

APRIL-JUNE

# Isaiah:

## What's This World Coming To?

**Q**  
**2004**



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide  
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

# Isaiah: What's This World Coming To?



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The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

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## This Quarter's Illustrator



Joanna Teciorowska-Jarosinski was born in Poland. After graduating with a master's degree from The Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, she traveled with her husband Janek (also an artist) for more than a year throughout Europe and Morocco. After living for a time in Vancouver, Canada, Joanna and Janek currently live in Miami, Florida, where they paint (mostly commissioned murals) and decorate.

# Getting the Most Out of CQ

## **FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW**

*CQ* is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

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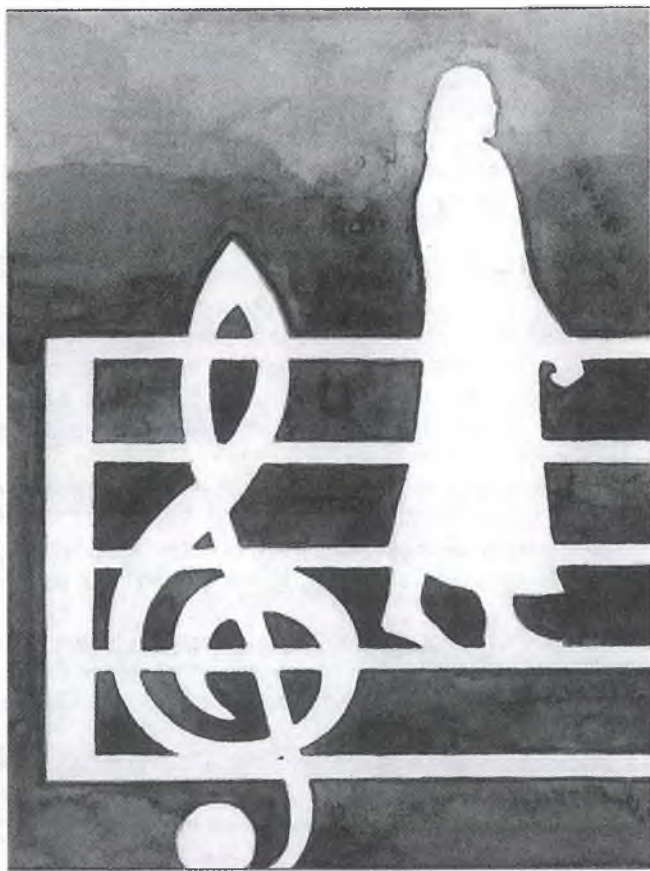
## **POINTERS FOR STUDY**

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
  - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
  - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
  - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
  - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
  - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
  - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
  - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

## **CQ AND THE CHURCH**

*CQ* is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

# Crisis of identity



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“ ‘Come now, let us argue this out,’ says the Lord. ‘No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool’  
(Isa. 1:18, NLT).

# "Saith Your God"

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 40:1, 2

" 'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God. 'Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned' " (Isa. 40:1, 2, NKJV).

G. F. Händel, in a 24-day period, wrote what later became his most successful and best-known oratorio. This oratorio named *The Messiah* was composed in the year 1741, exactly 2,431 years after the prophet Isaiah wrote, in the year 690 B.C., the powerful and unforgettable words contained within the profound music in *The Messiah*. It is not hard at all to understand why Händel would make use of these words that are so full of hope and promises. During their own times, and in different forms, they found these inspired words

**They found these inspired words  
as vehicles of divine thoughts.**

as vehicles of divine thoughts. And it was these God-inspired words that drove Händel to compose "Comfort Ye My People," one of the recitatives of *The Messiah*.

In those times, when the people of Judah were oppressed by enemy forces and they had rebelled and lost their identity, nothing else, other than these promises given by God, were able to contain the hope that could keep their faith alive through the rough trials.

In Isaiah 40:1, 2, we can see, and almost hear, the word of God in trying to restore His people to Himself as He says: "'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God. 'Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins' " (NKJV).

As in the desperate times of Isaiah and the dramatic and sophisticated composing days of Händel, these strong words, "saith your God," speak to us still in a powerful way today. This message that has been brought to us today may be a warning, may be a promise, but it is surely an ownership stamp. God really does not want us to go through what the people of Judah went through when they lost their true identity. We do not have to wander around without direction, because we are His. He is our true identity. How great it is to belong to the Lord.

\*Adapted from the introductory note of G. F. Händel, *The Messiah* (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1912), p. iii.

Sunday  
March 28

## Could Be . . . Will Be?

### LOGOS

Isa. 1:1-31; 5:1-7

*"By doing what is fair, Jerusalem will be free again. By doing what is right, her people who come back to the Lord will have freedom. But sinners and those who turn against him will be destroyed; those who have left the Lord will die" (Isa. 1:27, 28, NCV).*

The book of Isaiah opens with several stunning pictures of possibility contrasted with probability. What could be is clear. What will be is more likely. Through Isaiah, God wrings His hands over His people. Look at what they are! But oh, what they could be! So we see a picture of God in anguish: Must He destroy His people when He would so much rather heal them?

In Isaiah 1, the disease of sin is deeply drawn in dark colors: Israel is a "sinful nation" (verse 4, NKJV), "children who are corrupters" (verse 4, NKJV), "they

have forsaken the Lord" (verse 4, NKJV), "the whole head is sick" (verse 5, NKJV), "From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or

**He aims the artillery of his word right at the worship rituals of Judaism.**

soothed with ointment" (verse 6, NKJV), "a hut in a garden of cucumbers" (verse 8, NKJV). This is not unbelievers that Isaiah describes. This is the church. In verse 10, he sharpens the focus to Jerusalem, the very center of God's worship on all the earth. They were used to thinking about the heathen in these kinds of pictures. But Isaiah shines the flashlight of God's word on the source of the bad smell, and, look . . . it is Jerusalem!

This was a disturbing picture to religious Jews in Isaiah's time. They might have been tempted to say that this applied to the irreligious among them. But Isaiah will have none of it. In verses 10-17 he aims the artillery of his word right at the worship rituals of Judaism. God is sick of it all. "Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me" (verse 13, NKJV). "Your New Moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them" (verse 14, NKJV). "Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood" (verse 15, NKJV). God is just sick and tired of ritual without reality. There is no point in coming to worship when there is no heart in it. If the ritual is just being a cover for sin that destroys, then do not ask God to carry that burden.

---

Even as God rails against the horrors of sin in His people, He turns wistfully to the power He has to save. “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’ ” (verse 18, NKJV). “Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her penitents with righteousness” (verse 27, NKJV). What was in question was not God’s power. He could cure sin. The problem was rather with the will of the people. They uttered prayers, but they never spoke to God. They had no concept of His will. They had no common ground with God. They could not pray meaningfully. Their heart was not with God. They looked for the easy buck, and found it by oppressing the poor and widows. Then they returned to empty ritual. There was no reality in their worship. God was left with determined sinners, who never really talked to Him. He faced stubborn ritual with no heart of worship. They said His name, but they did not know Him.

God prefers mercy. There is some terrible time, however, when mercy becomes destruction. There comes a time to bulldoze the farm. In Isaiah 5 God talks about His vineyard. In California’s Napa Valley there are thousands of acres of very valuable vineyards. The grapes are incredibly sweet there. In my childhood, I lived on a farm farther north, where there were wild grapes growing. With the courage of childhood, I used to eat those wild grapes. Oh, they were sour! There would be no doubt what would happen to a field of those wild grapes in the Napa Valley. They would be bulldozed to make room for sweet grapes and to protect them against diseases of wild grapes. The land is too valuable to grow sour grapes. So God will bulldoze Jerusalem. His land is too valuable to grow sinners determined to sin.

There is no point in studying Isaiah without applying the message to ourselves. There are habits in our lives that sin compels. We may make excuses, but to God these habits just look like oozing sores. Why don’t we ask Him to bandage them? There are portions of our worship that are ritual without reality. He is tired of carrying that load. When will we really seek to know Him? Our sins must be brought to Him for cleaning. Our habits must be changed by His power. We Seventh-day Adventists are very proud of our corporate obedience. We keep the Sabbath. We wash one another’s feet, etc., etc. But look at what God says about Sabbath: “‘The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting’ ” (verse 13). It looks as if God wants more than our corporate reforms. It looks as if God wants our personal loyalty. It looks as if God wants our hearts.

Jesus is coming soon. He is looking for sweet grapes. He is about to bulldoze all the sour stuff. Come do what is fair and be free again.

## **REACT**

1. What is the difference between corporate obedience and personal obedience to God? Which type of obedience is more likely to be pleasing to God?

2. God desires us to seek the principles behind our actions. What are God’s ultimate principles that govern our behavior with Him and other people?

## Our God Is Reasonable

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 1:18

"The reign of Uzziah was drawing to a close, and Jotham was already bearing many of the burdens of state, when Isaiah, of the royal line, was called, while yet a young man, to the prophetic mission. The times in which Isaiah was to labor were fraught with peculiar peril to the people of God. . . . Already grave perils were threatening the peace of the southern kingdom. The divine protection was being removed, and the Assyrian forces were about to overspread the land of Judah.

"But the dangers from without, overwhelming though they seemed, were not so serious as the dangers from within. It was the perversity of his people that brought

**"In this promise the worst  
of sinners may find  
comfort and hope."**

to the Lord's servant the greatest perplexity and the deepest depression. By their apostasy and rebellion those who should have been standing as light bearers among the nations were inviting the judgments of God.

Many of the evils which were hastening the swift destruction of the northern kingdom, and which had recently been denounced in unmistakable terms by Hosea and Amos, were fast corrupting the kingdom of Judah.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah 1:18 is an invitation and a promise to Judah and to us today. "God here invites men to meet with Him for a free and frank discussion of their problems. He is not an inconsiderate judge or an arbitrary tyrant, but a kindly father and friend. . . . God is reasonable, and desires men to realize that it is to their advantage to forsake sin and to walk in the ways of righteousness. Man's reasoning powers were given him to use, and he can make no better use of them than to discover the benefits of obedience and the woes of transgression.

"In this promise the worst of sinners may find comfort and hope. God here assures us that however guilty we may have been in the past, however deep dyed our sin may have been, it is possible to be restored to purity and holiness. This promise deals not only with the results of sin but with sin itself. It can be eradicated and completely put out of the life. With the help of God the sinner may secure complete mastery over his every besetment."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 305, 306.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 99.



# Valiant Visionary

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 1:1

Open the book of Isaiah. Read the introductory phrase. "The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz" (verse 1, NKJV). This seemingly ordinary introduction springs to life when we discover that Isaiah means "salvation of Yahweh" or "Yahweh is salvation." Instantly we know Isaiah's mission. The redemption of God's people is priority.

Isaiah also had a tremendous vision of God and the glory in store for God's people. Although the first chapters deal with the invasion by Assyria, the last chapters deal with the deliverance from Babylon. In his vision, like other prophets, he is given warning, admonition, and instruction.

Isaiah was active over an extraordinary length of time. He was called to be a prophet as a young man somewhere between 750 and 739 B.C. He served as a prophet an estimated 40 to 60 years. He prophesied during the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This also included the reigns of Assyrian rulers: Tiglath-pileser III (745–727), Shalmeneser V (727–722), Sargon II (722–705), Sennacherib (705–681), and Esarhaddon (681–669). With the death of King Uzziah, Israel said goodbye to the prosperity of the previous 50 years, which had been relatively peaceful. Large-scale aggression was about to descend; shockwaves were about to be felt.

These were frightening times. Assyria was at the height of its power. No country seemed able to stem the tide of its power that swept over the Near Eastern world like a plague. According to *The Jerusalem Mosaic*, "Isaiah was witness to one of the most turbulent periods in Jerusalem's history, from

**These were frightening times.**

both the political and the religious standpoint. His status enabled him to take an active part in events, and in some cases to guide them."<sup>\*</sup> He encouraged the kings of Judah to choose quiet faith rather than desperate alliances. Hezekiah's attempts at an alliance with Egypt and the Babylonian king were contested by Isaiah, who maintained that they showed a lack of faith.

It appears that Isaiah had free access to the palace in Jerusalem. There are some suggestions that he even belonged to the aristocracy. Yet this did not stop him from speaking out against the corruption of the ruling class and being the spokesperson of the ordinary people who were being victimized by the rampant corruption. He is considered to be the most political of the prophets.

\* *The Jerusalem Mosaic* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995).

Wednesday  
March 31

# How to Keep Faith During Turmoil

## HOW-TO

Ps. 46:10; Isa. 7:3, 4, 7

Ahaz was the king of Judah. During his reign he received a message that two countries had joined together to come against his country in war. He and his people felt that they had no chance of winning a war with these two powerful forces. They became very frightened and discouraged. But God who knows all and sees all was watching over Ahaz and his people and came to their rescue. He sent Isaiah to comfort Ahaz. Go out to meet Ahaz, He said. "Tell him to be careful, keep calm, and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of their fierce anger" (Isa. 7:34, my paraphrase).

Have you ever faced a situation in your life that caused you to become fearful and dismayed? Most of us have. We have faced some situation that we felt we could not handle and did not know where to turn. But just as God sent Isaiah to comfort Ahaz, He still has a word for His people today. They can still have confidence that no matter what comes up against them they need not fear, because the same God who spoke to Isaiah back then speaks to His people today. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted

## What was it that Ahaz should have known?

among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:10, 11, NKJV).

What was it that Ahaz should have known that we should also know today?

First, we can always put our trust in God and His promises, for they are true. He has promised to be with us always (Matt. 28:20). We must take Him at His word, for it is when we believe that God answers our prayers.

Second, our God is omniscient. He knows what the end results will be. When we trust Him to take charge of our lives, we can move forward without fear, knowing that He will win the battle no matter what the odds.

And, finally, God is faithful. Matthew 24:35 states that "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (NKJV).

God sent Isaiah to comfort His people long ago. Today we have the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and strengthen us, so that we, too, can be faithful, even in the midst of turmoil.

## REACT

Why do you think it was necessary to send the Holy Spirit when we had the written Word?

---

*Jessie Beard, Erie, Pennsylvania*

# The Audacity of an Angel

## OPINION

Isa. 14:13, 14

Because of his brightness, Lucifer was considered a daystar. Ezekiel 28:13-15 gives us a picture of Lucifer's perfection. We can see that he allowed that brightness and beauty to distort his focus to the extent that he wanted to compete with God. Sometimes we become too familiar with those who may be in higher positions than we are, and lose the respect that we may have once had for them. Regardless of our status in life, however, we are all equal. But it should never be the same with God. We must at all times stand in awe of Him, who is the Creator of all things.

**We can all identify with wanting something we cannot have.**

The key text for today describes the thoughts of Lucifer as he lost his identity and desired to be above God. The question is: Why did Lucifer fall from being "perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you"? (verse 15, NKJV). It is because he had the audacity to compare himself with God. He doubted that God was who He said He is.

We can all identify with wanting something we cannot have, such as a job we are not fully qualified for. At such times we don't see things as they really are and may even go to such extremes in behaviors as those displayed by Lucifer—launching attacks on the characters of others in an effort to draw attention to ourselves. Could we, like Lucifer, be in danger of allowing pride and vanity to corrupt our wisdom?

## REACT

1. In a moment of perfect honesty, identify the aspect of your life in which you are most vulnerable to want to make yourself look better?
2. How can we structure our lives in such a way as to maintain our identity in God and not in ourselves? Be specific.
3. Who, in a high position of responsibility, would you like to pray for today?
4. The Bible's command not to covet is unique among laws, demonstrating that sin begins in the heart. What does the command against covetousness have to say about our relations with God, others, and possessions?
5. God has plans for each of us. How can we know when we are in His will? How can we seek God's guidance?

Friday  
April 2

# The God of Prophets

## EXPLORATION

Isa. 1:1-31; 5:1-7; 40:1, 2; Ps. 46:10, 11

## CONCLUDE

When we think of a prophet, our first reaction is to think of someone making dramatic predictions of the future. Though there are elements of this in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, more often God used these men to repeatedly call the people of Israel—God's people—back to a proper relationship with God. When they wandered away from God and forgot His love and His laws, Isaiah and the other prophets were called by God to point out their wrongdoing, warn them of the consequences, and remind them of God's love and forgiveness. It was often a difficult and dangerous task, but God was their source of strength and they were motivated by the hope they preached.

## CONSIDER

- Writing a script for a television commercial for God's stain-removing action as set out in Isaiah 1:18.
- Listening to a good quality recording of Handel's *Messiah* all the way through. Alternatively, listening to the *Young Messiah*, a contemporary adaptation of Handel's classic.
- Holding a tasting session with a group of friends: find the sourest fruit juice available (e.g., freshly squeezed lemon juice) and compare it with sweet, good-quality grape juice or another favorite.
- Writing a letter to an appropriate member of your government regarding an issue about which you feel strongly.
- Researching the rules of formal public debates and organizing such a debate on a relevant topic in your Sabbath School class.
- Finding a quiet place and allowing yourself time to "be still" and reflect upon God and His goodness—writing down some of your thoughts to which you can refer in times of stress.

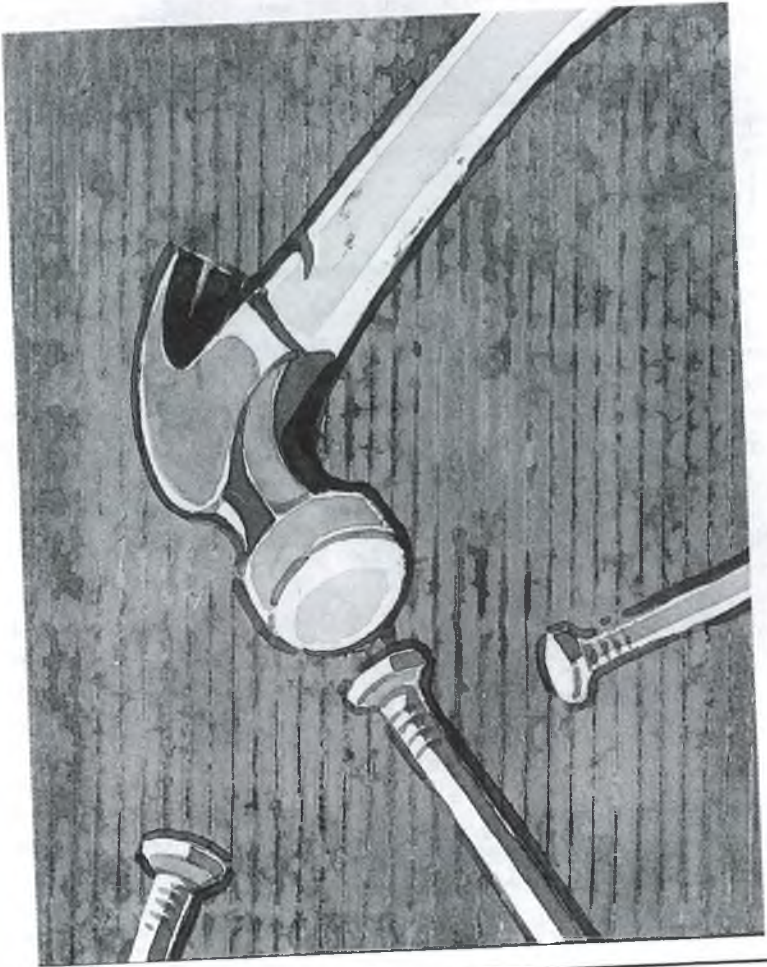
## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 25, 26.

Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read*, chap. 6; Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who, "Isaiah."*

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# Crisis of Leadership



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"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple" (Isa 6:1, NKJV).

# Leadership: In Ordinary Moments

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 6:3, 5, 7-10, 13; John 5:19; 15:5, 7, 8

A new baby coos and people smile. This experience is common in most families. We are accustomed to the patterns of our lives, but things aren't always what they seem. Centuries ago God became one of us. In a miraculous moment that must have seemed ordinary to almost everyone, Divinity was born human

and began to eat, sleep, work, and play as one of us, experiencing our humanity as a kinsman.

Max Lucado says that it seems almost irreverent to think of God as

**How challenging it is to imagine  
God-with-us hitting His thumb  
with a hammer.**

being susceptible to our human experience. To visualize God growing weary, dirty, hungry, or cold is difficult, but how much more challenging it is to imagine God-with-us wiping sweat from His eyes or hitting His thumb with a hammer.\*

As God-with-us, Jesus' mission statement included reflecting his Father's holiness in "the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5, KJV), and He frequently spent the early morning hours in prayer, meditating on Scripture. Considered individually, those moments must have seemed ordinary, but they were the secret of His power as He interacted with people who needed healing and people who wanted to kill Him. He must have noted the similarity of circumstances when He read Isaiah's story.

All of Judah had heard the news. The king was dead, and in their rebellious state the nation feared that God had turned His back. Despair cloaked the people, and destruction seemed to ride every dust cloud. No doubt Isaiah had already heard false alarms, "Look, the Assyrians!" Judah's destruction seemed imminent because they had broken their covenant of safety.

Surrounded by misery and, in what must have seemed like another ordinary moment, Isaiah saw in the temple a holy God surrounded by angels. There misery met holiness, and, like the lepers, Isaiah cried out, "Unclean, unclean!" God did not leave the prophet to despair but sent a coal from His altar to provide healing.

The mission has not changed: "Go and tell this people." The message has not changed: "Without Me you can do nothing." And the method must not change: "Abide in Me."

\*Max Lucado, *God Came Near* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1987).

# How to Follow God's Will

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 6:5

Isaiah wrote a book full of prophecies, encouragement, warnings, and instructions, written in Judah during the reigns from Uzziah (or Azariah) to Hezekiah. Uzziah was one of several kings who are described as partially doing the will of the Lord. The book of 2 Kings says that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but that he did not remove the high places, where the people continued to offer sacrifices.

The year that Uzziah died, Isaiah experienced a vision of God's glory, described in Isaiah 6, which filled him with fear of death: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King" (verse 5, NKJV).

