherent goodness, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption. The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because these sins are borne by his Substitute and Surety. The Lord speaks to His heavenly Father, saying: ‘This is My child. I reprieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him My life insurance policy—eternal life—because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even My beloved son.’

“Thus man, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Christ’s righteousness, stands faultless before God.

“The sinner may err, but he is not cast off without mercy. His only hope, however, is repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Faith and Works, p. 103.

III. Light Triumphs Over Darkness (Isa. 60:1, 2; 2 Cor. 4:1-6).

God’s plan of redemption assures the full establishment of His truth in the life of every believer. His followers will be steady lights in the world, revealing who Christ is and what He can do for those who love Him. Lives illuminated with Christ’s presence dispel the moral darkness that Satan has cast over the world. Christ calls His people the light of the world. They follow Him, the original Light of the world (see Matt. 5:14-16; John 1:4, 9; 8:12).

God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Hence the energetic missionary activity of Christ and His true followers (see Mark 16:15, 20; Luke 4:37-44). Until the close of probation, “now is the accepted time; . . . now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).
Universal Appeal (Isa. 60:1, 2).

What is Isaiah 60:1,2 talking about? What principle is at work there that’s seen all through the Bible? What hope does it offer?

In these two verses, we are given a picture of God’s deliverance of His people, following the exile, expressed with the imagery of God creating light out of darkness and pointing forward to an ultimate fulfillment in salvation through Christ.

In verse 3, to whose light do nations and kings come?

In Hebrew this person is feminine singular (see also vss. 1, 2). It must be “Zion,” personified as a woman, who is mentioned near the end of the previous chapter (Isa. 59:20). So the people of the earth, who are covered in darkness, will come to Zion. They will be drawn by the light of God’s glory that has arisen over her (Isa. 60:2). “Zion is summoned to enter into the light that is hers and then to observe and react to the nations as they gather to the same light.”—J. Alec Motyer, p. 494. Notice that although Zion is Jerusalem, the emphasis is more on the people than on the physical location of the city.

The rest of Isaiah 60 develops the theme introduced in verses 1-3: The people of the world are drawn to Jerusalem, which is blessed because of God’s glorious presence there.

How does this prophecy compare with God’s covenant promise to Abraham? Gen. 12:2, 3. Are they not saying the same thing?

God had a universal purpose when He chose Abraham and his descendants: Through Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18). So, God’s covenant with Abraham was ultimately intended to be a covenant with all humankind through Abraham. He and his descendants would be God’s channel of revelation to the world.

Isaiah sought to bring his people back to their ancient, universal destiny. As the representatives of the true God, they were responsible not only for themselves but for the world. They should welcome foreigners who seek God (compare Isa. 56:3-8), for His temple “shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:7, NRSV).

In this context, how do you understand the role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or your role in that church?
**IV. Justice at Last!**

One of the most perplexing aspects of the great controversy between good and evil is the delay in the administration of final justice in which all righteousness and truth are vindicated and all evil is brought to account. (*Compare* *Job* 16:16-22, 21:7-26, *Ps. 73:*2-17 *with* *Luke* 18:1-8 *and* *Rev.* 6:9-11.)

God’s justice and wrath are part of His holy nature, along with His love for righteousness and hatred of wickedness (*see* *Ps.* 45:7). The plan of salvation is the way of separating sinners from sin and filling them with God’s holy attributes. But people who choose to...

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**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery**: *Leviticus* 4:2, 13, 14, 20; 5:15; *Numbers* 15:28-30; *Psalms* 4:6; 119:105; *Micah* 7:9; *Acts* 17:30, 31; *1 John* 1:7.

1. Consider how completely our sin separates us from God. Knowing how horrible and ugly sin is and how it creates a barrier to the Father, consider what Christ gave up to become sin for us. Imagine how God felt to see His only Son become something He hated in order to save a world so ungrateful and so blind to His love. What is the admonition and the promise from the Lord regarding sin in our lives? *Romans* 6.