Many people are surprised by these words. Isaiah and Judah seem to have a cussing problem. But the key is in the response of the angel, given in the next two verses. An angel flies to him with a live coal, and touches his lips with it. Then the angel says, "This has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged" (verse 7, NKJV). From this we can see that both Isaiah and the angel used the term "unclean lips" to represent sin in general. When Isaiah's lips were cleansed with the coal, the angel said that his sin was removed.

Then Isaiah hears God asking whom He should send, and Isaiah is commissioned as a prophet to Judah. We know that Isaiah's description of Judah's sinfulness is accurate, because as we saw earlier, they were still sacrificing to false gods.

This vision of Isaiah is filled with hope and instruction for us. The hope is found in the fact that just as Isaiah's sin was cleansed, ours can also be. The vision gives four steps in following God's will. First, we must recognize our sin. Focusing on the character and glory of God brings this realization. Second, we must accept the forgiveness of God, which is available before we ask for it. Third, we must listen to God's Word. This can be given to us in many forms, from the Bible, to a vision or dream, to our own consciences. Finally, we must follow the instructions we receive.

## REACT

Contemplate the four steps (recognition of sin, acceptance of forgiveness, listening to God, and following instructions). From your life experience which step is the most difficult? Why?

Many people are surprised  
by these words.

Monday  
April 5

## An Eagerness to Speak

**LOGOS**

Isa. 6:1-13

The vision found in Isaiah 6 was given during a low point for Israel. Their sin had led them to reject the counsel of God. As a result, the previously undefeated Assyrian army had Jerusalem in its sights. The Lord wanted to show Isaiah that He was still in control, even though things were looking very grim. God wanted His people to know that even “when perils encompass God’s people and the powers of darkness seem about to prevail, God calls them to look up to Him . . . that they may take hope and courage.”<sup>1</sup>

### Realization

“Isaiah was in the presence of the Lord. The angels present were impressed by God’s perfect holiness of character,”<sup>2</sup> and Isaiah realized the power and glory present at the throne of God. This is what God desired: that Isaiah should realize the

**Isaiah’s eagerness to speak  
in the presence of the Lord  
is astounding.**

glory of God and be able to show it constantly to the people of Israel.

It was here that Isaiah realized his exceeding sinfulness and said, “Woe is me, for I am undone.” The word

undone literally means “cut off, destroyed.”<sup>3</sup> Here is the realization of the psalmist when he cried out, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled” (Ps. 6:2, NKJV). Isaiah knew that “‘out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks’” (Matt. 12:34, NKJV), and the mournful cry that his lips were not clean is truly a statement of his heart’s condition when exposed to the searching glory of God. Those who come to this point are those of whom Jesus spoke in answering the self-righteous Pharisees: “‘I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’” (Mark 2:17, NKJV).

### Relief

Relief, however, is waiting to be found. “The coal . . . represented the purifying and refining power of divine grace.”<sup>4</sup> The touch of it, the greatest need of Israel then and now, inspired Isaiah to help the Israelites of his day to experience the same. Today, the burning desire of those whose lips have been touched by the refining power and divine grace of God compels them to help the people in their lives to have this same experience.



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## Reach

Isaiah's eagerness to speak in the presence of the Lord is astounding. Isaiah is only minutes removed from the woeful cry of despair and an overwhelming awareness of his unworthiness. Now, purified by the Holy One, Isaiah finds freedom to speak and also the worthiness to accept the commission of God.

The discourse between the Lord and Paul in Acts 9 reveals great similarity. After finding out whose presence shone so bright, Paul asks the Lord, "What do you want me to do?" Both of these men were greatly used by God. Both began their ministry in the presence of the Almighty. Both wanted eagerly to do whatever the Lord called them to do.

Isaiah felt the desire to deliver God's message, regardless of what it was. In Isaiah's case, the message did not strike a pleasant chord, but the willingness remained unwavering. This must be the heart of every messenger of God; to be willing to do or say whatever the Lord wants, wherever He wants it.

## Response

How easy it would have been for Isaiah to ask the Lord for a brighter, easier, more agreeable message. But if he had that thought, it most assuredly did not take hold of his mind. He did have a question, though it showed no lack of faith in his Lord, nor did he ask for knowledge that would benefit only himself. Isaiah realized that the question he was about to ask would doubtless be heard from the lips of many of his brethren. He showed wisdom in asking God, "How long?" God designed us to be dynamic creatures and to anticipate, be curious, and use wisdom, and then to use those abilities to further the cause of God.

## REACT

1. How does the expression "unclean lips" apply to you?
2. Why are beholding, abiding, and reflecting the only methods of healing for our uncleanness?
3. Our journeys are constantly changing, growing, and repeating cycles as we encounter a variety of circumstances. Which aspect (realization, relief, reach, or response) are you currently experiencing in your life? What needs to happen to move you to the next phase?
4. Both Paul and Isaiah are described as "eagerly" wanting to do whatever God called them to do. How would you define "eager," and how do you demonstrate it?

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1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p.128.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 107.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 129.

Tuesday  
April 6

## "Take the Coal, Cleanse My Lips"

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 6:1-13

"Isaiah had a message from the God of heaven to give to the backsliding people of Israel, and he gave them this message. He knew what elements he had to deal with; he knew the stubbornness and perversity of the heart, and how hard it would be to make any impression upon them. As he stood in the portico of the temple, the Lord revealed Himself to him. The veil of the temple was withdrawn, the

**The servant does not seek  
his own way.**

door lifted, and he had a view of the holy of holies within the veil. He saw the God of Israel before the throne high and lifted up, and the train of His glory filled the temple. As Isaiah senses his

own sinfulness, he cries out, 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' And there was seen the hand that took the live coal from off the altar, and touched his lips, and bade him be clean. Then he was ready to go with the message, and he said, 'Send me'; for he knew that the Spirit of God would be with the message."

The key to Isaiah's ability to be used by God was in his admittance of his helpless condition. It is only in full submission that one truly becomes a servant. Isaiah could not cleanse himself, but allowed God to cleanse him, preparing him for the task ahead.

"Some things were shown me in reference to the institutions among us and the duties and dangers of those who occupy a leading position in connection with them. I saw that these men have been raised up to do a special work as God's instruments, to be led, guided, and controlled by His Spirit. They are to answer the claims of God and never to feel that they are their own property and that they can employ their powers as they shall deem most profitable to themselves. Although it is their purpose to be and to do right, yet they will most surely err unless they are constant learners in the school of Christ. Their only safety is in humbly walking with God."<sup>2</sup>

Those employed by God are not their own. The servant does not seek his own way but humbly obeys his master. This is the call to those who would call themselves Christ's. We are secure when through submission we are used by God to fulfill His plans, thus enriching and blessing our lives.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1141.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 537, 538.

# How to Be a Leadable Leader

## HOW-TO

### Isaiah 6

Isaiah was a leader whose great faith under pressure produced some of the most beautiful and moving passages in literature. But when the young Isaiah was first called to take God's messages of reproof, he shrank from the task, feeling his complete inability to measure up to God's call.

How did this fearful young man develop into the eloquent prophet who carried God's words of correction and hope to a reluctant and rebellious people for more than sixty years? How can we become the same kind of servant, dedicated no matter the cost?

Heavenly coals can take  
many forms.

**1. Find the power.** As long as Isaiah looked inward, all he found were the reasons he didn't have what it took to reform the wayward nation. But then Isaiah beheld in a vision the purity and perfection of the Almighty God. When we, with Isaiah, behold God, we will realize that our calling isn't about us and all the things we can't do. It is about God and all the things He can do.

**2. Accept the preparation.** After seeing God's power, Isaiah was painfully aware of his own sinful condition. At this point, he wasn't yet ready to be God's messenger. Before God sent him to do anything, He sent forgiveness and preparation to Isaiah in the form of a hot, heavenly coal.

Heavenly coals can take many forms. We always have the choice to reject them. But in order to be equipped for ministry, we must first accept the forgiveness and preparation that God sends to us.

**3. Go and speak.** True ministry is taking God's message to the people, not our own message. We are needed to sound God's call with unmistakable clearness. God asks for a lifetime of patient, courageous ministry as we answer His call to go forth.

## REACT

1. God calls us to turn our own goals to His. Does your vision for your life match God's? Does everyone have a set destiny God wants them to achieve? How much flexibility is there in life?

2. God calls us to something greater than ourselves. Isaiah, like Moses and other messengers chosen by God, at first stated reasons that he wasn't worthy to serve God in such a way. In what aspect of your life do you especially feel a need for God's transforming grace?

Thursday  
April 8

## Burned or Burnished for Service?

### OPINION

Isa. 6:5, 7, 8

### Crises always call for leadership and trust.

A leader is one who guides or directs others, through authority or influence. Leadership may be inherited, bestowed, or assumed. Through a vision, God thrust Isaiah into leadership during a critical moment of Judah's history, in the year that King Uzziah died. King Uzziah had been Judah's strong voice against Assyrian aggression. In their state of rebellion against God, Judah could not assume divine protection, and after King Uzziah's death, without God or their trusted leader, Judah feared that Assyria would overrun the whole world.

Like Judah, in our present crises we also need proven leaders who faithfully stand between us and the aggressor. Also like Judah, we may find ourselves in a state of rebellion and insecurity, surrounded by bogus advisors and overwhelmed by their inconsistent advice. Preoccupied with personal crisis, our individual vision may become myopic, causing us to leave others to solve their own problems. Memorable leaders are people who step forward in such moments, offering a clear sense of direction and purpose.

Isaiah was acquainted with the sins of his people, and after seeing the vision of the Lord in the holy temple, he was especially aware of his own condition. In the presence of God's holiness, he was overwhelmed by his own sinfulness.

Crises always call for leadership and trust. For his generation, Isaiah answered the question asked in verse 8, "Who will go for us?" In our generation the question may remain unanswered unless contemporary Isaiahs catch a similar vision. These leaders, like Isaiah, must comprehend the larger crisis, the inadequacy of their human competence, and the necessity and availability of divine resources. It is not enough for a leader to say "Here am I; send me" without first experiencing the divine touch of the coal from God's altar.

Lasting authority and influence are earned, and trust in a leader grows through repeated dependability. Acknowledged shortcomings often mark the legends that follow exceptional leaders, but self-importance and denied faults destroy credibility. Isaiah's acknowledgment of his unclean lips prepared him to receive God's solution. Among the many current leadership models available to a society, sensitized by failed leadership, leading from the sidelines is perhaps the most appropriate. Leadership may be defined as one perplexed individual saying to another, "I don't know the answer, but I know where to find the answer."

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*Jessie Thompson, Houston, Texas*

# Going for the Glory

## EXPLORATION

Isa. 6:1-8

## CONCLUDE

Like Isaiah we live in a time when God's people often battle nonstop temptation to remain true to Him. As we seek the Lord's presence, and as He reveals Himself to us, we indeed discover how unworthy we are—in our own strength and with our own filthy-rag righteousness—even to hope for eternity, let alone be anything like a credible witness of Him. Yet once we experience God's amazing love for us and His desire and power to cleanse us, we can take courage—as Isaiah did—to be heralds of heaven's love.

## CONSIDER

- Keeping a week-long “Dow Jones” chart of how often you see God at work. Write the numbers 1 to 10 on the vertical axis, and the days of the week on the horizontal. Then each day during your devotional time, make notes about—and rate on the vertical scale—the previous day's “God-sightings.”
- Thinking back over your favorite walking or hiking route. Go on that hike again within the next few days, and this time think of it as a parable of your spiritual journey. Which parts are easiest? Which most difficult? What are the delights—and the dangers?
- Closing your eyes and picturing Isaiah's temple vision. What do you think God's glory looks like—feels like—sounds like—smells like? Do you think Isaiah's heart rate went up or down? How did he feel?
- Emailing or chatting with someone, describing an experience when you sensed that God had come very close to you.
- Learning by memory the song “Refiner's Fire” (words and music by Brian Doerksen, in *Praise Time: A Collection of Songs for Youth*). Buy a tambourine or other rhythm instrument you can keep in your car to beat time as you sing the song (drive safely!).
- Doing some exploratory writing in a journal. Think about three tough issues you've always wanted to ask God about. If necessary, write enough so that you have honed these issues into focused questions. Then actually write God a prayer-letter, asking these questions. As you write, listen for His response.

## CONNECT

Jeremiah 18:6; Malachi 3:2, 3; Revelation 3:18.  
*Prophets and Kings*, chap. 25.

# When your **World** is **Falling** apart



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**“ ‘If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all’ ” (Isa. 7:9, NIV).**

# Faith—God’s Condition

## INTRODUCTION

Heb. 11:6

“Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), much less to submit to His wise and gracious leadership.”\*

Hundreds of years ago an English ambassador was on his way to Sweden. He was very worried and could not sleep. At the inn where he was staying with his advisor, he tossed about in bed and then paced the floor.

Hearing this, his advisor knocked on his door. When the ambassador appeared, the younger man said, “Will you permit me to ask you a question?”

“Certainly,” came the quick reply.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but don’t you think that God governed this world very well before you ever came into it?”

“He surely did.”

“And don’t you think He can take care of the world while you are in it?”

The question needed no answer. The ambassador got the point, said “Good night,” closed his door, and with his trust in God, slept peacefully.

We live in an age when everything moves at a frantic pace. We are taught to depend on no one but ourselves. But is this the way to have a full, successful life?

The answer is a definite No!

God is the One in whom we can believe, the One we can trust and give all our problems to. He is willing to do this. He wants to do this, but there is one condition: We must have faith in Him.

**“Don’t you think God  
can take care of the world  
while you are in it?”**

We must believe that God is really with us, helping us every step of the way. To seek Him and follow Him is what He requires of us. He has helped others. He can help you. He has a master plan for each of our lives that is greater than anything we could ever dream. This life can be yours if you trust Him completely and follow anywhere He leads. Do you have this faith?

“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6, NIV).

\*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 133, Isa. 7:9.

## LOGOS

2 Kings 16:7; 2 Chron. 28:5-15; Isa. 7:1-14

**Ahaz refused to accept  
the Lord's terms.**

displacement from a solid foundation to an unstable state. The house of David was in a crisis.

The ingredients for a major disaster loomed around the corner because of the weakness of Ahaz's

government. Ahaz deliberately displaced holy practices with unprescribed heathen offerings and sacrificial ceremonies. Idolatry was the substance of Judah's weakness. This human effort to displace God from His rightful position paved the way for instability and insecurity.

On this occasion God immediately dispatched Isaiah, the prophet of royal descent, and his son Shear-jashub (meaning "[A] remnant [shall] return") to offer a counter tactic to meet the crisis. God specifically said to Ahaz through Isaiah: "Take care, and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah" (verse 4, NASB).

Hence, the explicit command from God was issued to the house of David, assuring them of Divine protection. This move from God was urgent and imperative. Furthermore, the Lord repeated His guarantee directly to Ahaz: "Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (verse 11, NASB).

## The First Trouble

Old Testament records tell us that God intervenes to save us on one condition—that we believe. Ahaz's first wrong move was evident when he flatly said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" (verse 12, NASB). The Lord was inviting King Ahaz to reason with Him that His ways are the only means for survival. Isaiah bore to Ahaz the clear message to save God's people from impending destruction.

Ahaz refused to accept the Lord's terms. Thus, the Bible reports the consequences of relying on human strength (2 Chron. 28:5-7). We can say that the first trouble brought into the kingdom of Judah resulted from disbelief. God was displaced by the human inclination to do things on our own. Disbelief is akin to faith-



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lessness. And according to the entire testimony of the Scriptures, faithlessness certainly brings trouble.

## God Moved

When Judah was under threat by its more powerful enemies, God made His own move. Isaiah prophesied because God made a promise: “ ‘Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel’ ” (Isa. 7:13, 14, NASB). Immanuel means “God with us.” Though this prophecy foretells the coming of the Messiah sometime in the future, the immediate application of this promise is as urgent as during and after the cross of Jesus.

God offered to save the entire nation if they would only believe on the message of Isaiah. Not only did He provide a way out, but He also provided if they did not believe: to secure those who chose to remain with God.

The nameless woman in verse 14 reflects the role of a virgin carrier of the Messiah. When Jesus became flesh, it was a direct fulfillment of “God is with us.” During the time of Ahaz, the assurance of God’s Word was the Immanuel.

## The Domino Effect

God gave Ahaz a chance to decide. This decision entailed the eradication of the idols that were set up around the high places and the reformation of the temple sacrificial system. Isaiah’s job was to make sure that Ahaz received the instructions from the Lord. But instead of relying on the Lord, “Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, ‘I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram, and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me.’ And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king’s house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria” (2 Kings 16:7, 8, NASB). The act of subservience to Assyria was accompanied by the transfer of the nation’s wealth to a faithless people.

A pact with the heathen nation cemented the doom of Judah. Instead of believing God through the prophet Isaiah, Ahaz denied God’s power. Divine judgment came as a result of disbelief. Ahaz chose human friends rather than taking God as a trusted friend. The effect of his faithlessness rippled through his defenses. His heart moved with fear and he met with more misfortune. The domino effect of displacing God displaces also his grip on his kingdom.

## REACT

What is implied by God calling the two hostile kings “ ‘stubs of smoldering firebrands’ ”? (Isa. 7:4, NASB).

Monday  
April 12

## Voice of Comfort Amidst Dangers

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 40:1, 2; 59:14

Isaiah, whose name means “the salvation of Jehovah,” was called by God to labor during difficult times in Judah. “Grave perils were threatening the peace of the southern kingdom . . . but the dangers from without . . . were not so serious as the dangers from within. . . . 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.”<sup>1</sup> It was into this context that Isaiah was sent to comfort God’s people.

Today “daily papers are full of indications of a terrible conflict in the near future. . . . Men have become infatuated with vice, and every species of evil prevails. . . .

**“Daily papers are full of indications of a terrible conflict in the near future.”**

Justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.’ Isaiah 59:14. . . . The cries of starving humanity are coming up before God, while by every species of oppression and

extortion men are piling up colossal fortunes.”<sup>2</sup>

As in the days of Isaiah, so God is now comforting us amidst disasters. Our world’s situation today is not so much different from Isaiah’s. While the greatest danger seems to be the troubles of the nations, our surpassing peril is our own ignorance to our spiritual condition.

“ ‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ says your God” (Isa. 40:1, NKJV). This prophecy addressed God’s prophets, instructing them to emphasize the theme of comfort to a captive people in the land of sin distanced from their home city. God had good plans for great blessings to Israel in the future because they were His covenant people, who were never to be permanently cast away.

“Let Israel hope in God. The Master of the vineyard is even now gathering from among men of all nations and peoples the precious fruits for which He has long been waiting. Soon He will come unto His own; and in that glad day His eternal purpose for the house of Israel will finally be fulfilled. ‘He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.’ [Isaiah 27] Verse 6.”<sup>3</sup>

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 305, 306.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 11, 12.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 22.

# God, Seeking Uninterested Sinner

## EVIDENCE

2 Kings 16; 2 Chron. 28:19-23

In order to fully understand Isaiah 7, it is necessary to visit the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. As they reveal Ahaz's true character, we understand the real sentiment thinly concealed in his abrupt reply to the Lord's offer of a sign, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test" (Isa. 7:12, NIV). Both books describe him as sacrificing to idols "under every green tree" (2 Kings 16:4, NKJV), a telling exaggeration. Thus, when Isaiah brought his message of hope and deliverance from Judah's God, Ahaz wasn't interested. "Ahaz's true reason for declining was his resolve not to do God's will, but to negotiate with Assyria, and persevere in his idolatry. . . . Men often excuse their distrust in God, and trust in their own devices, by professed reverence for God."

**Ahaz's plea to Assyria  
unmistakably proves his  
true loyalties.**

Ahaz's plea to the pagan king of Assyria unmistakably proves his true loyalties: "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me" (2 Kings 16:7). "In the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord. . . . For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, 'Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me'" (2 Chron. 28:22, 23, NKJV).

Ahaz had absolutely no excuse to turn his back on Jehovah so blatantly. God allowed him every opportunity for repentance. Isaiah was sent to seek Ahaz and to deliver a promise of divine protection while Ahaz was engaged in "superintending the works for defense and cutting off the water supply from the enemy, securing the city"<sup>2</sup> in his own strength. Isaiah was directed to bring with him a tangible reminder of the promises of God, his son, bearing the name "a remnant shall return." More than that, the Lord offered to Ahaz, this openly heathen king of His chosen nation, an additional sign of His providence, an opportunity to dispel all doubt, if doubt had been Ahaz's difficulty.

But alas it was not doubt, but pride that caused Ahaz to reject every passionate plea of God and stubbornly persist in his own ill-fated course. How often are we blinded by it as well!

1. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, new clear-type edition (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, Zondervan, 1961), p. 514.

2. *Ibid.*

Wednesday  
April 14

## Victory in Tragedy

### HOW-TO

Phil. 4:8

Adoniram Judson and his newlywed wife, Ann, were full of zeal to spread the message of salvation to the civilized heathen world when they landed at Rangoon, Burma on July 13, 1813. Judson “had learned that a nation could be evangelized only by means of its own population. He and his fellow missionaries could establish native churches. But it was from these churches that preachers must be taken to carry the Gospel to their brethren.”<sup>1</sup>

Judson “set to work on the Bible translating, but it had become a dry grind. . . . He told himself that he was mentally, physically, and spiritually bankrupt. The work of twelve years in Rangoon was wiped out. His health was shattered. His wife, his

**“God had cast him aside  
like a broken crock.”**

children, his friend—[Maung Shway-gnong] were dead. He was empty, stripped to the buff, at thirty-eight years of age! This was the man who twelve years before had called himself a

novice in affliction. What incentive was there to begin life anew? God had cast him aside like a broken crock.”<sup>2</sup>

How can we cope with problems when we are away from the Lord or even when we are faithful to the Lord?

**1. Ask the Lord to help you understand why things go black.** As mortal beings, we can see only the past and the present, but not the future. This limits us from seeing the overall picture of why God lets things go wrong. Remember, the Lord may let you pass through the darkest hour because He wants you to be a better person.

**2. Let Jesus transform your tragedy to victory.** Totally place your trust in the Lord by asking His Holy Spirit to comfort you and guide you.

During the last days of his life, God helped Adoniram Judson to see the victory he had achieved when he confessed, “I wrote tracts so missionaries can give out writings. I translated the Bible so missionaries can give the Word of God to the Burmans. I wrote the grammar and word list so that new missionaries can learn the language and the dictionary so that they can know the meanings and usage of the Burmese words.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Honoré Willsie Morrow, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 298.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

3. Fern Neal Shocker, *Adoniram Judson* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 121.

# Sign Language

## OPINION

Isa. 8:18

Are you just another average person in your community—no message, no purpose, no goal?

Isaiah's son wasn't.

The jittery king paced back and forth at the end of the aqueduct. It was crisis time! The pressure was almost too much to bear. He couldn't sleep at night, and when he did manage to catch a wink, dreams of horror shook him awake.

And he wasn't alone in his anxiety. Everyone was terrified, including the bravest warrior in Judah. Syria and Israel had confederated and were going to attack Judah. The king fretted that the entire nation would be demolished.

The king looked up and stopped pacing. In the distance he saw two figures walking in his direction. One looked like a grown man, the other, a young boy. It was Isaiah and his son.

Isaiah had a message to deliver to the king. God said that the enemy would not prevail. All their plans would be thwarted and they would be defeated.

The king couldn't believe it. Then Isaiah looked at him and said, "Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God" (Isa. 7:11, NKJV). But the king refused.

Then Isaiah proclaimed, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste" (verses 14-16, NIV).

Who was this boy? Isaiah's son. His wife gave birth to him soon after Isaiah's meeting with the king. He was a sign to God's people and anyone who took notice that God's presence was still in the land. When they looked at him, they knew that God was with them. When they heard his name, they knew that they would be saved from all of their enemies in a stunning victory.

**In the distance he saw two figures walking in his direction.**

## REACT

1. If you could ask God for clear signs to show His guidance in your life, what signs would you ask for? What sign would be adequate to prove that the guidance is from God?

2. What role do prophetic messages play in your life today? Be specific.

Friday  
April 16

## Still Standing

### EXPLORATION

Isa. 7:9

### CONCLUDE

If it looks to you as if the world is falling apart around you, you're right! If it looks as if there's no way to stay standing, you're mistaken. The key to staying on your feet in a crashing world is to remember that the surest way to become part of the rubble is to hide behind man-made fortresses. Faith is the only fortress able to protect you. Any other hiding place, no matter how safe it may appear at the time, is the enemy's camp. Consider Ahaz!

### CONSIDER

- Rewriting Isaiah 7:10-12 so that Ahaz does take God's counsel. Also, rewrite 2 Kings 16:7, 8. Then consider the likely outcome of your revisions. Consider how different things could have been with Ahaz and Israel if the true story read like your revision.
- Building fortresses with Lincoln Logs, Legos, or other children's building blocks. Build one fortress according to the proper instructions. Build another that has major pieces of the foundation missing. Then heap objects on top of both fortresses. Which one falls first? The fortress represents faith and the foundation represents God's counsel.
- Blindfolding someone and giving him or her a pencil and piece of paper. Give detailed instructions for drawing objects that you have on your master paper (circles, squares, houses, people). Remove the blindfold so they can see how close their paper is to yours. Did they follow your instructions or did they make their own judgments?
- Making a list of ways you are challenged in daily life to lose your footing of faith to trust God's counsel.
- Identifying Ahaz and Isaiah with animals, according to their personality traits. For example, Jesus is represented by a lamb for His gentleness and sacrifice. What animal do you identify with?
- Analyzing why our churches, like the House of Israel, often have trouble with obedience to God on the inside. What measures could you yourself take to help heal this?
- Sending an appropriate "HeartCard" to someone you know who is going through a time of discouragement. These are available at <<http://cards.heartlight.org>>.

### CONNECT

*Messages to Young People*, section IV; *The Great Controversy*, chap. 40.

Gwen Simmons, Centerville, Iowa

# The **Hard** way



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“I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him” (Isa. 8:17, NKJV).

## Evil Spirits, Come Out!

### INTRODUCTION

Matt. 24:24

I attended a funeral recently. I sat listening to each speaker talk of the great impressions and positive influences that had been left on them by the person now lying motionless in a box draped with flowers before the altar. One by one they would come to the microphone. At some point in their message, I kept hearing “I

**A girl questions her father about why she isn't allowed to watch *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*.**

know he's looking down and smiling” or “I know he's with God now.”

A young girl questions her father about why she isn't allowed

to watch *So Raven* or *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* on TV. A group of teenagers discussed the newest book and the great special effects of the latest Harry Potter film. Meanwhile a group of college students contemplate going out to see *Final Destination 2* or *Darkness Falls*. Truth or fiction? It's only entertainment. It's only a TV show. It's not real anyway.

I wonder how many who are reading this can relate to these examples. Are you saying, “Who cares! Most of the stuff that SDAs teach is old and out of date anyway. It doesn't really matter anyway, does it?”

Is there even a real devil? As long as I do good things, good things will happen to me. It is karma; what goes around comes around and my mansion is coming. Whether I am good or bad, I know that God will let me into heaven, right?

I remember growing up and watching shows like *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*. I had friends who played with Ouija boards. There were others who tested Satan by placing a key into the Bible by a certain text. I even thought it would be fun having my palm read. Why should I try to keep anyone else from experiencing things for themselves?

“There are few who have any just conception of the deceptive power of spiritualism and the danger of coming under its influence. . . . Let them once be induced to submit their minds to his direction, and he holds them captive. It is impossible, in their own strength, to break away from the bewitching, alluring spell.”\*

What do you do? As you study this week's lesson remember this: Satan is ready for a battle to the death. Are you?

\**The Great Controversy*, p. 558.



# A Question of History

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 7:17, 20

It was probably one of the worst times in relations between Israel and Judah. Israel had by now departed from serving God and was worshiping the gods of surrounding nations. Israel made a pact with Syria, which created a formidable alliance, one that Judah was afraid of. In Isaiah 7 we see God sending Isaiah to counsel Ahaz to trust God and leave to Him the defense of Judah. Ahaz refuses and instead asks the aid of Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria. Assyria now becomes a powerful weapon in God's hands. We read in 2 Kings 17:18-20 that God gave over the kingdom of Israel, as well as Judah, into the "hand of plunderers" (verse 20, NKJV) because of their sins and unfaithfulness.

Assyria duly tackles the threat of this new alliance, and in 732 B.C. Damascus and Syria fall under Assyrian rule. By 722 B.C. Samaria is also conquered, and the nation of Israel ceases to exist under its own rule until A.D. 1947. But the relief for Judah was short-lived. We read in 2 Chronicles 28:20 that "Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to [Ahaz] and distressed him, and did not assist him" (NKJV). God had to let Israel and Judah learn the consequences of sin the hard way. The Lord was hiding "His face from the house of Jacob" (Isa. 8:17, NKJV), not because He wanted to, but because men of Israel and Judah had turned their backs on Him. Talking to them became like talking to a brick wall. And amazingly, this silence from God was followed by a seemingly preprogrammed response: People turned to spiritists and mediums for guidance. (Compare 1 Samuel 28:6, 7; Isaiah 8:19.)

You may say this is just a part of history and we're way beyond that now. But the same quest for higher knowledge that Satan used to entice Eve into taking the forbidden fruit is still driving millions to consult supernatural forces. "New Age occultism now incorporates more modern pseudoscientific activity into its repertoire, such as . . . crystals, auras, UFOs and parapsychology (ESP). The spiritualism element, . . . adds a dynamic and sensational aspect to New Age. The apparent ability of mediums to contact the spirits of deceased relatives and great spirit guides convinces the

**Talking to them became like  
talking to a brick wall.**

New Age followers that the spirit world is a realm of reality."<sup>\*</sup> Jesus Himself warned us about all this: " 'False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect' " (Matt. 24: 24, NKJV).

<sup>\*</sup>Will Baron, *Deceived by the New Age* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990), p. 194.

Monday  
April 19

## The Art of Naming Your Children

### LOGOS

Isaiah 7; 8

*"I will wait for the Lord, . . . I will put my trust in him" (Isa. 8:17, NIV).*

As I write this article, I am an expectant grandfather. By the time it is published and you read it, the expectant part will be reality. I know the job of grandparents is not to name the grandchildren but simply to enjoy them. But we've been talking with the soon-to-be parents about the awesome responsibility of giving the child a "title" that will be with them the rest of their lives. It's got to be just the right name that represents the whole person and all he/she is and ever will be.

The Old Testament characters, including and especially God, seemed to place at least as much emphasis on naming children as we will be doing in the next few

**This is a positive promise  
of restoration.**

months. The book of Isaiah is no exception. The prophet has been tasked with the unenviable duty of trying to redirect Judah and Israel back into a right relationship with their God. They were again wandering in the wilderness of rebellion, and God was using the Assyrians and the Egyptians to impress them with the consequences of their poor choices (7:18). As God introduces Isaiah and His children, and Himself and His Son, all the names demonstrate by definition both sides of the choice that God's people must make.

Isaiah, his name bringing promise, means "Jehovah will save." Primary meaning of Old Testament text should be applied historically, then secondarily, in its potentially inspired prophetic application. Historically, Jehovah would save His people from the Assyrian assault and the Egyptian power play if they would only turn back to Him. Prophetically, He will also save His people from their sins. From the very introduction of the prophet, God presents His ultimate desire: to save.

Historically, family is not isolated from Isaiah's calling. The naming of his two children reveals a balance of promise, both positive and negative. The first son was named Shear-Jashub (verse 3), "a remnant will return." This is a positive promise of restoration as a called and chosen people in exchange for faithfulness to their God. The second son (8:1) is a real mouthful—Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (say that one five times fast!), "quick to the plunder, quick to the spoil." The negative promise is that if Judah, like Israel, does not return to their covenant relationship with God, things will begin to happen and they will happen fast. Assyria is waiting at the door, ready to take advantage of the consequences of rebellion. Two sons, two promises. "I will save you and bring you back, but if you don't want it, you will quick-

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ly see the results of that choice too.” Prophetically we can see the truth of the same opportunity to choose God and live or to choose the world and lose.

The names of God are not excluded in the message to Judah and Israel—or to us. Two names for the historical and prophetic Son of God reveal yet another promise and calling to the historic and prophetic Israel, them and us. Immanuel (7:14; 8:8, 10), “God is with us,” a continual reminder to those who were faithful and true to Him of His continued presence among them. And the Lord Almighty (8:18), “Jehovah the captain of the army.” “I’m with you,” says God, “and I will lead you in battle over your enemies and on to victory.”

So much potential for God’s people as they turn and stay close to Him. “Isaiah” (God will save), “Shear-Jashub” (a remnant will return), “Immanuel” (God will be with us), and the Lord Almighty will lead us on to victory over evil and its consequences. But don’t forget “Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz” (if you choose to turn away from God, behold, destruction is waiting at the door)!

In Isaiah 8:17 you will probably notice that the middle part of the verse was left out. In spite of the current condition of God’s people, Isaiah says he will “wait for the Lord—who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob.” I wonder if what is really happening is that God’s face is hidden when they turned their backs on Him. He was there to save; Isaiah was there to remind them of that fact. They were busy consulting mediums and constructing pseudo alliances, all of which are contrary to “the law and the testimony” and have “no light in them” (verse 20). Confusion reigned, according to verses 21, 22, as the people kept turning their back on Him, to the point where they cursed the name of their God. But the faithfulness of God kept introducing new names (wait until you reach chapter 9!) as He strove to use His prophet to present the consistent message of hope and salvation, if only His people would turn back to Him. That’s the historical application; the prophetic is no different. He is still Immanuel, “God with us.”

As you read Isaiah 7; 8 for this week, can you make the prophetic application of this story to your own spiritual life? What are your criteria for moving from historic to personal/prophetic application?

If meanings of names were as significant in the presentation of a message as has been implied here, what method can or do we use to present the spiritual application today?

What cautions have you discovered in making personal application to the historical text in the Old Testament that may help your fellow class members? (e.g., Does Isaiah 7:14 apply only prophetically to Jesus? The Hebrew for “virgin” can mean “virgin” or “young woman.” Could that also have a historic reference to a person in Isaiah’s day, born to a young woman, as well as a prophetic application to the Messiah’s virgin birth?)

Tuesday  
April 20

## To Whom Do You Turn?

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 8:19, 20

Isaiah's world had declined into moral weakness. Living with integrity, providing for those who were weak and hungry, standing for that which was righteous—these ideals were from a past lifetime. And perhaps more distressing was to see that the last thing on people's minds was to consider what God thought of their lives and whether they should live their lives any differently.

Today's world is not much different. Crime and violence are normal reports on the news. Even in charitable stories, we eventually discover layers of corruption. Nothing is sacred. Conflict is seething under every relationship.

In this world of tumultuous activity, to whom do we turn for a moment's peace? Do we really turn to God first, or do we look elsewhere for other answers? Judging from what's running on television these days, the answer is that we look elsewhere. *Crossing Over* with John Edward or special shows sharing personal testi-

monies about near-death experiences (e.g., the white light at the end of the tunnel) indicates that there is a demand for spiritualism.

As a Christian, you may think it is easy to dismiss spiritualism

as a temptation, but is it possible to be deceived? "It is true that spiritualism is now changing its form, and, veiling some of its more objectionable features, is assuming a Christian guise. . . .

"Even in its present form, so far from being more worthy of toleration than formerly, it is really a more dangerous, because a more subtle deception. While it formerly denounced Christ and the Bible, it now *professes* to accept both. But the Bible is interpreted in a manner that is pleasing to the unrenewed heart, while its solemn and vital truths are made of no effect. Love is dwelt upon as the chief attribute of God, but it is degraded to a weak sentimentalism, making little distinction between good and evil. God's justice, His denunciations of sin, the requirements of His holy law, are all kept out of sight. The people are taught to regard the Decalogue as a dead letter. Pleasing, bewitching fables captivate the senses and lead men to reject the Bible as the foundation of their faith. Christ is as verily denied as before; but Satan has so blinded the eyes of the people that the deception is not discerned."\*

\* *The Great Controversy*, p. 558.

# God's Love

## HOW-TO

Mal. 3:3; 1 Thess. 5:18; Rev. 3:19

I was having the worst day of my already bad week. Then I remembered a few occasions when in the middle of my difficulties God had allowed me to see why things happened that way. And when I saw the end result, I actually was happier and thanked Him that it went His way and not mine. I went a little deeper, and I realized that it was Him revealing His Love to and for me. Indeed it's true when Paul says that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28, NKJV). And he says again, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18, NKJV). Thank You, God.

A group of women were studying the book of Malachi. As they were studying chapter 3, they came across verse 3, which says: "He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver" (NKJV). This verse puzzled the women, and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of them offered to research the process of refining silver and to get back to the group at their next Bible study.

That week she called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot, then she thought again about Malachi 3:3. She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy: when I see my image in it." If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eyes on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.

**He held a piece of silver  
over the fire.**

Thursday  
April 22

## When the Coach Leaves

### OPINION

Isa. 8:6-8, 17

Coach Ancira was the high-school wrestling coach. He was a short, muscular guy whose bald head looked like a cannonball and whose voice sounded like the cannon as he barked commands during practice. When we weren't doing technique drills, we were running laps around the mat room, and when we weren't running laps, we were doing push-ups, sit-ups, lunges, and a whole bunch of other exercises. Many times, during my freshman wrestling season, I'd wish for Coach Ancira to step out of the room for a few minutes so I could slack off and take a break. I figured it would be more fun if he weren't around. That's what I figured. Here's what actually happened:

Coach Ancira stepped out of the mat room to answer a phone call, and immediately the upperclassmen wrestlers began to chase the freshmen wrestlers around the mat room. They wanted the elastic bands from our underwear. They would wrestle a freshman to the mat, pin him, and yank on his underwear band until it ripped loose. It was the way the upperclassmen wrestlers welcomed the freshmen wrestlers to the wrestling team. Most of us freshmen didn't care for this welcome, and all of a sudden we found ourselves running, dodging, and wrestling, all at once, getting twice the workout as when Coach Ancira was in the room, and having less fun.

**That's what I figure.**

Many times, during my walk with God, I've become tired of His workout, and sometimes I even wish for Him to step out of my life for a while, so I can slack off and take a break. I figure it might be more fun if He weren't around. That's what I figure. Here's what actually happens when He does step out: I find myself running, dodging, and wrestling, all at once, getting twice the workout, and having less fun. I find myself learning the hard way. I find myself wishing He were back in the room, barking out commands once more.

The chaos in the mat room didn't last for that long. Coach Ancira was soon back in the room, and everything returned to normal—we were exercising again, becoming better wrestlers. The chaos when God steps out of our lives doesn't have to last that long either. The Coach will come back when we ask Him, and soon we'll be exercising again, becoming better Christians.

### REACT

How might learning things the hard way strengthen our relationship with God?

# Heaven Sent

## EXPLORATION

Exod. 33:12-14; Psalm 121; Phil. 4:11

## CONCLUDE

In a world that often seems chaotic, it is sometimes difficult to believe that God even exists. This doubt is not new. Even the psalmist referred to it in Psalm 121; most people had heathen altars on high places. But the psalmist was clear that help doesn't come from places, things, or rituals. Help comes from God. Whatever need, no matter how bad situations seem, the blessing will be heaven-sent. We must choose to look for and recognize it.

## CONSIDER

- Using various names of God in the “Logos” section of this week’s lesson to match them to specific periods in your life. You may want to look at the names of God in the song “El Shaddai” by Michael Card. The lyrics are available at <<http://members.tripod.com/~thecaringangel/elshaddai.html>>.
- Defining your concept of Seventh-day Adventists. See if your definition matches with the mission statement, vision, and fundamental beliefs of the Church <[www.adventist.org](http://www.adventist.org)>. Compare your definition and the SDA Church’s statements with the Bible.
- Looking at newspaper stories from the past week or searching news archives on CNN.com or Yahoo.com, compare the situations today with that of Isaiah’s time. Observe situations within the Christian church and analyze similarities and differences.
- Rewriting Isaiah as a devotional exercise—based on today’s Christian world.
- Reflecting on the number of times you’ve experimented with horoscopes, ierot cards, fortune gimmicks, Ouija boards, or similar materials. Discuss with your Christian friends passages in the Bible that warn against these activities.
- Creating a “weekly minder.” Every Friday night go through the week and list your bad times and how they were resolved or how they have helped you deal with life. What could you have done differently as a Christian?
- Listening to or reading the lyrics to the song “The Hard Way” by DC Talk.

## CONNECT

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, chap. 11.

Harold S. Kushner, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

# Noble Prince of Peace



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**“A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6, NASB).**



# Assurance Lost and Found

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 40:1

“Everyone should die young.” I was shocked to hear my grandmother say these words. As I looked at her, however, and then over at her husband, his mind crippled by Alzheimer’s, I could understand her statement. The nights had grown too long and the days too bleak to take anymore. The times she pleaded with him and he could not understand, his sickness confounding his mind, were becoming unbearable. She could not come to grips with what had happened to her beloved, and a look into the future created only an even bleaker outlook each day.

“Everyone should die  
young.”

The trials of Alzheimer’s disease, like any other trial in life, leads down a path that requires no real explanation. As inhabitants of this earth, we are surprisingly used to pain. The words of Isaiah cry through fierce heartache and sorrow to proclaim that God has comfort to offer for His people. What is this comfort that God so earnestly seeks to give us? I can only wonder as I witness my grandmother and her husband on their good days, when she is smiling and he, with a gentle ease, slides his hands to hold hers.

It is especially in uncertain times that the comfort of God is needed, but how is it provided? Does Isaiah give clues to what, how, and, importantly, when we will receive this comfort? Moreover, is this comfort everlasting or a temporary one that fades away? And what of God? What does it take from the eternal Creator to provide comfort for His ailing creation? The heartfelt understanding of God’s love for humanity and the sacrifice that He made is captured by Isaiah and presented with such literary clarity that, even in the present climate of war, terrible loss, and gloom, they still bring hope.

While someone chooses to end all when the future seems bleak, the Lord sends a message through Isaiah that through Him there can be found a bright tomorrow.

Sunday  
April 25

# God in Control

## LOGOS

Isa. 9:1-10:34; 11; 12:1-6

### A Great Light (Isa. 9:1, 2)

Whoever said prophets bring only bad news! To be sure, Isaiah lived during a time of real bad news for the people of the Promise. Solomon's once great kingdom had been divided into two sometimes warring factions. The breakaway Southern kingdom of Judah was in turn threatened by Israel and then by Syria. After the Assyrians conquered Syria, they overran Samaria and took Israel captive. Judah feared it would be next and appealed to Egypt for help. Nothing was secure and the national mood was desperate.

But wait! What is the prophet saying: "The gloom will not be upon her who is distressed. . . . The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isa. 9:1, 2, NKJV). This was a promise without logical premise. It depended on the word

**The ancient Greeks had a great sense of the dramatic.**

of God, not on outward confirmation. It was built on the logic of God's action against Israel for its proud rejection of Him. And it burst forth not only as a promise to Judah, but to the

Gentiles, as reiterated in Matthew 4:13-17. It was the central promise of God's plan first revealed to Adam and Eve in the Garden, passed to Abraham, and confirmed in the ceremonies begun at Sinai. A Redeemer would come "in the latter time" (Dan. 8:19, NKJV).