2. When we are no longer separated from God (by confessing our sins), we are able to claim the power that Christ has to bring others into His marvelous light. What do *Psalms* 4:6, 119:105, *Micah* 7:9, and *1 John* 1:7 say about the function of God’s light and its benefits? How can we be, in practical ways, a source of that light?

3. Discuss the question in Thursday’s section regarding God’s love and vengeance. How can God, who hates sin but loves the sinner, exact punishment on that sinner? Define vengeance. What are the components that cause someone to act in vengeance? Contrast that definition with God’s vengeance. What are the components of His holy and just cause? Discuss the relationship between His mercy and His vengeance.

4. How does God judge those who sin in ignorance? Will His vengeance apply to them also? Do they have an obligation to confess or make recompense? Explain your answers. Will there be “sins of ignorance” in the last days before His judgment? Why, or why not? (*Read* *Lev.* 4:2, 13, 14, 20; 5:15; *Num.* 15:28-30; *Acts* 17:30, 31.)
“The Year of the Lord’s Favor” (Isaiah 61).

Who is speaking in Isaiah 61:1?

The Spirit of God is on this anointed person, which means that he is a messiah or the Messiah. He is to “bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners” (vs. 1, NRSV). Who does that sound like? Compare Isaiah 42:1-7, where God’s Servant is described in very similar terms.

Isaiah 61:2 talks about the “acceptable year of the Lord.” The Messiah, who is anointed as the Davidic King and Deliverer, proclaims a special year of divine favor at the time when He proclaims liberty. Compare Leviticus 25:10, where God commands the Israelites to proclaim liberty in the holy fiftieth year: “It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (NRSV). This means that persons who had been forced to sell their ancestral land or to become servants in order to survive hard times (vss. 25-55) would reclaim their land and freedom. Because the jubilee year began with the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement (vs. 9), we have mentioned this passage before in connection with Isaiah 58.

While “the year of the Lord’s favor” (NRSV) in Isaiah 61:2 is a kind of jubilee year, it is not simply an observance of Leviticus 25. This year is announced by the Messiah, the King, when He reveals Himself through a ministry of liberation and restoration. This is similar to some ancient Mesopotamian kings who promoted social kindness by proclaiming release from debts during early years of their reigns. The Messiah’s ministry goes far beyond the scope of the Leviticus 25 law. Not only does He “proclaim liberty to the captives,” He also binds up the brokenhearted, comforts those who mourn, and brings about their restoration (Isa. 61:1-11). Furthermore, in addition to “the year of the Lord’s favor,” He proclaims “the day of vengeance of our God” (vs. 2, NRSV).

When was Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled? Luke 4:16-21. How did Jesus’ ministry accomplish this? We, of course, are not Jesus, but we are to represent Him to the world. Also, ask yourself this important question: What are the things the Messiah does, as expressed in Isaiah 61:1-3, that we, in our limited capacities, should be doing, as well? And what are some of the practical ways in which we can do these things?
remain in darkness must perish with their sins. These sinners oppose all who are truly converted and make life as difficult as possible for them. God, however, will reward His righteous people and ultimately destroy those who hate His Son (see Heb. 10:26-30). Cooperating with Satan to overthrow God’s kingdom of righteousness is no small offense. Christ’s forbearance is not leniency or permissiveness but longsuffering love that labors tirelessly for our redemption until everyone’s decision is fixed (see Matt. 23:34-36; Luke 11:52; 1 Thess. 2:15, 16; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Rev. 13:1-17; 15:1-5; 16:4-6; 17:5, 6; Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 210–212).

Witnessing

Justice can be defined as the principle of treating all people equally according to the law. However, is it really possible to treat everyone equally under the law?

The relative new science of DNA testing is able to revoke some judicial decrees. Eyewitness accounts and circumstantial evidence are no longer necessarily the definitive answer to solving a crime. DNA testing provides nearly 100 percent accuracy in the determination of guilt or innocence.

God, however, possesses an infinite amount of justice that decrees fairly and equitably. Yet, it is important for us to remember “He takes no delight in vengeance. The work of destruction is a ‘strange work’ to Him who is infinite in love.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 139.