### Seen in Perspective (Isa. 10:26)

The ancient Greeks had a great sense of the dramatic, as well as an active sense of the divine. They were fond of concluding complex situations with the convenient God in a machine (*deus ex machina*), whereby some immortal swept down to intervene and correct the human mess. Isaiah puts that in its place as petty stagecraft. God is indeed announcing a brilliant intervention in the destiny of the remnant. But it is the culmination of His long-term involvement, not the end to an Olympian distance. Don't worry about the Assyrians; God "will raise his staff over the waters, as he did in Egypt" (10:26, NIV). In a single allusion the prophetic invokes God's power in freeing a people from bondage and the bonding moments at Sinai that followed. The clear message of this text and its context is redemption, not punishment: When Moses lifted the rod, the waters parted; they came down in punishment on the Egyptians when he lowered it. Any reader of the time would also have seen a clear inference here that God's people should look to Him for deliverance, not to a state like Egypt.

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## He That Is to Come (Isa. 11:2)

There is no question that the promised Redeemer is at the center of the book of Isaiah. It is not by chance that Handel was drawn to so many of these words from Isaiah for the text to his *Messiah*. It is not by chance that so much of the book of Revelation sings with the language of Isaiah: After all, as chapter 11 presents so patently, the final acts of the Messiah are universal and apocalyptic. And it was not by chance that Jesus, given the book of Isaiah to read in the Nazareth synagogue, should choose texts that emphasized the spiritual empowerment that would rest on Him.

In chapter 11 we can see, as it were, a mini-summary of the overarching purpose to the Messiah. A nation judged, truncated by disobedience, is privileged to produce this flowering of God's purposes for the world (11:10). The Messiah comes with spiritual power to reveal God Himself (verses 2, 3). He will judge, not as the nations do, with violence, but in righteousness (verses 4, 5). He will reconcile all of nature and bring a re-creation of the initial perfection (verses 6-9). And in gathering the remnant from all the nations of the world, He will guarantee the reality of God's initial promise to Abraham that in Him would all the nations of the earth be blessed (verses 10-12). United with His eternal people, the Messiah then executes a final disposition of the forces of wickedness. The "scorching wind" (verse 15, NIV) of His anger will create a highway for the remnant to security—an interesting prelude to the New Testament promise that the righteous will tread down the ashes of the destroyed wicked (verses 13-16).

## In That Day (Isa. 12:1)

"You were angry" (12:1, NIV) is now forever past tense. God has kept His promise and brought comfort with relief. Again, in language of adoration so similar to the book of Revelation, the anthem of praise rings out for this entire chapter of six exultant verses. "Who is this King of glory" (Ps. 24:8, KJV) ask the host of heaven. And from Isaiah comes the call to "Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you" (Isa. 12:6, NIV).

## REACT

1. Look for textual clues in Isaiah 9–12 that would place the action beyond the immediate into the future of Jesus' ministry and the final events of earth's history.
2. What emotion would best characterize these verses: hope, fear, gloom, anticipation? Explain your answer.
3. Isaiah is clearly the source for much of the language in Revelation. To what degree does it also look back and use the details of earlier Old Testament writings?
4. How clearly do these passages identify Christ as the Messiah?
5. If you were a prophet, how would you deliver good news? How about bad news?

Monday  
April 26

## God's Gift of Peace

### TESTIMONY

John 14:27

*"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27, NKJV).*

"We are living in a solemn time. An important work is to be done for our own souls and for the souls of others or we shall meet with an infinite loss. We must be transformed by the grace of God or we shall fail of heaven, and through our influence others will fail with us. Let me assure

**"We are living in a solemn time."**

you that the struggles and conflicts which must be endured in the discharge of duty, the self-denials and sacrifices which must be made if we are faithful to Christ, are not created by Him. They are not imposed by

arbitrary or unnecessary command; they do not come from the severity of the life which He requires us to lead in His service. Trials would exist in greater power and number were we to refuse obedience to Christ and become the servants of Satan and the slaves of sin. . . . The sacrifices which we must make in following Christ are only so many steps to return to the path of light, of peace and happiness. . . .

"God calls upon you to mingle the trusting simplicity of the child with the strength and maturity of the man. He would have you develop the true gold of character, and through the merits of Christ you can do this. My soul is burdened for those who do not feel their need of constant connection with heaven in order to do the work devolving upon them as faithful sentinels for God. . . .

"The peace of Christ, the peace of Christ—money cannot buy it, brilliant talent cannot command it, intellect cannot secure it; it is the gift of God. The religion of Christ—how shall I make all understand their great loss if they fail to carry its holy principles into the daily life? The meekness and lowliness of Christ is the Christian's power. It is indeed more precious than all things which genius can create or wealth can buy. Of all things that are sought, cherished, and cultivated, there is nothing so valuable in the sight of God as a pure heart, a disposition imbued with thankfulness and peace."\*

### REACT

1. How does God use trials to enhance our peace? Why is this so?
2. How do I maintain that constant peace connection?
3. How can my sphere of influence help bring God's peace to others?

\**Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 557, 558, 559.

# Unto Us

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 9:1-7; Luke 2:25-34

In every age God has preserved for Himself a prophet; one who would speak boldly against iniquity, warn His people of judgment, and urge them to follow after righteousness. Isaiah was one such prophet. Such an awesome task! Not long before that, the prophet had beheld the Lord in vision. Standing before the Almighty, he cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isa. 6:5, NKJV). Standing on the threshold between mercy and judgment, Isaiah became more aware of his need for God. In worship he answered God's call saying, "Here am I! Send me" (verse 8, NKJV).

Isaiah's messages express the love of a longsuffering God for His errant children. Through His providence, He had carefully tended them, hoping for them to be a light to the heathen around them and to demonstrate His superiority over their gods. Love was, however, mingled with judgment. Israel had slid into moral and spiritual decline. God was unable to help them unless they repented, and the prophet's warnings bore this awful reminder.

Even in the division of the kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 11:33-38) God would have saved to Himself a remnant of His people. He had warned Judah of impending captivity should they remain in disobedience.<sup>1</sup> Judah, too, had Israel's captivity by Assyria as an example of the consequence of disobedience, but unfortunately, Judah was resigned to apostasy.

Isaiah 9 seems to be a pause in the prophet's message of warning. Today's verses are a ray of hope amid the destruction prophesied in the preceding chapter. "The people who walked in darkness [will see] a great light" (verse 2, NKJV). This heralded the Messiah's coming, through the line of Judah. In this was God's favor upon Judah evident.

**Isaiah's messages express  
the love of a longsuffering  
God.**

"Unto us a child is born" (verse 6, NKJV). "The prophets did not always clearly understand messages they themselves had borne pointing . . . to the coming of the Messiah."<sup>2</sup> But there were many at Jesus' first advent who looked forward to the "consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25, KJV). One, Simeon, had been blessed by the Holy Spirit and told that he would not die until he had seen Jesus (verses 26-35). Isaiah's words "unto us" could have been that of Simeon's.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 36.

2. *Ibid.*

Wednesday  
April 28

## Peace Like a River

### HOW-TO

Ps. 23:2; Isa. 40:1; Mark 4:39

So many things in the Bible are violent; so much of the time people seem to be harassed. But the moments that really stick out in the Bible are the times when things are still, times of reflection, when there is peace.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Ps. 23:2, KJV). Why is that such a poignant phrase? These strong words paint a picture of serenity, of how God ultimately wants us to be.

God sent His Son Jesus to the world to show us how to live to glorify Him, in love, in action, word, and deed.

I've recently had a friend return from a missionary trip to Romania, where she was working in an orphanage of more than 20 children. I have followed her ups

**She would use her time to  
tell these children of  
Christ's coming again.**

and downs for the past year by email. She would email the group that had previously visited the home in 2001 and update us of the goings on and the welfare of the children. Every time I received an email, it would be

more desperate for prayers, for hope, and certainly for peace.

When I think of my friend, Isaiah 40:1 comes to my mind: " 'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God" (NKJV).

Children were running away from the safety of the home to a life of drugs, alcohol, and who knows what. My friend would talk to the other children about a Man who came to this earth from heaven to die for us. Such a significant, selfless act of love.

She would use her time to tell these children of Christ's coming again to take them home where they no longer have to use their bodies to get food, where they will not want to use drugs to get high, where they do not have to steal to survive.

We are to be like my friend and Isaiah in this respect. We are to give God the full adoration that He deserves. When we fully give our heart over to Him, He will give us the peace that we have been hoping, working, and praying for.

We have been filled with hope. Help to pass it on.

### REACT

1. Do you agree with the premise that if you fully give your heart to God, He will give you peace? Can you find Scripture to support your belief?
2. What is "peace"? Describe it in as many ways as you can.

# Fighting for Peace?

## OPINION

Matt. 5:38-41

Fighting for peace! Surely that is a contradiction—but let me explain. At the end of World War II, the United Nations (UN) was formed as an overarching body to mediate among countries. Fresh hopes would have been formed after nearly six years of brutal wars, death, and destruction. Each individual country was represented at the UN and, theoretically, disagreements could be resolved by negotiation.

**Fighting for peace! Surely that is a contradiction.**

Unfortunately that was the theory, as today there are still many conflicts and wars. So in recent conflicts in such places as East Timor and Kosovo, the UN would mandate that “peacemakers” be sent to the region to enforce peace. The peace is often enforced only by the presence of weapons in the hands of the peacemakers. Sadly, this peace is often only artificial—many people still live each day in fear of death. So many children will never have the opportunity of peace in their lives.

The only answer to this lack of peace is to be found in Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Throughout His life, Jesus taught peace (Matt. 5:38-41; John 14:27) and said in Matthew 5:9 that the peacemakers will be called children of God. Jesus was not one to sit back passively, however, and He took action when required (Mark 11:15-18). He spoke up against injustice and fought for equality for all people (Matthew 23; John 8:1-11). As Christians (followers of Christ) we are also required to be peacemakers. We are to follow the example of Jesus by actively trying to create peace in this world.

Consider the following possible actions:

1. Pray daily for peace.
2. Join an organization such as Amnesty International.
3. Become an advocate for any refugees in your church.

The fight for peace cost Jesus His life on a wooden cross. He was scorned by the local people, despised by the government, rejected by close friends. The price of peace can be ultimately very expensive to us. But Jesus has challenged us all to be fighters for peace. Will you take the challenge?

## REACT

1. Is the use of violence justified if the ultimate outcome is peace? Explain your answer.
2. Should we take part in “peace demonstrations”? Why or why not?

Friday  
April 30

# Finding Peace Above the Storm

## EXPLORATION

Isa. 26:3

## CONCLUDE

Today the world is crying for peace. We know from prophecy that the more humankind cries peace, the more wars and death there will be. As Christians, we believe true peace comes to us only through our faith and belief in a Savior. With this, we also recognize that there is a loving God who is more powerful than any events that occur on this planet. We can sleep soundly at night, knowing that whatever happens, God has a greater plan for those who choose to follow Him. He truly is our peace above the storms of this mortal life.

## CONSIDER

- Singing the words, "I've got the peace that passes understanding, down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart. I've got the peace that passes understanding, down in my heart, down in my heart to stay." Use the tune, "I've Got the Joy."
- Sharing the book, *Peace Above the Storm* with a friend or neighbor who is struggling with serious issues in their life. Tell them how you have found peace in your life. *Peace Above the Storm* is available through your local Adventist Book Center.
- Viewing the video *Air Force One*. Consider the quotation of the U.S. President who says, "Real peace is not merely the absence of conflict. It is the presence of justice." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Conducting a person-on-the-street interview. Ask people if they have peace in their lives. If they say No, be prepared with a tract or some other type of information to tell them how they can find lasting peace.
- Performing a skit that contrasts the life of a person who has no peace with that of a person who has found peace.
- Composing a song that tells the journey of a person who was searching for peace in their life and how they found it.
- Sculpting a form that shows your interpretation of lasting peace.

## CONNECT

*The Desire of Ages*, chap. 35.

Frank Minirth and Paul Meier, *Happiness Is a Choice*.



# Playing God



“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’ ” (Isa. 25:9, NKJV).

Sabbath  
May 1

## "I" to Its Superlative

### INTRODUCTION

Isa. 14:12-14

The day was dying with the sun retiring down behind the forest. The lion, ruler of the forest, came near the glittering stream to quench its thirst. It gazed into the crystal-clear water, admiring its huge body and majestic physique. As it stood watching the reflection of its image, a thought stumbled into its mind: *Look at me. What a marvelous species of the community I am. I am unchallenged among the citizens of the forest. I rule them.*

Then it looked to the other side of the stream and saw a nearby village and said to itself, I can be the same in the nearby village too. *Today the king of the forest, tomorrow king of the village.*

The lion's episode came to an end when villagers killed it as it entered the village and the vultures feasted on its body.

Many biblical people illustrate the wrongful emphasis on pride and the need for its converse humility. Rebellious pride that claims to be independent from God and

**People say that it is fine to  
have a little bit of pride.**

not subject to His universal empire was the root of sin, even in heaven. Lucifer, the incomparable angel of the angelic hosts, entertained the thought of rebellion in heaven,

creating his downfall. Isaiah describes the tragic beginning of Lucifer's destruction (Isa. 14:12-14).

Our forefathers embraced pride right from the hands of Lucifer by selling their freedom from sin, leading the human race to spiritual, mental, and physical captivity to sin. It became a human instinct, raising our minds to unhealthy imagination and ambition.

Mohan was standing outside the principal's office with a suspension letter in his heavily bruised hand. Rahul, a close companion of his, asked his purpose of standing in front of the office door. Mohan replied, "That scoundrel, Deepak, called me a coward. I proved him wrong but broke his left leg. So now I'm suspended from school."

Mere words had caused this fight. Would it really hurt to be called a coward? How would we take such insults?

People say that it is fine to have a little bit of pride. Most religions do not condemn every kind of pride. What does the Bible say about this? Join with us as we study this week's lesson about this particular hindrance to our spiritual growth.

# Rise and Fall Theories

## EVIDENCE

Prov. 16:18

*"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18, NKJV).*

Even the most cursory of historical studies shows that the theme of the rise and fall of empires and civilizations threads through all ages. The Assyrian, Babylonian, Mede, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires—all had their day as world super-powers before they crumbled into oblivion. Even today scholars suggest that Western civilization has reached its peak and can only descend. So, there are always "will-be's" and "has-been's." And according to the cycle of things, a will-be will one day be a has-been.

Is there a reason for this rise and fall? An explanation can be found in Isaiah 13:9: "See, the day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it" (NIV).

So God's purpose is to cleanse the world of sin. What is this sin? Isaiah 13:11 tells us more: "I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless" (NIV). God's hand at work in the shifting of world powers is a response to the evil that so often eats at the powerful: pride.

It is a common trait of humanity that with power often comes pride. Nations so easily lose their principles when they are too successful. It happened to a whole string of offenders documented in the Old Testament, not least of which was Israel (Amos 2:6-16). And this is not true only of nations, but can be the experience of individuals too. Consider why J-Lo tries to convince us that despite her riches she's "still Jenny from the block." And this doesn't apply merely to superstars; every human being has the potential for pride.

Israel truly was a blessed nation: It was given special insight into what the future was to hold for its people. It bore witness to how God dealt with offenders of His law. Babylon enjoyed 50 years as an occupying force in Israel, but after that time it was viciously crushed by the next empire, the Persians, and God's judgment on them was complete. We, too, have the opportunity to reflect on the results of pride. God leaves no doubt as to how He feels about it, and how He will deal with it. The question is: How will we deal with it?

**The question is: How will  
we deal with it?**

Monday  
May 3

## Conquered or Conqueror?

### LOGOS

Isaiah 13; 14; 24-27

Imagine yourself a slave. Each morning's waking thought is centered on your lack of freedom, your seemingly subhuman status, and your hatred toward those who oppress and enslave you. Some of humankind's darkest hours have been those in which the conquered have been made to serve the conqueror, where one part of humanity has taken dominion over another.

In his autobiography, one African-American slave says this about the disease of slavery: "There is scarcely any conceivable limit, and from its cruelty there is no refuge. His plantation is his empire; his labourers are his subjects, and revolt and violence, instead of abridging his power, are followed by inevitable and horrible punishment. The

**The Israelite nation was no stranger to slavery.**

laws of the land do not, indeed, authorize the master to take life, but they do not forbid him to wear it out by excessive toil."\*

Thus it was during Isaiah's time. The Israelite nation was no stranger to slavery; whilst being God's chosen people, their recalcitrant ways and refusal to return due worship to their Provider saw them conquered by many nations. Dwelling in the hearts and minds of the people was a foolish notion that it was they who were overdue to be exalted. Fierce pride in who they were obscured their view of the Almighty.

Thus it is today. Israel's curse was as original as sin itself, and today we still find ourselves, Christians, a people set apart by God for a sacred work, overcome by pride and oppression.

### God's Hatred of Sin

During the captivity under the Assyrians, Isaiah wrote some powerful words of prophecy on the destruction of Israel's oppressors. Read Isaiah 13. It should come as no surprise that he immediately identifies the nation's position as "the burden" (Isa. 13:1, KJV). Reading on, we find intense imagery, detailing the terrible day of the Lord's wrath on Babylon. Verse 8 says: "They will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames" (NKJV). In no uncertain terms, Isaiah spells out the end of Babylon "the glory of kingdoms" (Isa. 13:19, NKJV), yet the proud nation still did not understand the reasons for God's punishment or their deliverance.

What, then, shall be our oppressor? I hear you say.

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## The Cruelty of Sin

Like the cruelty of the cotton plantations, there is scarcely any conceivable limit to sin, nor is there any refuge from its cruelty. Over the millennia it has transformed God's perfect world into a cesspool of hate and destruction. To express in words, then, how much God hates sin is impossible. Paul writes of a time when God's punishment of sin comes about: "When they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3, NKJV). Noticing the similarities, it is easy to see that Isaiah's prophecy will come full circle. It was not only a prophecy for the Jews in that time, but for us also. Again, in no uncertain terms, the Bible spells out the end of the oppressor, sin, forever.

## God's Love for Us

God loved His people Israel. Throughout the ages, His mighty hand of deliverance proved this many times. God loves us. He understands that we are all victims of oppression. Our deliverance has come from a God who loves the sinner far more than He hates the sin. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NKJV). Not in the recurring hand of deliverance, but once and for all, Christ settled the score with sin on the Cross. Christ spelled out His love for us with His own blood.

## Knowing Thine Enemy

Sin has its origins in pride. Lucifer longed to exalt himself above his Creator. Pride caused his fall. Pride was one of the downfalls of the Israelites during Isaiah's time. The old saying that pride comes before a fall is true. The same tools the devil used to ensnare Adam and Eve are still in use today. The roots of sin are clearly identified in 1 John 2:16. First, the lust of the flesh, then the lust of the eyes, and finally, the pride of life. These three basic principles underlie all sin, and none is more carnal, more basic, than pride. We, as Christians, are constantly under attack. Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NKJV). Thus it is with hesitance that we must all cry guilty and admit defeat.

However, all is not lost. Just as Babylon's time came, so sin will meet its fiery end, when the one who says, "I . . . have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18, KJV) closes the chapter on our slavery. Paul has some interesting words to say in 2 Corinthians 4:9-12 where he says that we may be persecuted, but we are not forsaken; we may be cast down, but we're not destroyed. Our defeat and enslavement has been swallowed up in Christ's victory and freedom. Born of love for us and hatred for sin, it is freely offered. What's better is it gives a world enslaved by sin the only hope of ever truly being free.

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\*Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837).

Tuesday  
May 4

## “Behold Your God!”

### TESTIMONY

Exod. 33:14; Ps. 86:15; Isa. 63:9; Hos. 11:1

“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.

“In losing sight of the true character of Jehovah, the Israelites were without excuse. Often had God revealed Himself to them as one ‘full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.’ Psalm 86:15. ‘When Israel was a child,’ He testified, ‘then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt.’ Hosea 11:1.

“Tenderly had the Lord dealt with Israel in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage and in their journey to the Promised Land. ‘In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Isaiah 63:9.

“ ‘My presence shall go with thee,’ was the promise given during the journey through the wilderness. Exodus 33:14. This assurance was accompanied by a marvelous revelation of Jehovah’s character, which enabled Moses to proclaim to

**“This assurance was accompanied by a marvelous revelation.”**

all Israel the goodness of God, and to instruct them fully concerning the attributes of their invisible King. ‘The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.’ Exodus 34:6, 7.

“ ‘In the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.’ Ephesians 1:6; 2:7. ‘Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory.’ Psalm 72:18, 19.”\*

\* “Behold Your God!” *Review and Herald*, March 18, 1915 paragraphs 1-4, 10.

# “But, for the Grace of God . . .”

## HOW-TO

Isa. 25:1; 26:34

Most of us are familiar with the phrase, “But, for the grace of God, go I.” We mutter it under our breath when we pass someone sleeping in a door jam, begging for change, being harassed by classmates, stuck in a snowdrift, zooming by in an ambulance. We say those seven little words to remind us of our humanity, to recollect that the phenomenon of degrees of separation applies not only to relation-

A good praise song reminds you of God’s mercy.

ships, but to circumstances as well. We also toss the phrase up to remind God that we’re thankful for His mercies and to keep on blessing us. Most times, however, split seconds after the words pass our lips, we get caught up in a new train of thought, forgetting about our reliance on God’s everlasting mercies.

Another reason for Lucifer’s demise was pride in his circumstances. He imagined that his talents and gifts had placed him in his situation. And this very same self-centered thought will be our downfall if we do not keep our minds focused on God. He is the Author of our circumstances. God is the One who provides us with the comforts we enjoy, be it mental and/or physical health, fulfilling relationships, food, shelter, money, or transportation. He is the Master and Owner of the universe and has a love for us that exceeds the majesty of this power. Because of this love, mercy, and grace, every so often we remember our Benefactor by uttering a simple phrase. How can we take our recognition of God’s grace beyond these words?

**1. Get a praise theme song.** Whenever I feel especially down about my circumstances or a trial or when I want to make my day about helping others in (or through) their circumstance, I get a praise song in my head. A good praise song reminds you of God’s mercy and love and how He keeps you sheltered in His hands. Begin this morning with a Holy Ghost bounce in your step.

**2. Specify your “But, for the grace of God’s.”** The next time you say this, identify why you are saying it. For example, next time you see someone panhandling, say, “But, for the grace of God, I could be begging for money,” then turn around and drop some change in their bucket. (After all, is it your money to withhold?) Make it your mission to be God’s hands and feet and to help change someone’s circumstance for the better.

Thursday  
May 6

## Between Fiction and Reality

### OPINION

Isa. 13:13, 14

#### Scenario A

God's favorite angel revolts against Him. He begins to have feelings of envy and self-indulgence, and he believes that he can take the place of Jesus even though Jesus is God. Without thinking much, he confronts God—questioning His thoughts, His love, His laws, and even His decisions. After their little dialog, He leaves offended. After a long, long time of thought, he returns to God, saying: I've made a mistake. I'm sorry, please forgive me!

#### Scenario B

The snake is talking with Eve. "Eve," it says, "don't you believe that God would like for you to be more wise, more independent, more . . . you? It's simple—the key is this fruit. Where else can you have eternal life? Do you see the sense in this?"

Eve then goes to talk to Adam and, of course, the snake tries to reason with him. Suddenly in the middle of the confusion, they both ask God, "Can we be more independent, wiser—more us?"

And God responds, "Yes, you can, but you don't have to eat the fruit if you don't want it. Want Me to show you?"

And then the fruit falls to the ground, completely untouched!

No worldwide Flood, no Babylonian captivity, no Calvary, no death, no suffering . . . fiction, nothing else but fiction!

At the end, the only real thing is what the prophet Isaiah told in Isaiah 13:13, 14. You were perfect in everything until the day, far apart from God, you thought that your perfection was enough. You doubted, but instead of coming back to Him you thought of yourself and said: I can definitely do it without God. But without God there is no more beauty, no more perfection.

Between fiction and reality, there are some questions: Could these scenarios have been possible? At what step did the ancient serpent find himself at the point of no return? Is there a point of no return?

**The only real thing is what  
the prophet Isaiah told.**

For me something is very clear. At the point where I begin to substitute God, whether it results from boredom, routine, because I think He fails me, or simply because—like Eve—I lose sight of Him and apparently He is very far away, then I'm at that point of no return.



# There Goes My Pride Again

## EXPLORATION

Prov. 16:18

## CONCLUDE

"Pride goes before a fall." At one time or another we have all experienced the emotion of pride. But it is what we do with that emotion that sets us apart. There are three choices we can make: (1) nurture the emotion until it envelops our whole being; (2) recognize pride as a weakness and surrender it to God; or (3) understand that pride can be positive. Pride is a component of self-respect. If you have a healthy respect for yourself, then pride is a natural outcome of feeling good about what you have accomplished. But when that feeling of pride takes precedent in your life, then it becomes a negative emotion.

## CONSIDER

- Taking a well-known children's song (e.g., "Mary Had A Little Lamb"; "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"; "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star") and rewriting the lyrics to talk humorously about the negative emotions of pride.
- Contrasting the negative and positive sides of pride.
- Creating a chart listing the five senses as the header rows. Under each sense write how pride feels, tastes, looks, smells, and sounds. Create a new definition for pride based on your response.
- Viewing the film *Malice*. As you do this, consider the way in which pride is personified by Dr. Hill. Think about people in the Bible who exhibited a kind of pride similar to that of the doctor in the film.
- Taking a walk through your neighborhood and looking for a bird's nest. Study the intricacies of how the bird built its nest. Analyze how the bird took pride in building its nest versus how you take pride in the things you do.
- Doing something completely different from what you normally would do. Build a model rocket, sew a shirt, volunteer at a senior center, climb a mountain. Journal how you feel about yourself afterward.
- Tracing the stories of Moses (Num. 20:1-13) and David (2 Sam. 6:1-23). How were they full of pride and how did they deal with it? What were the consequences?

## CONNECT

Genesis 1.

*Messages to Young People*, chap. 30.

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, 1/11, 1/12, 6/12.

# Defeat of the Assyrians



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“ ‘O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth’ ”  
(Isa. 37:16, NKJV).

# “Defeat + Prayer = Deliverance”

## INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 36–37:20

Lord, grant me thy favor  
That which was given to Hezekiah and  
Jerusalem over the Assyrians.  
Let me always be in your grace to hear your  
Word when in prayer  
I seek your face.  
Let me know that thou art God  
So when defeat seems adamant  
Instead of sorrow, I will ever be glad.  
When the strings of death coil my heart,  
Let me not accept death but set it apart  
For life is thine  
And with prayer on my lips it has become mine.  
I have been made whole so as to tell of your praise  
That I plan to do with the rest of my life.

—Stacey-Ann Gunzelle

The people of Jerusalem were worried. Sennacherib had been boasting about how he would conquer Jerusalem as he had conquered the other cities of Judah. He sent the Rabshakeh, who warned them that they shouldn't let King Hezekiah deceive them when he said the Lord would deliver them. King Hezekiah sought the Lord in this time of great tribulation, and the Lord didn't forsake them; instead he sent the prophet Isaiah to comfort them, saying that they should not be afraid of the words that they heard because the Lord God Almighty was going to send a spirit upon the king of Assyria and cause him to fall.

But the king of Assyria sent yet another message warning them not to let their so-called God deceive them because no other god had stopped him. Hezekiah, feeling defeated, placed the letter before God and prayed saying: “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, . . . Incline Your ear, . . . hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God’ ” (Isa. 37:16, 17, NKJV).

As Christians we often lose sight of the wonderful love of God, but like Hezekiah we need to turn our journey over to Jesus. As a popular song states, “Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you”—and indeed He does.

Sunday  
May 9

## "The Battle Is the Lord's"

### LOGOS

Isaiah 36–37:20; 38; 39

### History Repeats Itself

From the establishment of Israel as God's chosen people, His royal nation, His holy priesthood, they were constantly under attack at the hand of the enemy (Satan), a part of the great controversy. These trials came in the form of enslavement, war, threat of war, siege, exile, and even death. One example is the deliverance of Israel from the bondage and the ensuing pursuit of the Egyptians to re-enslave them (Exod. 15:5-31)—and their ultimate deliverance.

Now they were again threatened by the enemy, this time by the Assyrians, but God shows His might once again, when the people of God are brought into strait places and apparently there is no escape; for them the Lord alone must be their dependence.<sup>1</sup>

### The Boast of the Enemy

Judah and King Hezekiah had faced the situation of paying tribute to the Assyrians for years. The Assyrians were then the dominating force of the region. Hezekiah, how-

**The Assyrians were the dominating force of the region.**

ever, after restoring his nation from a state of apostasy, decided to revolt. He thus forms an alliance with Egypt, despite the warnings of Isaiah against this strategy (30:1-5; 31:1-5). The

Assyrians under the reign of Sennacherib, steam-rolled their way through Israel, leaving terror and destruction in their wake. With eyes fixed toward Judah, Hezekiah—out of fear—withdraws allegiance with Egypt and pledges allegiance to Assyria.

This latter act on the part of King Hezekiah does not convince Sennacherib that Hezekiah's intentions are pure, so he demands unconditional surrender, which Hezekiah refuses. King Sennacherib thus sends his servant Rabshakeh with a letter to the people, warning them not to trust Hezekiah and his God to deliver them. Rabshakeh makes this proclamation publicly in a proud boast (36:4-22).

Why does God allow the enemy (Satan) to express dominion over His people? Think of people like Job, Saul, and David, who faced this same situation because of varying circumstances.

### Mistakes . . . Redeemed

Hezekiah's haste and disobedience proves fatal to himself and the people. "We

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should not follow impulse, nor rely on the judgment of men; we should look to the revealed will of God and walk according to His definite commandment, no matter what circumstances may surround us. God will take care of the results; by faithfulness to His word we may in time of trial prove before men and angels that the Lord can trust us in difficult places to carry out His will, honor His name, and bless His people.”<sup>2</sup>

As Hezekiah bemoans the fate of the nation, the Lord sends Isaiah with a word of hope; this is always evident of God in a time of need. The words of God as spoken by Isaiah unfold in Isaiah 37:6, 7.

Even as Hezekiah seemingly panicked, the people trusted in his word. This was a result of a renewed covenant and faith, which they were experiencing having gone through a period of revival and reformation. This is a very important reminder that the closer we are to God, the more we can rest assured of guidance and protection. Hezekiah’s downfall was that he had a faith that consisted of knowing about God rather than knowing God.

Are we like Hezekiah—denying the peace and assurance that comes from knowing the Peace-Speaker? Are we like the people who had no fear because they had a relationship? How do we achieve the relationship the people had? “We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”<sup>3</sup>

## Victory Achieved

Hezekiah in penitence of heart goes to the Lord in prayer to petition His help (Isa. 37:15-20) and God heard and answered his prayer.

“When with earnestness and intensity we breathe a word of prayer in the name of Christ, there is in that very intensity a pledge from God that He is about to answer our prayer exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”<sup>4</sup>

Without the shout of “Charge,” without a sword drawn, without a drop of blood from a Judean, the Assyrian army was defeated. All it took was a prayer. The angel of the Lord went out to smite the camp of the Assyrians and all that remained were corpses. In dismay, King Sennacherib retreats, to dwell in Nineveh, and as he worships in the house of Nisroch, his god, he is slain by his son, Sharezer. This fulfils the proclamation of Isaiah made in Isaiah 37:7 and proves the power of God and His Word.

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 257.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 622.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

4. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 147.

Monday  
May 10

## Deliverance When We Need It Most

### TESTIMONY

Ps. 46:1; Isa. 51:12

"The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations and all who would look unto Him should live."<sup>1</sup>

"In a time of grave national peril, when the hosts of Assyria were invading the land of Judah and it seemed as if nothing could save Jerusalem from utter destruction,

**"To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given."**

Hezekiah rallied the forces of his realm to resist with unflinching courage their heathen oppressors and to trust in the power of Jehovah to deliver. 'Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him,' Hezekiah exhorted the men of Judah; '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.'<sup>2</sup>

"The God of the Hebrews had prevailed over the proud Assyrian. The honour of Jehovah was vindicated in the eyes of the surrounding nations. In Jerusalem the hearts of the people were filled with holy joy. Their earnest entreaties for deliverance had been mingled with confession of sin and with many tears. In their great need they had trusted wholly in the power of God to save, and He had not failed them."<sup>3</sup>

"Darkness and discouragement will sometimes come upon the soul, and threaten to overwhelm us; but we should not cast away our confidence."<sup>4</sup>

"We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most."<sup>5</sup>

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 290.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 349.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 361, 362.

4. *Messages to Young People*, p. 111.

5. *Education*, p. 258.

## “Lest Any Man Should Boast”

### EVIDENCE

Luke 18:14

Isaiah was the son of Amoz and a descendant of the royal line; he was called to the prophetic office in his youth, toward the close of the reign of Uzziah, during the coregency of Jotham. This would place the call between the years 750 and 739 B.C. His term of ministry continued for at least 60 years, spanning the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. In Jerusalem, the chief scene of his labors, he became the court preacher and exercised considerable influence. For many years he was both political and religious counselor to the nation. His prophetic ministry, together with that of Micah and possibly also the indirect influence of Hosea in the northern kingdom, contributed to the reforms of Hezekiah.

Isaiah, whose name means “The Lord is help” or “The Lord is salvation” presents deliverance from sin. In the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign on the throne of Judah, the Assyrians had already captured a large multitude of the children of Israel from the northern kingdom. During a few years within his reign, he had begun rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, thus strengthening their defense system, while the Assyrians held Samaria in captivity and allocated the ten tribes among the many provinces of the Assyrian realm.

Jerusalem was less than 50 miles away and the borders of Judah were only a few miles distant. The riches in the temple would assure the return of the enemy. But the king of Judah was determined to play his part in preparing his people to resist the enemy. With emotive words of encouragement, King Hezekiah managed to motivate his forces with unwavering faith and affirmation: “With us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chron. 32:8, NKJV). The king of Judah had been closer drawn to Christ during his preparation for this great event and the time had finally come for this long-expected crisis. Due to the continual triumph of the Assyrians, they started to exalt themselves instead of giving glory to God for their numerous victories.

Confident of victory, the leaders of Assyria divided their forces into two armies, one of which was to meet the Egyptians and the other to capture Jerusalem. But God kept His promise, and allowed Judah to defeat the Assyrians.

This comes to show us that we should not boast of our victories but give God the praise, adoration, and glory for His blessings and deliverance.

**The riches in the temple  
would assure the return  
of the enemy.**

Wednesday  
May 12

## Any More Answers Left to Prayers?

### HOW-TO

Gen. 18:14; Isa. 38:5, 6; Jer. 29:12, 13

Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem—Hezekiah prays.

Jerusalem delivered—God has answered.

Hezekiah becomes ill—Hezekiah prays—God heals, God restores.

The events and results appear simple, right? Is life that simple?

Can God do more than we can ask or imagine?

Can He turn impossible for us to possible?

Can He do what He did then—now? Is He doing it today?

Our God is a great God,

One who is able to do great and marvelous things.

We need to enter into God's great storehouse today to claim His blessings. How do we do that?

**1. Make ourselves ready to be vessels God can bless and use.** That means getting rid of bad habits, thoughts, attitudes—in short possess all the fruits of the Spirit and never forget that our body is the temple of God.

**2. Pray, pray, pray.** We need to pray endlessly. God is available 24/7. We need to pray continuously and tell God everything. More prayer, more power. Prayer is the opening of our hearts to God. Prayer brings us into instant contact with the supernatural—the all-powerful God.

**3. Read His Word.** We need to know the God we serve. His Word tells us so much about His character: His love, His care for us, His patience. Let us learn about the promises we can claim, too, and the encouragement He has for us and the messages—all in His Word.

**4. Fast, have faith, trust God, and be patient.** Focus on God alone. Take a break from daily activities. Take time out to be with God to tabernacle with Him. Life can never be the same after communing with God.

The God of Bible times is alive today. In so many lives He came through for persons in need. Does God love any of His creations any less? Is He out of miracles today? No, God is alive and ready to bless you today and turn your impossibilities into possibilities. Will you let Him?

### REACT

1. What are some of the factors that cause doubt and what can we do personally to alleviate these feelings?

2. How do biblical characters like Daniel and Peter help us to claim God's promises in time of doubt? And how can we herald the promise of deliverance to others in our everyday activities?



## More Doubt— Less Results!

### OPINION

Josh. 1:5

Let's face it! We, as Christians, find ourselves doubting God. But why?

A few years ago when I was in primary school, I was to take a very important examination that would determine which high school I would attend. It was very important for me to pass because I had so many people depending on me. The reason for this was that my mother was actually my teacher and everyone had the mentality that a teacher's child ought to be exceptionally intelligent. But the truth was, I was just an average student striving for good grades like everyone else. Nevertheless, I fully prepared myself for the examination and being a young Christian I prayed for God's guidance.

It was the night before the exam and I don't know what came over me, but out of nowhere came these questions creeping from the back of my head: *What if I fail? What if I let everyone down? What if God has something better to do than to help me with this silly exam?*

I became so fearful that I found myself making conclusions. *I'm going to fail! I'm going to let everyone down!* Drifting away in my thoughts, I fell asleep. The next morning I woke up, ate a light breakfast, and headed off to school.

In the examination room, the invigilator entered, issued the papers, and ordered us to begin. I breathed a word of prayer, asking God to touch my brain cells, to help me do my best, and just to take over.

After the test, before the results came in, the feelings of doubt came back again. I tried not to pay it any attention. Months later the results came in from the ministry. Because my mother was a teacher, she would know them earlier. "Andrae," she said, "you passed for St. Jago High." I jumped, yelled, danced, and ran all over the house. I thanked God for that was the school I wanted to go to. From that day on I learned never to be doubtful no matter the circumstance.

Sennacherib threatened to destroy the city, and Hezekiah began to doubt God. He began to ask, Where is God? But he finally just turned everything over to God and God came through for him. What an awesome God we serve!

My experience and this Bible story link perfectly well. No matter the situation, once we acknowledge God and turn everything over to Him, He will come through—not only for King Hezekiah and me, but for you too.

**Out of nowhere came  
these questions.**

Friday  
May 14

## Deliver Us From . . .

### EXPLORATION

Isa. 36:18

### CONCLUDE

The Lord will deliver us—from what? The Bible is filled with wonderful accounts of deliverance. Yet it also chronicles times when God allowed Satan to have dominion over His people. How do you rectify your faith in an all-powerful God with the reality of bad things happening to good (or God's) people? What keeps your faith strong? When your faith waivers, what promises do you claim to regain confidence in our Deliverer?

### CONSIDER

- Creating a “Deliverance Mural” that depicts incidents of deliverance recounted in the Bible. This could be done using original drawings or other artwork, copies of classic paintings, cutouts from magazines, etc. It could depict one deliverance account or be a collage of multiple events.
- Interviewing people who have jobs that allow them to interact with or care for people who are in distress. Ask them how they cope when pleasant outcomes do not occur.
- Using David's “Song of Deliverance” (Psalm 18) as a model to compose a new writing in David's style incorporating contemporary language, modern allusions, and/or incidents from your own experience.
- Listening for a deliverance theme in the “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel's *Messiah*. Think about whether that chorus would be as thrilling or uplifting if the theme were something other than deliverance and the forever reign of the King of kings.
- Conducting a “heart attack” by placing heart-shaped cutouts inscribed with Bible promises or other uplifting thoughts in a presentation scrapbook, in a hospital room, or affixed to the front door of a despondent person's house (placed there as a surprise when you know the person is away from the house).
- Browsing the Internet for Web sites that convey Christian encouragement. Share some of these with a friend who needs an uplift.

### CONNECT

Revelation 21; 22.

*The Great Controversy*, chap. 40; *The Desire of Ages*, chaps. 56, 57.

# “Comfort my People”



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“O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’ ” (Isa. 40:9, NKJV).

# Weary and Tired Youth—Is It Possible?

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 40:30, 31

**We want our home church to “catch on” and quickly evolve as fast as we are.**

It has been noted that, throughout history, young people are the torchbearers of change. The decade of the 1960s was no exception. Young people in America were at the forefront of student protests for free speech, civil rights, and even the anti-war movement. The movement to increase awareness and stop the Vietnam War, however, dwindled with time as the military presence escalated and the protesting youths grew weary. One observer keenly noted, “I quickly saw then

that the counterculture wasn't going to make it. It wasn't going to work. It was an illusion. And meanwhile the war was going on. It became more and more clear that you couldn't just set up little islands of peace and love in the middle of the Vietnam War.”<sup>1</sup>

Young people also become impatient when change comes slowly. We want our home church to “catch on” and quickly evolve as fast as we are. And when things do not go in the direction we work so hard to achieve, we become weary like the youth of the 1960s.

Jesus knew that this would happen. This is why He instructed us to come to Him when we are “weary and burdened” (Matt. 11:28, NIV). He knew that even young people would grow weary, and He is willing to take our burdens and lighten our loads. How can we ensure that, as the youth and future of our church, we are able to stay in the forefront of God's army?

Isaiah 40:30, 31 begins with the statement “Even youths” (NIV) as if recognizing that it is almost unheard of for youths to grow weary. Think of a time during an athletic contest, perhaps, when you were so tired that you felt like giving up but you played on. Ponder these words: “they will run and not grow weary” (verse 31, NIV).

This week we are focusing on Isaiah's role in comforting God's people (verse 1) and strengthening those who are weak through the redemptive power of forgiveness. Pay close attention to the words “renew” and “hope” as they pertain to the physical action words of “run,” “soar,” and “walk.” What is God's plan to alleviate the heaviness of our responsibilities? “Whenever man accomplishes anything, whether in spiritual or in temporal lines, he should bear in mind that he does it through co-operation with his Maker.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Alex Forman as quoted Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It* (New York: Time Books, 1987), p. 221.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 82.

# The Insidiousness of Idolatry Indulgence

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 17:7, 8; 40:28, 29, 31

"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."<sup>1</sup>

There are so many forms of idolatry within society today that the devil uses to take our focus away from Christ. One of the problems with our indulging in idolatry is that we often feel that God will never forgive us. The people of Israel were experiencing this same sense of spiritual darkness.

God used Isaiah the prophet in a special way to steer His people in the right direction. He wanted them to understand that despite all that they had done wrong, He was willing to forgive them. Just look at some of the many passages in Isaiah that relate to this theme: 1:16-18; 6:7; 41:10, 13, 14; 55:6, 7; 57:15, 16; 63:9.

Isaiah 40 is a chapter that classically illustrates how much God was willing to comfort His people and plead for them to forsake their idols and return to relationship with Him. Isaiah states: "Have

you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is

**We often feel that God  
will never forgive us.**

unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, . . . Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:28, 29, 31, NKJV).

A more modern-day prophet spoke these words: "Our people [the church] are making very dangerous mistakes. . . . There is among us as a people an idolatry of human instrumentalities and mere human talent. . . . God's people have departed from their simplicity. They have not made God their strength, and they are weak and faint, spiritually. . . . You are following the same path as did ancient Israel!"<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah predicted in his day that there would come a time when "a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands; he will not respect what his fingers have made" (Isa. 17:7, 8, NKJV).

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 311.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 75, 76.

Monday  
May 17

## God Beyond the Box

### LOGOS

Isaiah 40

I first remember Isaiah 40 from a memory verse when a child, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (verse 8, NKJV). I sensed some kind of permanency with God. As a teenager I was aware that John the Baptist claimed to be the one in the desert preparing the way for Jesus (Isa. 40:3-5; Luke 3:4-6). John, a prophet, was fulfilling prophecy, and I sensed a link of continuity with God. God was at work in the Old and New Testament. As a young adult, I wrestled with the concept of a God without beginning. Where did God come from? Isaiah 40:28 gave some evidence, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable" (NKJV).

At least the Bible admitted that God was difficult to comprehend, and I had to accept His existence by faith. But not until recently have I trusted God more. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength" (verses 30, 31, NKJV).

**Jesus is God's best news.**

When exhausted, I claim and accept the promise and find strength in God. Over time God has become not only someone that I knew existed, but a closer friend. I suspect that is why Isaiah prophesied and wrote. The people of Judah knew the Lord was God of their history and culture. He was their God but a God who conveniently fitted the box of their minds and did not affect their lives. But God is always beyond the box.