“While He does not delight in vengeance, He will execute judgment upon the transgressors of His law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. And the very fact of His reluctance to execute justice testifies to the enormity of the sins that call forth His judgments and to the severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor.”—Page 628.

This last quote teaches us how important it is to accept God’s grace and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, who guides us daily in Jesus’ footsteps. Think of ways you can help others accept Jesus this week. Ask God to help you act upon at least two of those ways.
“The Day of Vengeance of Our God”  
(Isa. 61:2, NRSV).

**Amidst** all the good news, why does the Messiah, as depicted in Isaiah 61, proclaim God’s vengeance? When is this prophecy fulfilled?

When in Nazareth, Jesus, the Messiah, read Isaiah 61 as far as “‘to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’” (vs. 2; Luke 4:19). Then he stopped and said: “‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21, NRSV). So, He deliberately and specifically avoided reading the next words in the same verse: “the day of vengeance of our God” (Isa. 61:2, NRSV). While His ministry of good news, liberty, and comfort was beginning to set captives free from Satan’s tyranny, the day of vengeance was not yet to come. In Matthew 24 (compare Mark 13, Luke 21) He predicted to His disciples that divine judgments would come in the future.

Indeed, in Isaiah 61 the day of God’s vengeance is the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31, NRSV; Mal. 4:5), to be fulfilled when Christ will come again to liberate planet Earth from injustice by defeating His enemies and setting the oppressed remnant of His people free (Revelation 19; compare Dan. 2:44, 45). So although Christ announced the beginning of “the year of the Lord’s favor,” its culmination is at His second coming.

**How** do you reconcile the notion of a loving God with a God who also promises vengeance? Are the ideas incompatible? Or, do you understand vengeance as a manifestation of that love? If so, how so? Explain your answer.

Though Jesus has told us to turn the cheek (Matt. 5:39), in other places He is very clear that justice and punishment will be meted out (Matt. 8:12). Though Paul tells us not to “render evil for evil” (1 Thess. 5:15), he also says that when the Lord is revealed from heaven, He will with flaming fire take “vengeance on them that know not God” (2 Thess. 1:8).

The difference, of course, is that the Lord in His infinite wisdom and mercy can alone bring justice and vengeance in a completely fair manner. Human justice, human vengeance, comes with all the faults, frailties, and inconsistencies of humanity. God’s justice, of course, will come with none of those limitations.

**How do we understand the link between God’s love for us and the warnings of vengeance?**
Teacher Comments

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A painting by the artist Elfred Lee hangs in the Ellen G. White Estate offices, located in the General Conference. It is a panoramic view spanning much of our Christian faith. Looking at the picture, you can envision Jesus’ return. That will be a day of both rejoicing and despair. Where do you intend to stand on that day, and why?

Thought Questions:
1. To obtain salvation, we must believe and accept Christ’s promises. Once we have done that, we will not be able to contain our love for Jesus, and our actions will reflect that love. Now let us reverse that thought: We apply ourselves diligently to doing good works, but we do not totally accept God’s salvation. How would you describe both scenarios as true “cause and effect”? What will be the ultimate result of each scenario?

2. This week’s lesson mentions that perhaps there are pockets of exclusivity within the church that limit our ability to reach those who need the gospel the most. Let us never forget, however, that each and every one of us has sinned against God in some way. Jesus founded the church, and He has protected and guided it. Jesus also directed His church to preach the gospel to all the world. So, take a look around your local church to see how many visitors come on any given Sabbath. If the number is not large, how can you involve other members in reaching those needing to hear God’s story?

Application Questions:
1. Sin erects barriers between the sinner and God. And Christ often is unable to penetrate these barriers, because we do not allow Him to remove them. It is sin that drives us away from Christ, even though He would like nothing better than to hold on to us for eternity. Discuss the connection between the amount of time we spend with Jesus and our spiritual health.

2. There are some who believe there is plenty of time to enjoy the pleasures of this world before they need to set aside sinful activities to take up salvation. What dangers are there in living this way?