### A New Section

Isaiah 40 begins a new section in the book. Chapters 1–35 record God warning Judah and the surrounding nations of their sins and His work of justice in their midst. Chapters 36–39 report some personal work of Isaiah: his support and advice to King Hezekiah during the Assyrian threat. Isaiah was a man of his times and not just the esoteric future. From Isaiah 40 to the end (chapter 66), the prophet focuses on the nature of God and how God will bring about His desired future for Judah and the world.

Isaiah 40 answers basic theological questions: What is God like? What are humans like in comparison? How can God and humans relate?

### The Voice Shouting With Good News (Isa. 40:1-11)

Isaiah is asked by a visionary voice to be the voice to the people and give them

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a new message. The message must be heard—shouted! God is not just a God of justice but compassion as well. He will come personally and show this mercy. As a dignitary, He will need the road well prepared (verses 3-5), the Word of God is certain even though generations of people may die like the flowers of the field (verses 6-8), and when God comes the people will be well looked after by the Shepherd extraordinaire. These images give an indication of what God will do.

The images of this section are well used by the writers of the New Testament. John the Baptist is the road builder preparing the way (Luke 3:4-6). Jesus says God cares for the flowers even though they do not last long (Matt. 6:30). He also refers to Isaiah 40:8 and the certainty of God's Word coming true in His own message of His soon coming (Matt. 24:35). When Jesus does come, He brings His rewards with Him (Rev. 22:12). Jesus was the Good Shepherd and treated people as such (Matt. 9:36; John 10:11-18). Jesus is God's best news.

### **Comparing God? (Isa. 40:12-31)**

More images are used to describe God in these verses. To take the mind into the realm of the unknown, familiar images are used to give a reference point. Isaiah first asks who we can compare God to; later God Himself asks the same question (verses 18, 25). A series of satirical, rhetorical questions compares God to idols, to humans, and the created things on earth and in heaven. In comparison God is beyond them all, and we as humans have not heard the words of God and are nothing (verses 15, 17, 23). God is not just preoccupied with the minutia of human lives; He is the great all-knowing and all-powerful Creator.

The people think God is too big and too powerful to be interested in them (verse 27). They are so wrapped up in their own issues that they put God in the box and leave Him there. Like them we fail to look out or up to some Other solution. But God must be allowed to be God, the God beyond the box of human minds. Although humans are nothing but withering flowers in comparison, those who choose to hear His Word, to be awed by and to trust Him, can find a personal God who will help them when they get weary. We may even be able really to trust Him with our lives. Trust in this God promises to be a soaring adventure (verses 30, 31).

### **REACT**

1. What images are used to describe God in Isaiah 40? Which image means the most to you?
2. In what ways have you put God in a box? How can you help people to comprehend God beyond the box?
3. What do you understand by the image of humans as withering flowers (Isa. 40:6-8, 23, 24) and grasshoppers (verse 22)?
4. Which is your favorite promise in the chapter? Why?

Tuesday  
May 18

## Preparing for Your Restoration

### TESTIMONY

Isaiah 40

What happens when God calls you to be faithful, despite your trials? What do you do when you are at the end of your rope? Do you hang on or let go and plummet into the depths of despair? How does it feel when it seems that God has turned a deaf ear to you, as if you are all alone, left to face this cold, harsh world? Do you trust Him or indulge yourself in fear and doubt? "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isa. 40:28, 29, NIV).

Throughout the book of Isaiah, God's people were full of unbelief. They worshiped idols which was like a slap in God's face. They suffered much because of their own guilt. They felt the wrath of God's judgment, the hand of His punishment. But they also felt His endless mercy, His infinite love. He gave them comfort, hope, and promised them restoration. The same is true for us.

**God is in the business  
of rewards.**

Though we go through some things, and have yet to experience many more trials, God promises in His Word to restore us, not necessarily on this earth, but in eternity. God is in the business of rewards, and He rewards all according to their walk. "Whenever He comes to us, His reward is with Him. He does not leave it in heaven, but gives it to us every day. Daily He gives us confidence and light and blessing. Daily our hearts beat in unison with His great heart of infinite love."<sup>1</sup>

"Those who desire to labor with God have need of His Spirit every day, they need to walk and labor in meekness and humility of spirit, without seeking to accomplish extraordinary things, satisfied to do the work before them and doing it faithfully."<sup>2</sup>

### REACT

1. Why is it that many get caught up laboring for the Lord, but forget the Lord of the labor?
2. How does this question apply to you: "If God seems so far, who moved?"
3. What are three definite things you must change to walk closer with God?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1145.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1144.



# "My World's Falling Apart!"

## HOW-TO

Rom. 8:31-39; Gal. 6:2; Rev. 21:3, 4

"My whole world's falling apart!" Ever felt like that? At some point most people are going to feel some form of pain and anguish. Whether it's a class that you're failing or a relationship that has ended, sometimes life really hurts. It's at these times we are in need of comfort. It can be a temptation to find comfort in ways that eventually bring us more harm. Instead, it's important to remind ourselves of some ways that will help us cope and even grow through whatever difficulty is at hand.

He loves us too much  
to forget.

**1. Remember you are not alone.** When we are hurting, it's easy to feel sorry for ourselves and believe we are the only one who's ever felt this way. It can feel as if you are the one person in the universe that God has chosen to forget. Everybody else looks as if they are having a perfect and exciting life. It's important to remember that we all experience pain sometime in our lives and as amazing as another person's life is, it might not seem so great if you were actually living it. God never forgets. He loves us too much to forget (Rom. 8:31-39). He sent Jesus to this earth because He loved us, and He is a reminder of the length God is prepared to go to show how much He loves us.

**2. Remember not to carry the burden alone.** We all like to think of ourselves as superman or superwoman, but there are times when we just can't do everything by ourselves. Find a friend to talk to. If it's more serious, talk to your church pastor or a counselor. There is no shame in saying that you need a little help from time to time. The Bible encourages us to support one another as a way of showing God's love (Gal. 6:2).

**3. Remember it will end.** When life is very black, it feels as if the pain will never end. This is when some people choose to take their lives because they don't believe the pain will go away. But as awful as it seems now, remember that one day the class will end, broken hearts do mend, and soon we will be in a place where there will be no more pain (Rev. 21:3, 4).

Thursday  
May 20

## Released From the Guilt Trap

### OPINION

Isa. 40:1, 2; Rom. 8:31-34; 1 John 3:20

As a teenager, I fell into Satan's timeless trap of doubting God's love for me. I was convinced that my past mistakes were so great that God could not forgive me. Worse still, He could not accept me. My guilt was pushing me further away from my God.

It was not until a friend challenged me to consider that God is love and was desperate to have me back that I decided to put God to the test. I challenged God to wake me up early enough to study His Word before anyone in the house began to stir. (I'm sure God smiled and had to laugh. Too easy!)

I was wide awake at 5:30 A.M., quite a miracle for someone who is definitely not a morning person. So I opened my Bible. It fell open to Isaiah 1. "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen" (verse 15, NIV). My heart broke and I cried my heart out to God. "Stop

**Many are leaving the church  
because of the way they are  
treated by people in the  
church.**

doing wrong, learn to do right!" (verses 16, 17, NIV). "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (verse 18, NIV). There it was. Forgiveness. Love. Comfort. Acceptance.

I had been beating myself up over sins that God had already forgiven! My penalty had been paid. I beheld my God of comfort and love.

Just as I had misunderstood the love of my Father in heaven, so do many today. They see God as a condemning, punitive dictator—if they even believe in Him at all. Many look at religion and judge God by what they see. Many are leaving the church because of the way they are treated by people in the church. How sad. When will we learn that Christianity is not the religion we choose, but the relationship we have with our Savior? So many are serving their religion rather than their God. Don't they see they are making an idol of it?

Isaiah had a very clear message. Yes, retribution, but there was always a way out. Good news! "Here is your God!" Shout it from the mountains! Your God loves you and your time of hardship is over!

Memo to myself: Let go of your guilt and your sin. Give it to Jesus. He has paid your penalty. He loves you. Now, let it go.

Maybe this message is for you too?

# A Chapter That Soars

## EXPLORATION

Isa. 40:1-31

## CONCLUDE

Isaiah 40 is one of the most poetic and profound chapters of the Bible. It begins in answer to the cries of people who are oppressed and suffering and brings the promise of really great news and a revelation of God. The prophet reminds us of the vastness and goodness of God, stretching across time and space. In contrast with the magnificence of God, both the good and bad things we are so easily distracted by on this earth are insignificant. And finally, we are reminded that the power of God is the source of our strength and hope. It's worth reading again and again.

## CONSIDER

- Reading the whole of Isaiah 40 aloud to yourself.
- Sending a card or flowers to someone going through difficult circumstances.
- Watching the classic film *Chariots of Fire* and paying particular attention to the sequence in which excerpts from Isaiah 40 are overlapped with the running scenes.
- Listening to a recording of or singing the worship song "Eagles' Wings" (it has been recorded by a number of Christian artists).
- Interviewing older people at your church, asking them to list things they might have been tempted to idolize at various stages of their lives.
- Using newspaper reports of world news to create a collage or similar work of art on the theme of Isaiah 40:15.
- Memorizing Isaiah 40—or portions of it.

## CONNECT

*Ministry of Healing*, "Danger in Speculative Knowledge."  
Randy Maxwell, *On Eagles' Wings*.

# To **Serve** and to **Save**



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“ ‘Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations’ ” (Isa. 42:1, NIV).

# Soon to Be Delivered

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 49:9

"Mother? When will we be free?"

"When the Deliverer comes, darling."

"But when will He come?"

"When the time is right," the mother replied.

The child thought for a while, then she asked, "But how do you know He will come?"

The mother wrung out a piece of the clothing she had just rinsed, then she said, "A long time ago, before we were slaves, the prophet told our forefathers that we would be taken captive and also that we would be delivered."

"Wow," the child breathed.

"You see, we were not obeying the laws of God, and this is why we would be taken captive, but God made a promise to Abraham a long time ago. He told him that He would bless his children, and not only them, but everyone in the future who would hear about Him and serve Him. God loves us so much He would not let us stay captive forever."

**"The prophet told our forefathers that we would be taken captive."**

"Does He love me too?" the child asked.

"Yes, that is why He told the prophet that He would send someone to set us free, and when He comes, He will send

us back to Jerusalem, our true home, and then we will be free again."

"Jerusalem!" the child echoed, "Father has told us that is where the great temple is." Then she suddenly exclaimed, "But, Mother! The temple is destroyed!"

"Yes, but we will build it again—and worship God in it."

The child thought about what her mother said as she watched her hang out the washing, and then she said, "Mother?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know the Deliverer?"

The mother smiled, and with a twinkle in her eyes she said, "That's another story, for another day. Now run along, dear, there's work to be done."

So the child ran off in the direction of the fields and her friends. Then she stopped as she heard her mother call after her.

"Don't worry, dear. He *will* come."

Sunday  
May 23

## Wanted: Willing and Faithful Servants

### LOGOS

Isaiah 41; 42:1-7; 44:26-45:6; 49:1-12

### The Character of a Servant

Beginning in chapter 40 of Isaiah, God introduces His servant. In the chapters that follow, the servant is meant to be Isaiah himself, Israel (the covenant people, not the northern kingdom which no longer existed), and also the coming Messiah. But, in order to understand the role of the servant, we must first understand what God intended the character of His servant to be. The best explanation is found in Philippians 2:5-8: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (NIV).

Love (*agape*) is best understood as selfless service to others. This was the character of Jesus. He came to demonstrate true love. He did that by living His

**God intended for Israel to learn God's character and to proclaim it.**

life as a Servant of servants. Servant love (usually referred to as *agape* love) is the character of God and therefore the essence of the law of God. If we accept God's invitation to enter into a covenant relationship with Him, He promises to give us this character as well. Jeremiah 31:33 says, " 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people' " (NIV).

When we are in this covenant of servant-love,\* we become like Jesus, who taught us, " 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' " (Matt. 20:25-28, NIV).

God intended for Israel to learn God's character and to proclaim it, by both word and deed, to the surrounding nations. When the Messiah comes, He will more fully teach this service. Ultimately God intends each of us to so reflect this servant-love character that all people will become part of God's covenant community.

### God's Call to All (Isa. 41:1-42:7)

Before God can impress upon Israel how successful His plan of servant-love

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can be, He must first convince them that He alone is the omnipotent God. He calls not only on Israel, but upon all nations to hear Him. He describes the bravado of idolaters as they speak of the so-called power of their gods, even as they must nail “down the idol so it will not topple” (Isa. 41:7, NIV).

God reminds Israel of His love for them and that He has chosen them to be His covenant people. In this covenant they are to be His servants and purveyors of the knowledge of His character of servant-love. Israel need not fear this task. It is not too difficult for them, with God’s help. In fact, there is nothing too difficult for God. Can idols make such a claim? Certainly not!

When God’s covenant people truly accept the character of servant-love, they will truly be (as the Messiah would demonstrate) “ ‘a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles’ ” (42:6, NIV).

### **God’s Knowledge and Power (Isa. 44:26–45:6)**

Because of the disobedience of His people, God allowed Babylon to be an agent of His discipline. But God did not reject His people. He promised that they would be released from captivity in Babylon and that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored. As a way of demonstrating His power and foreknowledge, God reveals that Cyrus, the Persian emperor, would be the one to release the Israelites and provide for the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem. Cyrus does not even know that he is the agent of God’s will, but God knows—and reveals even the method the army of Cyrus would use to enter the city of Babylon!

### **The Result of Faithful Servant-love (Isa. 49:1-12)**

Now the prophet Isaiah calls on all to listen to what he has learned. He recognizes that he, as well as Israel, has not been faithful to God and God’s plan. But God has forgiven! God once again points His covenant people to the unfinished task: “ ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth’ ” (49:6, NIV).

God further reminds His people of His covenant love for them and shares a promise that if we accept the challenge and privilege of servant-love, all peoples and nations will join God’s covenant community!

### **REACT**

When God calls you, is He calling you to a job, mission, or ministry? Or could He be calling you to a relationship with Him? Explain your answer.

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\*The concept of servant-love is based on a paper written by Dr. Thomas Wilson of Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday  
May 24

## The Picture of a Servant

### TESTIMONY

2 Cor. 6:4-7; 1 John 3:16

The book *Prophets and Kings* utilizes an entire chapter for the “coming of the Deliverer.” Ellen White takes the words of Isaiah, along with other words of promise for the One to come, and paints a portrait of the chosen servant of God. Those prophetic words illustrate His loving character, the key to the plan of salvation.

“It was love for sinners that led Christ to pay the price of redemption. ‘He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor,’ none other could ransom men and women from the power of the enemy; ‘therefore His arm brought salvation unto him; and His righteousness, it sustained him.’ Isaiah 59:16.”<sup>1</sup>

The Deliverer would be the perfect Servant. Though “despised and afflicted,” He shall not cry out nor lift up.” Jesus would endure. “He shall not fail nor be discouraged.” Jesus would carry out His mission. “No beauty or majesty” did He seek.

“In His life and lessons, Christ has given a perfect exemplification of the unselfish ministry which has its origin in God. God does not live for Himself. By creating the world, and by upholding all things, He is constantly ministering for others. ‘He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’ Matt.

5:45. This ideal of ministry God has committed to His Son. Jesus was given to stand at the head of humanity, that by His example He might teach what it

**His whole life was under a  
law of service.**

means to minister. His whole life was under a law of service. He served all, ministered to all. Thus He lived the law of God, and by His example showed how we are to obey it.”<sup>2</sup>

“As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God” (2 Cor. 6:4-7, NIV).

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16, NIV). If the love of Jesus shines through our humble service, we, too, can bring others to see who our God is.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 692.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 649.



# By the Word

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 8:20

The book of Isaiah contains a vivid description of what the Lord wanted His people to know beforehand, so that through the eventually fulfilled prophecies and warnings, the Israelites would turn to the God of their forefathers and repent from their evil ways. One such warning is found in Isaiah's account of what the Lord spoke regarding fearing Him and heeding His Word (Isa. 8:11-22). This section begins with the Lord urging

**Christians in every age  
have sought comfort in  
the prophecies found  
in this chapter.**

Isaiah not to take part in the ways of the evil Israelites out of fear of what they might do to harm him; rather, Isaiah should fear the Lord only, because He will cause adversaries who do not fear the Lord to stumble and be snared into a trap. The second part of the section says that the Lord will hide His face from His people in an attempt to have them turn to Him and in all their ways acknowledge Him. Doing so would save them from further oppression.\*

Though it is true that the Israelites of Isaiah's day were exceedingly evil and chose not to seek the Lord in times of trouble, the Lord's warning does not apply to them only. In fact, all Christians in every age have sought comfort in the prophecies found in this chapter. Whether as a Jew during Isaiah's lifetime, or as a Seventh-day Adventist today, anyone can seek mediums and wizards to answer matters regarding their own lives instead of consulting the Lord's direction (verse 19) if they are extremely troubled. When following such practices, however, we begin to fall into the path of darkness, until every step we take leads to our downfall. In addition, those who become weakened in faith or have none will at that time curse God and blame their troubles on Him and everyone else but themselves (verses 21, 22). Therefore, the Lord strongly cautions us against seeking consultation from anything but the testimony, which is our guide for living (verse 20). Without it, we are lost, alone, and condemned. Isaiah's message remains as a remedy and reminder to us that when we are faced with problems, as long as we seek the righteous path and rest solely on the Lord's principles, He will never forsake us and will turn all matters into His good purposes.

\*See <<http://www.htmlbible.com/kjv30/henry/H23C008.htm#9-16>>

<<http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/BIBLE/ISA/ISA8.HTM>>

Wednesday  
May 26

## Cyrus, God's Anointed

### HOW-TO

Isa. 61:1-3

Cyrus the great, king of Persia, is often seen by biblical scholars as a type of messiah, exhibiting many of the same prophetic characteristics of Jesus Christ some five centuries later. There are many archeological, as well as biblical, similarities between the two messiahs that are worth noting.

Isaiah prophesied the coming of both, and called them both "the anointed" and "shepherd." "This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus" (Isa. 45:1, NIV).

God called Cyrus to be  
a "messiah."

The Hebrew word translated "anointed" is *mashiah*, commonly read as "Messiah," and translated as *christos* in the Greek. *Mashiah* was used in the Old Testament to describe an anointed person set

apart. Both Saul and David were anointed to be kings. In fact, the verb form *mashah* is used to denote kingship. These people were anointed with oil in a ritual as a sign of being set apart by God for the office that they were about to fulfill.

Cyrus's career as king and emperor was also an ideal fit for the messianic title. Though Cyrus built his empire primarily by conquest, local peoples often greeted him as a savior, even after impressive victories over their rulers. He is remembered for being even-handed, humane, and respectful of indigenous cultures and religions. He was the first monarch to believe in multiculturalism. The *Cyrus Cylinder*, written in cuneiform c. 538 B.C., published the first declaration of human rights. The *Cylinder* reports, "All the inhabitants of Babylon ... bowed to [Cyrus] and kissed his feet, jubilant that he [had received] the kingship." The king allowed his vassal states to retain their cultural and religious identities. He allocated funds for the restoration of important public buildings, temples, and idols of the newly conquered peoples. Since the Jews had no idols to restore, he returned to them the temple treasures taken by Nebuchadnezzar during the sack of Jerusalem.

God called Cyrus to be a "messiah," to be a deliverer for Israel, just as He called His Son to be the Anointed One to deliver us from our sins.

### REACT

Compare and contrast the messianic roles of Cyrus and Christ. See Isaiah 61:1-3.

1. Richard T. Ritenbaugh, *Forerunner*, March 1999.
2. Ibid.

# God's Lesson to Israel

## OPINION

Isa. 8:7-10

The book of Isaiah begins with a theme common to the Old Testament: movement away from God was bringing distress on His people. In the case of the Israelites, invading armies would take the cities of Judah, according to Isaiah's prophecies (Isa. 8:7-10). How did the children of Israel get so far? Indeed, they had taken many faithful steps to get where they were geographically and spiritually, yet an old snare still awaited them.

Since coming from Egypt, they had been led by Moses through the desert to the Jordan. Next began the second phase of God's plan: entering the Promised Land. The burden of fighting all the inhabitants would be eased by the Lord's help since God said that He would drive out the current inhabitants before Israel (Josh. 3:9, 10). Many years were spent under Joshua, and the judges such as Gideon, Deborah, and others in destroying the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, and Jebusites. Even more time was spent on the Philistines and other nations. Yet as demonstrated by Saul in 1 Samuel when he left some Amalekites alive, the Lord's commands were not always obeyed. The histories in the books of Kings and Chronicles illustrate how those not destroyed by the Israelites ultimately helped to move them away from the one true God.

It is very sad and telling that in spite of the great blessings the Lord had given Israel up to that point, it still was not enough. Rather than being the people set apart that God had desired since He made a covenant with them during the time of Moses (Exod. 19:5; 20:1-17), they wanted to be like their neighbors. True to God's Word, when there was a breaking of the covenant, the curses that the Lord had earlier pronounced began to occur. Therefore, in Isaiah's age, one of idolatry and waywardness toward God, the nation of Israel was being removed from the land it once possessed by the Assyrians and others, fierce-fighting, pagan nations. Clearly, God can use anyone to do His will, those who fear God and those who don't.

In spite of the obvious misery the Israelites faced at the hands of their invaders, all this was meant to demonstrate the importance of total reliance on God. What a lesson for any age. Isaiah saw and wrote about how people had forgotten God, had disregard for their less-fortunate neighbors and did what was spiritually popular. But as the saying goes, what is popular is not always right, and vice-versa. God desires full reliance on Him in this and every age.

**What is popular is not  
always right.**

## May I Take Your Coat, Madam?

### EXPLORATION

Phil. 2:5-8

### CONCLUDE

One of God's most heartbreakingly generous qualities is the way He calls repentant sinners to be His servants—"lights to the Gentiles." It's clear that God cares not only for the ultimate safety and happiness of the universe, and not only for the once-for-all redemption of sinners, but also that His children develop His own true servanthood.