“Jesus stood before the people as a living expositor of the prophecies concerning Himself. Explaining the words He had read, He spoke of the Messiah as a reliever of the oppressed, a liberator of captives, a healer of the afflicted, restoring sight to the blind, and revealing to the world the light of truth. His impressive manner and the wonderful import of His words thrilled the hearers with a power they had never felt before. The tide of divine influence broke every barrier down; like Moses, they beheld the Invisible. As their hearts were moved upon by the Holy Spirit, they responded with fervent amens and praises to the Lord.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

“The day of God’s vengeance cometh—the day of the fierceness of His wrath. Who will abide the day of His coming? Men have hardened their hearts against the Spirit of God, but the arrows of His wrath will pierce where the arrows of conviction could not. God will not far hence arise to deal with the sinner. Will the false shepherd shield the transgressor in that day? Can he be excused who went with the multitude in the path of disobedience? Will popularity or numbers make any guiltless? These are questions which the careless and indifferent should consider and settle for themselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 33.

Discussion Question:

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor thoughtfully stated that his number one problem in ministry is the exclusiveness of church members who do not want others to join them. How can “Christians” take the love, hope, and good news of Christ’s kingdom to all the world so others can have an opportunity to be saved before the end comes (Matt. 24:14) when they do not even want to accept people who go out of their way to show up in their church?

Summary: God purifies an unjust society by removing the rebels and by restoring the remnant who turn from the sins that have separated them from Him. Due to the blessings of God’s presence, people from other nations are drawn to God and His people, so that they also can enjoy the time of God’s favor that is proclaimed and delivered by the Messiah.
One day, a 12-year-old boy, having just read a book on astronomy, refused to go to school. His mother, hysterical, took the child to the family doctor, who asked, “Billy, what’s the matter? Why don’t you want to study or go to school any more?”

“Because, Doctor,” he said, “I read in this astronomy book that one day the sun is going to burn out and all life on earth will vanish. I don’t see any reason to do anything if, in the end, everything will die out.”

The mother, hysterical, shouted, “It’s not your business! It’s not your business!”

The doctor, after calming down the mother, turned to the little boy, smiled, and said, “But, Billy, you don’t need to worry, because by the time this happens, we’ll all be long dead, anyway.”

Of course, that’s part of the problem: In the end, we’re all dead, anyway.

Fortunately, our existence doesn’t have to end in death. On the contrary, we have been offered life, eternal life, in a world made new.

**The Week at a Glance:** What final hope does Isaiah present us? How can Gentiles become priests and Levites? How does Isaiah contrast the fate of the wicked with that of the redeemed?

**Memory Text:** “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17, NRSV).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 26.*
New Heavens and a New Earth (Isa. 65:17-25).

**Read** Isaiah 65:17-25. What kind of restoration does the Lord promise here?

God promises a new creation, beginning with the words: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa. 65:17, NRSV). In this remarkable prophecy, theLord promises to “create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight” (vs. 18, NRSV). In the city there will be no more weeping (vs. 19). People normally will live considerably longer than a century before they die (vs. 20). Their work and children will remain for them to enjoy (vss. 21-23). God will answer them even before they call (vs. 24).

**However** nice, why is it not a complete picture of our final restoration, our final hope?

Thus far we have a picture of tranquil long lives in the Promised Land. But even though people live longer, they still die. Where is the radical transformation of nature we expect with the creation of “new heavens” and a “new earth”? The next verse tells us: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (vs. 25, NRSV).

For carnivores such as lions to become vegetarian requires far more than a vegetarian cooking class. It requires a re-creation to restore the world to its ideal state, as it was before sin in Eden introduced death. What we have here in Isaiah 65 is God presenting the creation of “new heavens” and a “new earth” as a process, series of steps, that begins with the re-creation of Jerusalem. Compare Isaiah 11, where the Messiah would bring justice (vss. 1-5). Then, eventually, there will be peace on God’s worldwide “holy mountain”; the imagery used in Isaiah 11 is similar to what’s found in Isaiah 65: “The wolf shall live with the lamb . . . and the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . .” (Isa. 11:6, 7, NRSV). Although the Lord’s “holy mountain” would begin with Mt. Zion at Jerusalem, it was only a precursor, a symbol, of what God promises to do, ultimately, in a new world with His redeemed people.

Suppose instead of living 60,70,90, or even 100 years, most people lived a million years or more. Why, still, would the fundamental problem of humanity not be solved? Why is eternal life the only answer to our deepest human needs?
**Key Text:** *Isaiah 66, 67.*

**Teachers Aim:**
1. To convey the hope of eternal life.
2. To show how we can receive eternal life.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. We Have This Hope.
   A. Isaiah 65:17 begins a passage with familiar language of a new heaven and earth. But it soon becomes clear that this is not the final hope of the righteous, for there is still death and sacrifice.
   B. Shifting from the temporal to the eternal, Isaiah offers a picture of God’s final promise of an eternal home for the righteous, balanced by a graphic image of those who do not accept this promise.

II. To Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People.
   A. Eternal life is the consummation of the work already accomplished at the Cross through the suffering servant portrayed in Isaiah.
   B. Through the scattered people of Israel, God invites all nations to witness His glory as equal members in His community of faith.

**Summary:** The crimson threads of salvation and restoration run throughout God’s warnings to His people and end in a new heaven and a new earth as dwelling places for God and the righteous who come from around the globe.

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**COMMENTARY**

**Introduction: Rebirth of Planet Earth.**

The drama between good and evil ends in the triumph of goodness. But this end is really only the beginning of eternal joy and glory for the Lord and His redeemed, because in the “ages to come He might shew [to us] the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” *(Eph. 2:7, NKJV).*

I. A Brave New World *(Isa. 65:17-25).*

When God blots out evil at the end of the executive judgment *(Revelation 20)*, He will create new heavens and a new earth. This removal of everything negative clears the way for the establishment of everything positive. No insensitive hands, no discordant notes, no foul deeds will taint the tapestry of God’s magnificent handiwork. All life will be alive with untainted joy, grace, love, and the sounds of praise and thanksgiving to God. If we are faithful, our voices will blend with those of all the blood-washed saints and celestial beings.
Divine “Magnet” (Isa. 66:1-19).

Read Isaiah 66:1-19. Keeping in mind the time in which Isaiah wrote, what is the basic message he is giving here?

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Through the prophet, God reiterates the appeal and warning that permeates the book: God will save and restore the humble, who tremble at His word (vss. 2, 5). As in Isaiah 40:1, He will comfort them (vs. 13). But He will destroy those who rebel against Him. These include hypocrites of ritual, whose sacrifices He rejects (Isa. 66:3, 4; compare Isa. 1:10-15), as well as those who hate and reject His faithful ones (Isa. 66:5). They also include those who practice pagan abominations (vs. 17) like those practiced at the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 8:7-12).

Look at Isaiah 66:3. What is this text saying? What spiritual principles are being revealed here? How might the same idea be expressed, but in the context of contemporary Christianity and worship?

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How does God serve as a magnet to draw the nations to Himself? Isa. 66:18, 19.

Following the destruction of His enemies (vss. 14-17), God reveals His glory so that He becomes a magnet to draw people to Jerusalem (compare Isa. 2:2-4). He sets a “sign” among them, which is not specified here but apparently refers to the sign last mentioned by Isaiah: God gives His people joy and peace and restores their land (Isa. 55:13). When He reveals His glory by restoring His people after destruction, this is a sign of His restored favor, just as He gave Noah the sign of the rainbow after the Flood (Gen. 9:13-17).

Read Isaiah 66:5. What does it mean to tremble at His word? Why does the Lord want us to tremble at His word? If you don’t, what might that say about the condition of your heart?
**TEACHERS COMMENTS**

No painful flashbacks will haunt us, for the old conditions “shall not be remembered, nor [come upon the heart]” (Isa. 65:17, KJV, margin). This does not mean we will have amnesia but that these things “will no longer distress or annoy the mind or cause feelings of remorse.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 333.