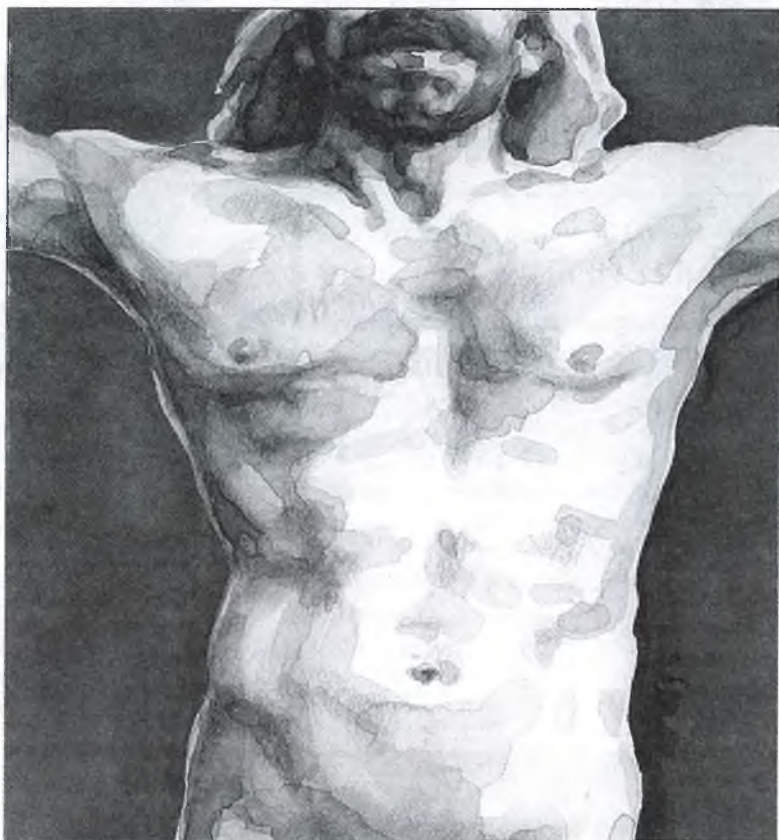
### CONSIDER

- Thinking back on books you've read or movies you've seen that show butlers or other servants at work. Make a two-column list of ways in which ordinary servants and servants of Christ are similar and different.
- Buying or borrowing an inexpensive musical instrument you've never played before and learn to play (or sing-and-play) the song "Make Me a Servant" in *Praise Time*. Check this Web site:  
<<http://www.mc-pro.com/kbc/lyrics/GB135.htm>>.
- Asking a child to help you act out a skit for a children's story time at church based on the story in this week's "Introduction." If necessary, change the characters—and their activities—to masculine ones.
- Volunteering to be a butler for a half-hour at the next party you attend. Tell people you're doing research on what it feels like to be a servant. Check out the following Web sites on butler and servant training:  
<<http://www.guildofbutlers.com/courses.htm>>;  
<<http://www.ausbutler.com.au>>;  
<<http://www.housestaff.net/avail.htm>>.
- Writing a persuasive email about the following issue: A former U.S. Secretary of the Interior was accused of not giving proper care to the environment because of his conservative Christian beliefs. In other words, if Jesus is coming soon—and the earth will be made new—why worry about what happens to the old? Begin an email with "Dear Mr. Secretary" and clearly state your views on this issue. Send the email to a friend (whom you've warned ahead of time) who has views different from your own.

### CONNECT

*The Ministry of Healing*, "Development and Service"; *Steps to Christ*, "The Work and the Life."

# Doing the Unthinkable



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“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed”  
(Isa. 53:5, NKJV).

# Subjected to Suffering

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 53:4

You've seen those movies and TV shows. The world is in danger and the situation looks grim. Only one person in the whole world has the ability and the intellect to save it from certain doom. Within minutes, that person devises a plan to overcome tremendous odds and musters enough courage and composure to look death in the face. The hero seems to know without a shadow of a doubt that success is within reach.

Every day the average person is bombarded with the idea that only the strong survive and those who can face troubles without fear will inevitably triumph over what life throws at them.

**What if I didn't know  
whether I'd make it through?**

What about the average Jane or Joe who wakes up every day wondering—sometimes even dreading—what life has in store for them? During a

bad day, my friends would tell me, "Don't worry. You'll make it through this." But what if I didn't know whether I'd make it through?

One Being had to endure that question. In Mark 14, Jesus asked His disciples to pray with Him because His soul is "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (verse 34, NIV). If Jesus knew without a doubt that He would make it through the next few crucial days and triumph over sin and death, what reason would He have to feel overwhelmed?

Isaiah talked about how Jesus' life was going to be difficult. The prophet also described how Jesus would do good deeds and at the same time be considered to be cursed by God. Why would a Being who created the universe and laws to govern it ever choose to come down to our speck of dust called earth and be subject to the kind of pain and suffering that Isaiah described? What Christ went through is unimaginable and unthinkable, but perhaps there is more to the suffering of Jesus to which Isaiah is trying to point us.

Many Seventh-day Adventists know that accepting Jesus as their personal Savior is the first step to developing a relationship with God, but many underestimate the power of that truth. Accepting Jesus as Savior means accepting what He did and what He chose to give up

# Identifying the Suffering Servant

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 52:13–53:12

Born into a powerful, aristocratic family, Isaiah lived in Jerusalem most of his life. He wrote the book of Isaiah 700 years before the birth of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah 53, which actually begins in chapter 52:13, describes One who suffers and dies for the sins of others—the Suffering Servant. Christians believe this text foretells of Jesus Christ. Bible scholar Henry Hailey describes Isaiah 53 as “so vivid in detail that one would almost think of Isaiah as standing at the foot of the cross. It cannot possibly fit any person in history other than Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Non-Messianic Jews, however, have different interpretations of the identity of the Suffering Servant. They subscribe to three main theories: One common explanation identifies the nation of Israel as the Suffering Servant. An alternate theory claims Isaiah as the Servant. A third view teaches the idea of two Messiahs, one who comes to suffer and another who conquers and rules.<sup>3</sup>

A casual look at the text reveals that singular, masculine pronouns refer to the Servant. This appears to contradict the theory that the text refers to an entire nation. In addition, Isaiah 53 describes the Servant as innocent: “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (verse 7, NKJV); and blameless “He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth” (verse 9, NKJV). The Hebrew word used in verse 10, *asham*, means sin offering.<sup>4</sup>

Leviticus 6:6 requires a sin offering to be without blemish. In contrast, Isaiah 1:4 proclaims Israel as a “sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters!”

(NKJV). Likewise, Isaiah calls himself a sinful man of unclean lips in Isaiah 6:5. Therefore, the theory of Isaiah as the Servant fails as well.

The theory of two Messiahs resolves the seeming contradiction that the Messiah cannot come to suffer and reign at the same time. When thought of as one Messiah but with two comings, however, Jesus resolves the paradox Himself. He came the first time as the Suffering Servant and when He comes again, He will come as the Ruler.<sup>5</sup>

**Non-Messianic Jews,  
however, have different  
interpretations.**

1. [http://ut.essortment.com/oldtestamentis\\_rmac.htm](http://ut.essortment.com/oldtestamentis_rmac.htm).

2. <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aiaa/letter-judaism.html>.

3. *Ibid.*

4. <http://www.chaim.org/nation.htm>.

5. <http://isaiah53.ifrance.com/isaiah53/realthing.htm>.

Monday  
May 31

## Salvation by Substitution

### LOGOS

Isa. 50:4-10; 52:13-15; 53

"For many years in the marketplace of Rotterdam, Holland, stood an old corner house known as 'the house of a thousand terrors.' In the sixteenth century King Philip II of Spain ruled over Holland. In his hatred of the Dutch, he tortured, maimed, imprisoned, and exiled thousands. When the people rose up in defiance, he sent a Spanish army under the Duke of Alva to put down the rebellion.

"The city of Rotterdam held out valiantly for some while, then finally fell before the Spanish army. The victors went from house to house, ferreting out the citizens, then slaying them wholesale in their houses. In one house a group of men, women, and children huddled together, a thousand terrors gripping their hearts as the Spanish soldiers approached.

**In the divine reckoning,  
the way up is down.**

"Suddenly a young man had an idea. Taking a young goat belonging to the premises, he killed it, then with a broom swept its blood under the door of the house. Then they waited breathlessly, as footsteps approached. Soon the Spaniards were battering at the door. Then they heard one of them say, 'Look at the blood running under the door. Come away, men, the work here is already done!'

"A little later the army withdrew, allowing a band of thankful people to emerge, safe and sound. They lived because a goat had died."

The book of Isaiah foretells of a far more solemn story that concerns the salvation of the doomed human race. The latter part of the book is especially replete with messages of redemption by substitution and the Messianic hope.

This time, we focus on what the prophet says about the supreme sacrifice, about Jesus Christ who, before He returns as Reigning King, first visited us as Suffering Servant.

### Isaiah 50:4-10

The prophet portrays Christ as the Servant, the totally obedient One suffering for our sake. Unlike unresponsive Israel, who is separated from the Lord by sin (verses 1-3), the Servant willingly responds to Yahweh (verses 4-9) and becomes the Example of all who would fear God (verse 10).

The duty assigned to Him meant supreme sacrifice. Despite sufferings and ill treatment,<sup>2</sup> He was most willing to do the Father's will in procuring salvation for



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man. "I gave" (verse 6) implies the voluntary nature of the Servant's sufferings. He is undaunted from His work of love by shame or suffering for He knows His cause will triumph at last (verses 7, 8).

### **Isaiah 52:13-15**

Who can fathom the depths of Christ's condescension to gain man's salvation? Thank God, the Servant's wise ways are amazingly different from ours. The Servant's wisdom was "deeply self-denying, and it meant accepting ends determined by God and willingly shouldering a burden of untold suffering to make them possible."<sup>3</sup>

In the divine reckoning, the way up is down. To stand tall, bend your knees. To be strong, become weak. To live, die.

So to gain glory, Christ took the path of suffering. The Servant's triumph came through atoning death. No cross, no crown.

### **Isaiah 53:1-12**

The Messiah's history is set forth here in greater detail. From the beginning, the Servant was despised and rejected by humanity (verses 1-3). Who would want to be identified with One so unattractive? One confronted with adverse conditions from his youth? One who came from an ancient stock, the seemingly dead house of David, then in a divided, decayed state? The people failed to desire the Servant, then despised and rejected Him because He did not meet their Messianic expectation. They looked for One coming to reign, not One coming to be humiliated and to suffer the penalty of sin.

Still, the lowly, suffering Servant was the Redeemer (verses 4-6). And contrary to human thinking, the Servant was not suffering for his own sins. The innocent Servant was punished as if guilty, that guilty humankind might be rewarded as if innocent.

How did the Servant take what He didn't deserve? Meekly and without protest (verses 7-9).

In all these, God's saving purpose in the Servant's sufferings is brought to clearer focus. God sees the Servant's death as vindication, a glorious success (verses 10-12). The Servant is the Savior. We are saved by His redemptive suffering. In His atoning death was opened for us a new life beyond that death.

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1. Leslie B. Flynn, *Come Alive With Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 120.

2. In Isaiah 50:6, to "pluck the hair" is the highest insult that can be offered an Oriental (see 2 Samuel 10:4); and to "spit" in another's presence, especially in the face, is likewise an insult In the East (see Job 30:10).

3. Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986), vol. 6, p. 301.

Tuesday  
June 1

## Acquainted With Grief

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 53:3

"The sufferings of humanity ever touched the heart and called forth the sympathy and love of Christ. He exercised pity and compassion toward those who were afflicted in soul or body. His example in the matter of treating the suffering and afflicted should teach us how to have compassion and pity for the sufferings of His creatures.

"Christ suffered in the flesh. . . . He knew what it was to suffer keen pangs of hunger, and He has given special lessons in regard to feeding the hungry and caring

**"Poverty with Christ is riches of the highest value."**

for the needy poor, and has declared that in ministering to the needy we are ministering to Himself in the person of His saints. He says, 'I was an hungred, and ye gave

me meat' (Matt. 25:35). He knew the discomfort and suffering of thirst, and He declared that a cup of cold water given in His name to any of His disciples should not lose its reward.

"Christ was an active, constant worker. He found the domain of religion fenced in by high, steep walls of seclusion as too sacred a matter for everyday life. He threw down the walls of partition, and exercised His helping power in behalf of every one who needed Him. He brought cheerfulness and hope to the desponding. . . . He did not ask, What is your creed? To what church do you belong? Active, earnest, loving interest marked His life. . . .

"The Lord Jesus knows what poverty means. He is the great missionary to the poor, the sick, the suffering. The King of heaven, He could have led a life of wealth and have lived among the wealthiest; but He chose poverty. And He has honored the poor who believe in Him, for He blessed them forever. Poverty with Christ is riches of the highest value."\*

### REACT

1. "Poverty with Christ is riches of the highest value." What does this statement mean to you, and how does one go about attaining "poverty with Christ"?

2. Jesus "threw down the walls of partition" to aid not only His followers, but everyone in need. What walls exist in our lives today that seemingly prevent us from helping those in poverty around us, especially those we hardly know or don't know at all?

\**That I May Know Him*, p. 43.

# Suffering and Glory of the Servant

## HOW-TO

Isa. 53:11

Would you consider giving a body organ or even your life for another person?

Remember Larry, that kid in your elementary school class who was always being bullied? He was a plain kind of kid. He really didn't bother anyone but he was always being bumped around. On the playground he seemed to get pushed to the ground every day. Someone always yelled his name if something was misplaced. He would be tripped when he walked down the aisle between the desks. Sometimes you were a part of it. He never complained.

In academy, he had his gym clothes taken at least once a week. Sometimes you were part of it. He never complained. Junior year, there was a great scavenger hunt. He was in your group, but you managed to ditch him along the way. He never complained. That senior year, if it hadn't been for Larry, you wouldn't have passed physics. He never complained. What sustained Larry?

"What sustained the Son of God during His life of toil and sacrifice? He saw the results of the travail of His soul and was satisfied. Looking into eternity, He beheld the happiness of those who through His humiliation had received pardon and everlasting life. His ear caught the shout of the redeemed. He heard the ransomed ones singing the song of Moses and the Lamb."<sup>1</sup>

What a gift to us! "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, NKJV). Jesus voluntarily laid down His life for the human race. The suffering and humiliation was far outweighed by the future glory.

"The joy that was set before Jesus was that of seeing souls redeemed by the sacrifice of His glory, His honor, His riches, and His own life. The salvation of man was His joy. When all the redeemed shall be gathered into the kingdom of God, He will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied."<sup>2</sup>

How do you share this gift of salvation with someone? Among others, write a letter to a friend explaining Jesus' death and resurrection. Include how it brings reassurance to you of God's forgiveness and love.

**Sometimes you were part of  
it. He never complained.**

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 601.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 686.

## OPINION

2 Cor. 9:15

The greatest gifts in life are not the most expensive ones, those that money can buy. There are some gifts that you get because you've earned them. For example, in Vacation Bible School, I would memorize portions of Scripture and then earn points to get a prize. To get more points and prizes, I worked hard to learn the longest verses. To this day some of my favorite stuffed animals are the ones I earned in VBS.

Then there are gifts that have sentimental value, such as heirlooms. And there

**The greatest gifts in life are not the most expensive ones.**

are also gifts that come in the form of simple gestures of friendship and love. In my life I have had the privilege of giving and receiving such gifts. But the greatest

gift I have ever received is something I will never deserve; I could never learn enough Scripture or be "good enough" for this gift.

This gift is God's grace through His Son Jesus. I definitely don't deserve it; nevertheless it is offered to me freely. When I consider the scene at Calvary, where my Savior was mocked, humiliated, and crucified, I am overwhelmed. On that wooden cross meant for me, He was taunted and insulted. The crimes He utterly despised, He was being charged with. He was deserted by His earthly family and friends, and He felt forsaken by His Father and the heavenly host.

My limited vocabulary cannot even begin to express the gratitude and amazement I feel when I envision the scene at Calvary. I have often wondered what He sees in me that He was willing to give up everything for me. I read, "It wasn't the nails that held Jesus to the cross, it was His love" for me. This gift of love is the most precious gift I have ever received. It is because of this gift that we have the hope of eternal life. It is God's grace that should urge us to live a life that pleases Him. This gift is absolutely free and available to anyone who accepts Jesus as Savior.

## REACT

1. How do you feel when you have received a gift?
2. To what extent, if any, should a sense of obligation relate to one's response to God's gifts?
3. What, if anything, does God expect from you in return for the gift of Jesus?

# Wearing His Stripes

## EXPLORATION

Isa. 53:5

## CONCLUDE

Isaiah said that we are healed of our sins by Jesus' stripes—His whip marks, that is. But the stripes are more than the physical brutality upon His body. The stripes also represent the spiritual beating that Jesus took in our place, the pain of the second death, which is being totally separated from God. That pain is where the stripes leave their deepest marks—on Him and on us. Some people wear uniforms with stripes that show service to their cause. As followers of Jesus, we wear His stripes upon our hearts and our lips and our minds as we proudly serve His cause.

## CONSIDER

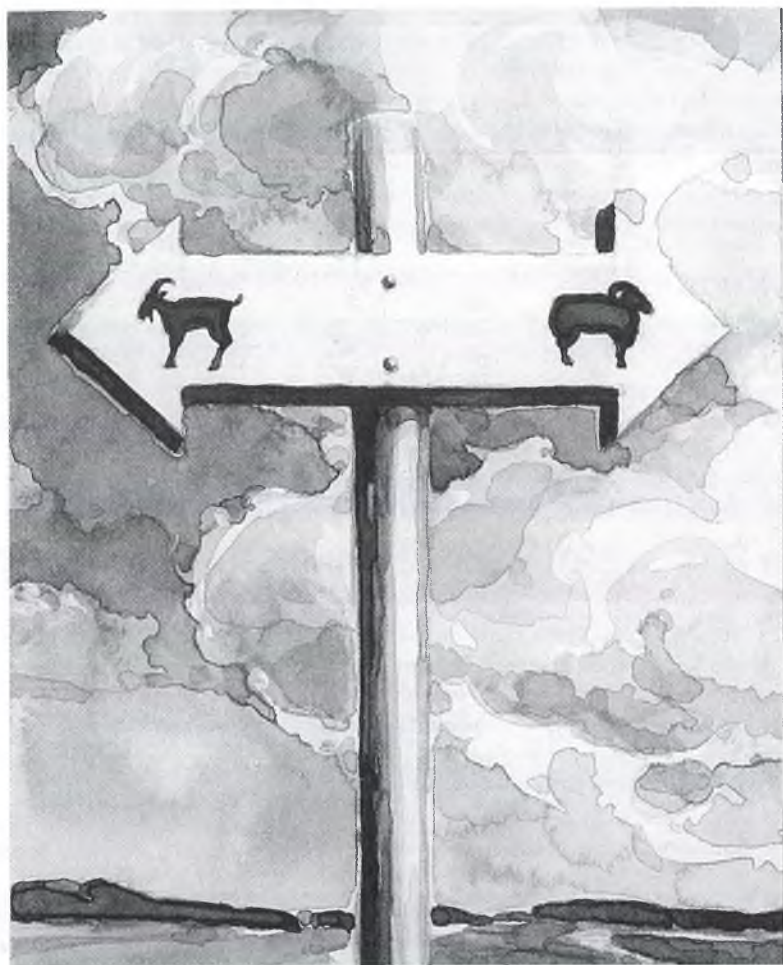
- Dedicating one week to asking God specifically to open opportunities to you to serve Him. Ask Him to arrange “divine appointments” for you to witness or to serve people in need.
- Drawing or painting the scene of Calvary. Use all of your senses (sight, smell, taste, sound, touch) to bring detail to your picture. Do you see the people surrounding the cross, some cursing Jesus and some crying? Do you feel the increasing weight on Jesus' heart as the guilt of every human is added? Do you hear Jesus asking John to take care of His mother for Him? Can you taste the mixture of tears and blood falling over Jesus' lips? Do you feel the lump in His throat? Do you feel the humiliation of this perfectly moral Man as His clothing is removed? Do you smell the odor of sweaty, frenzied people? Do you feel the heat of Jesus' last breath? Do you hear the message of His heart saying, “I love you this much!”
- Contrasting poverty with wealth. Analyze how the needs of the poor differ from the needs of the wealthy. Then analyze what needs both groups share and how both groups can be servants.
- Writing the eulogy of Jesus Christ. Include His birth, age, parents, childhood/education, occupation, service to community, His mission, accomplishments, cause of death. Include quotes from His surviving friends.
- Conducting an interview, asking people this question: “What is the difference between the first death and the second death?”
- Writing another verse to “Amazing Grace,” making it personal. Insert your own name or your own experience.

## CONNECT

Matthew 28.

Jerry D. Thomas, *Messiah*, chap. 70.

# Waging Love



**“If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday” (Isa. 58:10, NIV).**

# Being a Fool for Christ

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 5:2-9

God's thoughts and ways really are so very much higher than our own. The ways of the kingdom of God are usually the exact opposite of conventional human wisdom. This is because fallen human nature tends toward selfishness and self-centeredness; whereas God's character and law are all about unselfish, self-sacrificing love. Consider a few examples:

**Some say that such hard teachings are not meant to be taken literally.**

- If someone hits you, retaliate. Better still, strike them first. "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39, NIV).
- Always stand up for your rights. Be assertive and get people to give you what you want. "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (verse 41, NIV).
- Try to get people to give you more in return than what you give them. Get your money's worth out of them. "If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic" (Luke 6:29, NIV).
- The greatest love of all is to love yourself. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NIV). "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NIV).
- Be nice to rich and powerful people, so that they may return the favor later or be more helpful to you. "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13, 14, NIV).
- It is good to be proud and to get to the top so you can lord it over others. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, . . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:5-7, NIV).