**II. Citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom.**

Heaven will not be populated with self-promoters who have bullied their way to the head of the line, for many who are now first will be last, and the last shall be first (see Matt. 19:30). God looks on the heart, while we look on the outward appearance. Those who revere God’s Word above their own or anyone else’s are taught by God to grow in the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). When Jesus returns, bearing the name “The Word of God,” He will gather into His kingdom all who have been truly sanctified by His Word and who have honored its counsels (Rev. 12:17, 3:10, 14:12, 19:13). Realizing their deep need, they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. They have cooperated with God’s grace, which provided them with the power they needed for victory and character development (see 2 Pet. 1:3-11, Rev. 3:5, 12:11).


The only workmanship we will carry into heaven comes in the form of those whose salvation we have helped to obtain (see 1 Thess. 2:19, 20; Col. 1:27-29). “There [in heaven] all who have wrought with unselfish spirit will behold the fruit of their labors. The outworking of every right principle and noble deed will be seen. Something of this we see here. But how little of the result of the world’s noblest work is in this life manifest to the doer! . . .

“Many a worker sends out into the world messages of strength and hope and courage. words that carry blessing to hearts in every land; but of the results he, toiling in loneliness and obscurity, knows little. So gifts are bestowed, burdens are borne, labor is done. Men sow the seed from which, above their graves, others reap blessed harvests. . . . In the hereafter the action and reaction of all these will be seen.”—Ellen G. White, Education, pp. 305, 306.

**IV. Glories and Privileges of the World Beyond** (Isa. 66:22, 23; Rev. 1:5, 6).

It lies beyond our present scope to imagine the privileges and joys awaiting us (see Isa. 64:4, 1 Cor. 2:9). How can we really grasp what it means to be a priest and ruler in the realms of glory? We may have some faint knowledge as to what this entails by reading such passages as Exodus 19:4-6, 1 Peter 2:5-10, Revelation 5:8-10, and Revelation 20:4.

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**Missionaries and Worship Leaders (Isa. 66:19-21).**

**What** is the meaning of survivors’ bringing people from the nations as an offering to the Lord? Isa. 66:19, 20.

God sends survivors of His destruction out to the ends of the earth, to people who do not know about God, “and they shall declare my glory among the nations” (vs. 19, NRSV). This is one the clearest Old Testament statements of the theme of missionary outreach. In other words, not only are people to be drawn to the Hebrew nation but some of the Hebrew people will go to other nations and teach them about the true God—a paradigm that is explicit in the New Testament. Though there was Jewish missionary outreach between the time of return from exile and the time of Christ (Matt. 23:15), the early Christians spread the gospel rapidly and on a massive scale (Col. 1:23).

Just as the Israelites brought grain offerings to the Lord at His temple, so the missionaries would bring an offering to Him. But their offering would be “all your kindred from all the nations” (Isa. 66:20, NRSV). Just as grain offerings were gifts to God that were not slaughtered, the converts brought to the Lord would be presented to Him as “living sacrifices” (compare Rom. 12:1). For the idea that people could be presented as a kind of offering to God, compare the much earlier dedication of Levites “as an elevation offering from the Israelites, that they may do the service of the Lord” (Num. 8:11, NRSV).

**What** is the significance of God’s promise to “take some of them as priests and as Levites” (Isa. 66:21, NRSV)?

The “them” in verse 21 refers to “your kindred from all the nations” (NRSV) in the previous verse. These are Gentiles, some of whom God would choose as worship leaders, along with the priests and Levites. This is a revolutionary change. God previously had authorized only descendants of Aaron to serve as priests and only other members of the tribe of Levi to assist them. Gentiles could not literally become descendants of Aaron or Levi, but God would authorize some to serve in these capacities, which had previously been forbidden to most Jews.

Read 1 Peter 2:9,10. To whom is Peter writing? What is he saying? What message does he have for each of us, as members of a “holy nation” today? Are we doing any better than the original people (Exod. 19:6)?
**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** *Isaiah 65, 66; Revelation 21, 22.*

1. Contrast Isaiah 65:20, which says, “for the child shall die an hundred years old” with Revelation 21:4, which states, “there shall be no more death.” Give an explanation for this apparent contradiction.

2. Isaiah 66:19, 20 may be the first scriptural reference to the idea of being a witness to nonbelievers (Gentiles). Examining this text helps us to understand why or how the Pharisees rejected the prophecies about Jesus found in Isaiah. The idea of preaching to and saving Gentiles should not have been a new concept to those who prided themselves in knowing and living by the Word of God. Yet, they were agitated and offended when Christ and His disciples preached to Gentiles. When you are baptized, you present your body as “a living sacrifice,” an offering unto God (Rom. 12:1). How does Christ’s admonition in Matthew 28:19 further prove that He and His Father are One?

3. How does Isaiah 66:21 encourage converts that God still has a purpose for them in His ministry? What does this text say to well-seasoned Christians about encouraging new believers to be active in the church?

4. Compare Isaiah 65 and 66 with Revelation 21 and 22. How do the words of Isaiah prove to be prophetic when looking at the words of John the revelator? How do Isaiah’s words prove the statement in Malachi 3:6 that God does not change? The fact that God provided these warnings, instructions, and encouragement in both the Old and the New Testament proves that He has given people throughout the ages an opportunity to know Him and accept His Son. It also dispels the argument that the Old and New Testaments contradict each other.

“There we shall know even as also we are known. There the loves and sympathies that God has planted in the soul will find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages, the sacred fellowship that binds together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’—all are among the experiences of the hereafter.

“There will be music there, and song, such music and song as, save in the visions of God, no mortal ear has heard or mind conceived.
Community of Faith (Isa. 66:21).

The Israelites were “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6, NRSV) with special priests set apart to represent them as worship leaders. But in the future, some Gentiles would become worship leaders (Isa. 66:21).

How would this change affect the renewed community of faith? See Matt. 28:19, Acts 26:20, Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11, 1 Tim. 3:16.

In God’s “new world order,” Gentiles would not only join God’s people, they would be equal partners with Jews in a combined community of faith that would be a “royal priesthood.” Therefore, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles would become functionally irrelevant.

When was this prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled?

Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, proclaimed: “There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:28, 29, NRSV).

Becoming heirs of the promise and therefore an exalted “royal priesthood” was not a mandate for smug elitism but a commission to join the Jews in proclaiming “the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2 Pet. 2:9, NRSV; compare Isa. 66:19).

The elevation of Gentiles did not entitle Jews to grumble that God was unfair in giving them the same reward. Nor did it entitle Gentiles to treat their Jewish brothers and sisters with disrespect any more than workers hired late in the day should look down on those hired earlier (compare Matt. 20:1-16). The Jews had first been “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2, NRSV) as God’s channel of revelation. Paul wrote to Gentiles: “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches” (Rom. 11:17, 18, NRSV).

Why, in light of the Cross, in light of the gospel commission, is any kind of spiritual or ethnic or even political elitism so abhorrent in the sight of God? Look closely at yourself; are you harboring any sense of spiritual or ethnic superiority? If so, repent!
TEACHERS COMMENTS

“‘As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there.’ Psalm 87:7. ‘They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord.’ Isaiah 24:14.

“‘For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.’ Isaiah 51:3.

“There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul.”—Ellen G. White, Education, pp. 306, 307.

Witnessing

You probably would not refuse a gift based on the wrapping paper. After all, wrapping paper rarely has anything to do with the gift inside.

If, however, you were foolish enough to refuse a gift because of its packaging, you most likely would miss receiving a lovely gift.

The above scenario is similar to what would happen if you remained aloof from people who were a bit different from you in their culture, language, gender, appearance, physical or mental health, etc. All these things, and more, contribute to a person’s identity. But unless you have arrived at the very core or essence of each separate individual by personally getting to know him or her, you have only perceived who he or she is through your five senses.

Our church is made up of more than twelve million individuals representing hundreds of nations around the globe. What a rich tapestry of heritage this brings to our denomination as a whole and to each one of us individually! The ribbon that weaves around each one of us, binding us together for eternity, is the love we share for our heavenly Father. Just imagine what heaven and the new earth will be like because of this love.

This week, think of someone in your local church who is quite different from you yet bound to you by that ribbon of love for God. Write or call this person to express your appreciation for his or her contribution to God’s church and your life. Pray with this person that God will continue to bless your friendship and that His coming will be soon.
So Shall Your Seed and Your Name Remain (Isa. 66:22-24).

One of the most wonderful promises in Isaiah is found in Isaiah 66:22. Read it carefully. In the new heavens and the new earth, our seed and our name shall remain—forever. No more blotting out, or cutting off, or grafting in, plucking up, or uprooting. We have here a promise of eternal life in a world made new—a world without sin, without death, without suffering, a new heaven and a new earth, the final and complete fulfillment of our Christian faith, the consummation of what Christ had accomplished for us at the Cross.

**Why** are there new moons along with Sabbaths in the depiction of the new heavens and the new earth as presented in Isaiah 66:23?

Though there are a number of different ways to look at this difficult text, one approach is this: God created the Sabbath before the sacrificial system existed (Gen. 2:2, 3). So, although Sabbaths were honored by the ritual system, they are not dependent upon it. Thus, they continue uninterrupted throughout the restoration period, on into the new earth. There is no indication in the Bible that new moons were legitimate days of worship apart from the sacrificial system. But perhaps there will be worship days (but not necessarily rest days like weekly Sabbaths) in the new earth, possibly in connection with the monthly cycle of the tree of life (Rev. 22:2).

Whatever specific meaning Isaiah 66:23, the crucial point seems to be that God’s people will be worshiping Him throughout all eternity.

**Why** does Isaiah end with the negative picture of saved people looking at the corpses of rebels destroyed by God (vs. 24)?

As a graphic warning to the people of his day, Isaiah encapsulates the contrast between faithful survivors of the Babylonian destruction and rebels, who would be destroyed. This is not everlasting torment: The rebels are dead, killed by “fire,” a destruction that was not quenched until it did its job so that the re-creation of Jerusalem could begin.

Isaiah’s warning points forward to an ultimate fulfillment prophesied by the book of Revelation: Destruction of sinners, Satan, and death in a lake of fire (Revelation 20), after which there will be “a new heaven and a new earth,” “a holy ‘new Jerusalem,’” “and no more weeping or pain, ‘for the first things have passed away’” (Rev. 21:1-4, NRSV; compare Isa. 65:17-19), a new existence, with eternal life for all who are redeemed from the earth.
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Magnets pull opposites together, and they are hard to disconnect once they become attached to each other. Is it possible that we can use our love for Jesus and the plan of salvation like a magnet in attracting nonbelievers to His message? Would it not be great if the magnetic connection between all of us became so strong that we would be united for all of eternity?

Thought Questions:
1. The scientific community focuses on developing new cures and means by which people may live longer. Cryogenics (placing the body in a frozen state following death) is emerging as one possible way to do this. However, is this really the way we want to go? Why should the quality of life be more important than the quantity of time we spend on earth? We must ask ourselves two questions: (1) If we live longer, will we not perpetuate living in a sinful state and delay Christ’s coming? (2) Will living longer give us more time to save more people?

2. Jesus leveled the playing field centuries ago when He equalized the inherent value of Jews and Gentiles. Yet, it appears that God’s people still struggle with treating one another as equals. What continues to make this an issue in our personal lives and within the church?

Application Questions:
1. Christians know it takes human involvement to spread salvation. All of us can be involved in some way, whether on a layperson’s or worker’s basis, paid or unpaid. “In the very family, the neighborhood, the town, where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 141. Discuss some of the challenges of mission service. What are some of the positive aspects?

2. Review Hymn 213 from The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal. How do you plan to share with others that Jesus is coming soon? Prepare your heart for His return.

“...And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.

...‘And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.’

Revelation 5:13.

...The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Why is the promise of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth so basic to our Christian belief? What good would our faith be without that promise?

2. Read 2 Peter 3:10-14. How do these verses reflect the same idea presented in Isaiah 66?

**Summary:** Isaiah presents a vision of staggering scope. Not only would God purge and restore His community of faith; He would enlarge its borders to encompass all nations. Ultimately the re-creation of His community would lead to the re-creation of planet Earth, where His presence would be the ultimate comfort of His people.