Some say that such hard teachings are not meant to be taken literally, but looking at the example of Jesus, how He led His life, it is difficult to agree with that. They may seem difficult, even crazy, but we have everything to gain by following God's higher ways (Matt. 16:24-26). We do not need to worry about ourselves if we trust in God, and this frees us up to concentrate on seeking the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

Sunday  
June 6

## Can You Hear Me Now? Good!

### LOGOS

Isaiah 55; 58

Economic seesaw. Crime increase. Health failure. Communication failures. We pick up the phone. We dial up G-O-D—no answer. And especially now in our time of need. Is it our technique? We try reaching Him on the information superhighway and the television. No luck. Is it our spirit? We pick up the pace and dance feverishly around the altar of tradition and Sabbath keeping. We afflict ourselves with lancets of good works, fasts, and knee-bruising prayers. We ask Him, “Why have we fasted, . . . and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?” (Isa. 58:3, NKJV)

Israel knew God. At least they had met Him before. They were praying to a God that they knew had special powers. But they had become so busy in labor, chasing the “almighty” dollar that they mentally transformed the Almighty God into a convenient genie that would grant their wishes if they would just say the magic words. God did notice, but He could not hear them. It was

**The best way to get God’s  
attention is to let Him  
get yours.**

the static. The static of their sins was too loud and persistent. It was so bad that the people could not even hear His powerful voice over the static of their wickedness. In His love God resorted to leaving a clear and distinct message for the people with Isaiah. This message is found in Isaiah 55; 58, and speaks to us even today. In these passages, God offers us the original wireless solution for our communication difficulties.

### Recognizing Your True Need (Isa. 55:1, 2)

Just because you live lavishly, have a high school or college degree, a decent car, and wear a suit or fancy dress to church doesn’t mean you don’t have needs. Perhaps you are satisfied with your life and are concerned only with the health of your bank account. But until you recognize how poor and thirsty you are, you are just chasing after the wind. So Jesus almost teases us to come, broke as we are, to buy milk and wine. He invites us to purchase our pardon and feast at the table of His salvation. Pardon and salvation—therein lies our true need and our lasting prosperity. No matter how hard we work, we will never be able to afford it. But we can rejoice because Jesus paid it all!



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## From Talking to Listening (Isa. 55:3)

The best way to get God's attention is to let Him get yours. Once you have recognized your true need, wisdom demands that you seek the Supplier. God is the Pursuer of our hearts and the Lover of our souls. He's been chasing after us from long before we even knew ourselves. It was He who called us when we were still naked and wretched and blind—in short, unlovable. He gave the invitation to come feast of His salvation. All He asks is that we come and listen. What He has to say to us is better than anything we can tell Him. His words alone can break every confining yoke. Jesus once said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63, NKJV).

## Reaching Up (Isa. 55:6, 7)

Now that the invitation has been made clear, now that God has outlined His agenda, now that He has initiated and established the covenant, He is waiting for your response. The lines are clear, and it's our turn to speak. We respond by reaching up our hands in humble simplicity, crying to the Lord like the prophet Elijah, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me" (1 Kings 18:37, NKJV). We humble ourselves in prayer, seek His face and turn from our wicked ways (2 Chron. 7:14). And just as in the days of Elijah, we can be assured that the consuming fire of His love and mercy will descend in that moment to purify us.

## Reaching Out (Isa. 58:6, 7)

Somewhere along the line, we tend to forget what God has done for us and focus on what we can do for ourselves. We forget because we are not exercising the spirit of mercy that God has exemplified to us (especially in the person of Jesus Christ). Jesus became poor so that we might become rich. Now He is asking that we do the same. It is our privilege to bring others to the foot of the Cross and share with them our physical blessings. It is then that we are most like God (Luke 6:27-36).

So hang up the phone! God is not to be found on your Nextel Direct Connect, your Sprint PCS, or your Verizon Choice Plan. Get off the information superhighway and into the alleys and streets of the least of these your brothers and sisters. Reach up for His blessings and then reach out in mercy to your neighbor. God is longing to heal us.

## **REACT**

1. The Israelites at that time were working overtime to gain and maintain their wealth, and that involved oppressing others to do so. Does this sound like the capitalistic economy practiced by most modern Western nations? Does God advocate a more socialistic economy? Explain your answers.

2. What kinds of "static" can block an almighty, omnipresent God's ability to hear us? How do we reconcile that with the belief that God is always with us?

Monday  
June 7

## Hard Life, Huh?

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 40:30, 31

Isaiah 40:30, 31 is familiar to us all. All of us have been through a dark valley, an unforgiving glen, a barren wilderness, or even an overcrowded but lonely neighborhood. We have all had experiences to produce resounding testimonies, but how do we get through them? In an age in which people are more educated, more successful, more culturally aware, where topics of concern once kept secret are brought out to breathe in a tolerant atmosphere, it is ironic that depression, loneliness, stress, and uncertainty abound.

How does one get through trials? This regularly aired question has a simple, inexpensive answer. Our guide through this world is God's Word; i.e., His Holy

**It is ironic that depression, loneliness, stress, and uncertainty abound.**

Scriptures, or the Bible. In an age in which many run to various means to gain enlightenment, one true voice remains firm. "The Word of God is to be the foundation of all study, and the words of revelation, carefully

studied, appeal to and strengthen the intellect as well as the heart. . . . The truths of the Bible, received, will uplift mind and soul. If the Word of God were appreciated as it should be, both young and old would possess an inward rectitude, a strength of principle, that would enable them to resist temptation. . . . a familiar acquaintance with the Scriptures sharpens the discerning powers and fortifies the soul. . . . The Bible . . . will never fail to vanquish the adversary."\*

Yes, we have heard it all before, but we all know how true it is. Throughout history great men and women under severe trials and tribulations turned to the Bible, or if one was not available, they went through the trials victorious because of what they had learned. We all go through this life with trials; if we are Christians, why is this so?

We live in a world of sin, through unfortunately human choice, and some rain must fall. But with God's Word as the guide, whether we remain firm and true or waver, by His grace we will survive our trials and produce a testimony to the encouragement of many around us.

We all have a long week ahead. What will we face? How will we cope? Will we have a testimony at the end to make us cry joy or shudder with guilt? Whatever our week, we can all take comfort in the knowledge that if we lean upon God, He will renew our strength and fortify us to come through any trials.

\**Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 89.

# Why Doesn't God Show Himself to Me?

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 58:6-9

The statement has been made over and over again: "If only God would reveal Himself to me, then I would believe in Him." Why does God have to prove Himself to you? Doesn't that take away our ability to choose? Would you believe it was God if He did show Himself to you? God cannot fully reveal Himself to us until we believe in Him. Only once we have a close relationship with God are we able to see God in His full glory.

Isaiah 58:6-9 tells us what having a relationship with God will do in our lives. Each verse gives us a different aspect to a part of our relationship with God. The following is a brief breakdown of each verse so that we can better understand how to apply it to our lives.

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen" (verse 6, NKJV). Fasting is not one of the most popular things to do in our society today. Neither is it God's design that we live in a world filled with wickedness. Therefore God provided us with fasting to "loose the bonds of wickedness" (verse 6, NKJV). By being able to get rid of wickedness and heavy burdens in our lives, we are drawn closer to Him.

By being drawn closer to God, we begin to see needs in the world around us. God will show you how you can help someone in need. It can be as simple as feeding the hungry, helping the poor, and giving clothes to the naked. These things and more will be desires that God puts in your heart when you build a closer relationship with Him.

Once we have drawn ourselves closer to God, we will begin to see the world differently. "Then your light shall break forth" (verse 8, NKJV). People will be able to see a difference in your character and personality because God will be living inside you.

Are you still wondering why God doesn't reveal Himself to you? "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am'" (verse 9, NKJV). God will reveal Himself to you after you take the time to get to know Him and His will. Only by knowing Him will you be able to see Him when He does reveal Himself to you.

**God cannot fully reveal Himself to us until we believe in Him.**

## REACT

Is there something that God has been trying to show me about Himself that I have been too caught up in the world to notice?

## HOW-TO

Isa. 58:6-12

In rare moments of deep thought while I'm procrastinating about reading over my biochem notes on the train to university and people-watching behind my sunglasses, it seems unbelievable that there are so many other lives and thoughts and significant moments besides mine. I try to keep hold of the knowledge that I'm not the center of the universe, but I get a bit overwhelmed by the enormity of so many spheres of life all the same.

**It seems unbelievable that there are so many other lives besides mine.**

So many people need the comfort that comes from letting yourself be loved by God. It is our responsibility to let people know about the greatness of this love and all the things it has accomplished and can still achieve. But we can't always just talk about it. Even when we have the best of intentions,

sometimes sharing our beliefs with others can make them feel uncomfortable or threatened, instead of comforting and reassuring them as we had hoped.

One of the most powerful tools we have is the opportunity to let God's love guide our attitudes and actions so we can bring comfort to others. We need to:

- Pray to be filled with love so that we can give it freely to those who need it. Ask to be led to those who need us; for wisdom, patience, and tolerance in our relationships, so we can treat others gently and with respect; and for the guidance and the means to provide comfort in the ways it is needed most.

- Watch and listen to those around us so that we can identify ways we can make life easier for them. We can learn a lot about those around us by taking note of the way they act and the things that have an impact on them. It can help us to appreciate their good qualities and to be more accepting.

- Be mindful that our own behavior can have an impact on the way people respond to us and the things we have to say.

If we show others the mercy, love, hope, and forgiveness that God has given us, all we can hope is that in time they might want to hear how they can receive the same gifts, and might be comforted by someone who can do it more completely than we.

## REACT

1. How can you love those whom you might consider unlovable?
2. Explain how God could love you even though you may choose not to love Him?

# Climbing Out of Our Trenches

## OPINION

Isa. 5:1-7

One of the most remarkable stories in military history is that of the World War I Christmas truce of 1914. At numerous points up and down the troop lines, British and German combatants spilled into no-man's land exchanging gifts, telling of families, and playing soccer. These cessations were not approved of by high command, but began when a small number of soldiers exited the relative safety of the trench, moving carefully into the brief expanse of open territory between armies. Some held high a white cloth, while others hoisted evergreen trees as a symbol of Christmas peace. These men who previously would have been shot for such an action, caused an unprecedented outbreak of peace among warring soldiers. This respite from war occurred because a handful of courageous men chose to wage love rather than war.

Isaiah's message to Israel points out that acts of loving service supercede mere symbols of holiness. The Jews had become so comfortable in their religious practice that it no longer impacted their behavior, but actually contradicted it. By fasting they believed they were attaining holiness, but in reality they were only starving themselves spiritually, entrenched in the mire of self-serving worship. Isaiah calls Israel to worship through unselfish service.

I, too, am called to this hard-to-attain ideal. While fasting hasn't been the form of holiness I've pursued, it's easy to become comfortable in my religious practice. The hurdle I face is similar to that of the troops wallowing in the cold and mucky trenches in 1914. Am I willing to be the risk-taker, the one who takes the first step to love my neighbor? I risk nothing by discussing the plight of the needy or writing essays about God's love. But the more I talk, the more I write while still neglecting to act, the more reality fades into the distance. Psychiatrist and author Robert Coles contends that a by-product of comfort is a stunted sense of compassion—we are more likely to love humanity in general, but less likely to love one person in particular.

**These men caused an  
unprecedented outbreak  
of peace among warring  
soldiers.**

Isaiah's words convict me that true worship is embodied not in how we praise God with our tongues, but by how we praise Him with our acts of love. True worship involves climbing out of our trench, holding high God's message of peace to a world in conflict.

## EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 10:13

## CONCLUDE

Sometimes it is easy to just lie down and let everything hit you in the face. If it happens, it's God's will, right? Wrong! God's will isn't for us to be aimlessly drifting on an open ocean. God has a purpose. That purpose is to bring us home, protecting us in the process. The lighthouse God uses isn't some figment of spiritual explanation. The Bible is that beacon. Don't believe me? Look at the Scripture for today. This is just one lumen found in His Scripture. He is always trying to reach us, to reassure us that He is there.

## CONSIDER

- Listing a few of the situations this past week that you reacted to badly. Find scriptural advice to deal with these situations.
- Reflecting on the ways during the past week that God tried to get your attention. List your responses.
- Looking at theories of behavioral response (search the Internet). How do we learn to respond to God?
- Listing situations in which it is important to wait. List reasons that you don't wait in those situations. List what you are going to do about it. Save this last list where you'll be reminded.
- Creating a card with graphics and/or quotations that encourage you to wait. Give it to a friend and ask him or her to mail it to you sometime in the future. Remember to pay for the postage!
- Meditating on the lyrics to "Hands in the Air" by The Waiting at <[www.the-waiting.com](http://www.the-waiting.com)>.
- Drawing or describing what symbolizes holiness to you. Share it with others in your study group.
- Using the principles of haiku to write a poem on holiness. Make a book of similar poems written by other members of your family or study group.
- Writing a prayer stating your need to be heard by God and your need to hear God. Through time revisit this prayer and mark events that prove either.

## CONNECT

*Selected Messages*, book 2, chap. 25.

# Desire of Nations



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“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isa. 60:3, NIV).

## INTRODUCTION

John 15:5

As a mother, I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities that this role entails, especially by the attachment that my children have for me. It's to the point that no matter where I go, they go after me.

To illustrate this, it's like one of those American football games where one of the players has the ball and all the players from the opposing team throw themselves on top of that one player to block his play and keep him from making a touchdown. That's how my children's attachment toward me is.

If I go to lie down on my bed, they come and throw themselves on top of me. If I sit on the floor, they climb on me and try to ride me like a horse. And even

**We should seek light not  
only when it is night.**

though it may seem funny, they follow me even to the bathroom. If they can't see me for even a moment, the oldest one starts calling, "Mommy! Mommy!" And the youngest one starts crying.

Sometimes I feel as if I don't have a life of my own, and that my life is for my children only. But if things were completely different, I know I would miss them tremendously, and this tells me that they love me just as much as I love them. This makes me reflect on how the dependence that my children and I have established for each other is like that which all Christians should have with Jesus.

Many times we, as mothers, complain that our children are too attached to us and never stop to think how much Jesus desires that we, His children, depend totally on Him to the point that if we don't feel His presence for a moment we will run after Him like lost children toward His arms of love. That was precisely the problem with the children of Israel, they did not depend completely on God because at times they felt that they were self-sufficient and in need of nothing.

It is said that children are self-centered, but when we think we do not need help from the One who gave His life for us, we are acting just like self-centered children, and that's when we falter and then remember our Creator.

Let's remember that we should seek light not only when it is night, but that we should also seek light while it is yet day.



# Wake Up, Sleepy Head!

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 60:1-3; Matt. 5:16

The book of Isaiah is part of the major prophets; it is one of 17 of the larger prophetic books. Isaiah is also considered the Messianic prophet because of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah, but what is the main message that Isaiah wanted to communicate? In summary: God has a remnant, for whom there is a glorious future.

Nowadays the message of Isaiah 60:1, "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you" (NKJV), clearly applies to us who live in a dark world, and we need to arise and proclaim in a loud voice the message that Christ has given us: "I will return!"

First we must arise, which in the original Hebrew is used in the imperative voice, as in a command. But can it be true that we are sleeping and must be called to arise? Ephesians 5:14 shows us the reality in which we are living, like vagabonds on the floor: "'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light'" (NKJV). We must wake up from our slumber and break away from the barriers that keep us from receiving this light. If we will do this, we will reach the goal that Israel was not able to reach.

It is interesting to note that in the original of Isaiah 60:3 (NIV), "Nations will come to your light," *halak* (will come) is used in the perfect tense, thus giving to understand that the action has been completed; in this context, we know that if Christ's glory is with us, the nations will be attracted to this radiant light as to a magnet, not by accident but as a result of this prophecy.

**God has a remnant,  
for whom there is a  
glorious future.**

"Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession."\*

God willing, may our light always shine throughout our life, as the song says:

"This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine . . . let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

Monday  
June 14

# Separated From God

LOGOS

Gen. 1:26, 27; 3:17; Isaiah 59; 61; Luke 15:11-32

## Like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son because He wanted to simplify the fact that human beings tend to value themselves according to their own merits and don't understand that separated from our heavenly Father, we are lost in this evil world. Among the parables recounted in Luke 15, the only person who had discernment and knew how to return home was the prodigal son.

But we should keep in mind that he made the decision to return home after he had spent all the money he had demanded from his father, having wasted his time and also his life.

The one thing that stands out in this parable is that the young man's father had already forgiven him and was continuously waiting for his son's return; he went out

every afternoon and scanned the horizon to see if there was any sign of his son's return home, and finally he forgave his son. The young man in the story had to get himself deep into trouble

**It doesn't matter how far  
we are from God.**

before he could come to realize that he had one hope left, and that he should grab a hold of it—that is, he should return home. We know the rest of the parable and how it all worked out in the end.

It doesn't matter how far we are from God: He opens His arms of love wide and patiently waits for us to turn our eyes toward our Creator, and He will do the rest. I want to say that it isn't easy to make such a decision because the worldly pleasures and our life of sin influence us to the point that we want to continue to be far away from our heavenly Father.

## How Far We've Fallen (Isa. 59:1-13, 20, 21)

Nearly all of humankind has sinned, and I say that nearly all sinned because we know that there was One who did not sin, and that was Jesus. Name after name cited in the Bible were synonymous with evil, perversion, pain, suffering, and death; we can find there examples of kings who were assassins, patriarchs who were polygamists, sons who stole the birthright, siblings who were filled with jealousy, prophets who lied and who gave in to the pressures of kings and pagan governments, etc. The only thing we can say is that they all sinned and that the majority of them came to recognize how evil they were and reaped the fruit of their evil, but they learned to trust in divine love once they repented of their sins and left their sins behind them.

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“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins’” (Isa. 43:25, NKJV) says Jehovah. It doesn’t matter how far we are from His presence. He knows the spiritual condition in which we find ourselves but waits for you and me to confess our sins in faith.

Many years ago I heard the story of a kind king who went to visit the prisoners in his kingdom. No one knew the real purpose for his visit. One by one the prisoners complained about how unjust society had been in throwing them in prison. One by one they proclaimed their innocence and declared that they should not be in prison. But the king was surprised to hear one prisoner say that he deserved to be there because he had broken the law. Everybody’s jaws fell open when the king ordained that this prisoner be set free, saying, “Free this ‘evil’ man who is among so many good men.”

Although we have sinned and deserve divine punishment, God made provision for us to be redeemed through His beloved Son. He was born in this sinful world, and one by one He bore the consequences of human sin (53:3-7) and as such drank the bitter drink of human suffering, was mistreated, and was injured because of our rebellion. We might even say that there is no person in the entire history of the human race who has suffered unjustly and died without guilt. But Christ’s suffering was not in vain. He died to save you and me, and all we need to do is accept His sacrifice and once again receive the promise that we are participants of the family of God.

We must not disdain each opportunity that God offers us, so that we might enjoy a full and happy life. Nothing is more secure than a life in communion with God and in harmony with the holy principles that He offers.

## **REACT**

1. What does it mean in my life to recognize that God has forgiven me of all my sins?

2. Why is happiness so far away from this world? And why, if we know the secret to be happy, do we not go after it?

3. If the father of the prodigal son was so wealthy and willing to forgive, why didn’t he spend the money and time to go out and search for his son and bring him home? What does this mean for how we deal with those who make similar choices?

4. Can the lesson of the prodigal son apply to a community or nation? What impact does your answer have on the way you behave in your community or nation?

5. If a “heathen” is better off with their limited amount of light, why are we educating ourselves and our children as Christians? Wouldn’t we and they be better off with less knowledge? Explain your answer.

6. If we are told that “nations will come to your light” (Isa. 60:3, NIV), why do we make such an effort to go out and try to convert others to Christianity? Is there a better way? If so, what is it?

Tuesday  
June 15

## See the Scriptures Fulfilled in Me Today!

### TESTIMONY

Luke 4:14-30

Jesus stands before the worshipers in the synagogue and reads from the book of Isaiah that was handed Him. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Then He closed the book, and He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' " (Luke 4:18-21, NKJV).

Mrs. White says that as He read and explained the words, the people were impressed with their significance. Their hearts were moved by the Holy Spirit.

"But when Jesus announced, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,' they were suddenly recalled to think of themselves, and of the claims of Him who had been addressing them.

### God sent Elijah to a foreign widow for support.

They, Israelites, children of Abraham, had been represented as in bondage. They had been addressed as prisoners to be delivered from the power of evil; as in darkness, and needing the light of truth. Their pride was offended, and their fears were roused. The words of Jesus indicated that His work for them was to be altogether different from what they desired. Their deeds might be investigated too closely."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus went on to tell of how God had found so little faith in Israel in Elijah's day that He had sent Elijah to a foreign widow for support. And even though there were many lepers in Israel, it was only a heathen nobleman who was healed by Elisha.

"The words of Jesus to His hearers in the synagogue struck at the root of their self-righteousness, pressing home upon them the bitter truth that they had departed from God and forfeited their claim to be His people. Every word cut like a knife as their real condition was set before them. They now scorned the faith with which Jesus had first inspired them."<sup>2</sup>

The problem with the people then was the same as it was with Lucifer in the beginning—and the same as it is with us today. Our stubborn pride insists that we know best how to live. We don't want to place our trust in God.

When Jesus says to us "Today you see the scriptures fulfilled in Me," how will we respond?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 237.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

# How to Be Oaks of Righteousness

## HOW-TO

Isa. 40:26; 61:3

The God of Israel says, "My people will be called oaks of righteousness, planted by God" (Isa. 61:3, *The Clear Word*). Admit it to yourself. After September 11, along with the grief and disbelief, there was a small, dark spot inside that demanded revenge. Not immediate, tangible revenge such as the bigoted attacks against Arab Americans in scattered locales. But maybe a secret desire that if God had asked you to be the instrument of His justice against Al-Qaeda, such as Samson or David were used against the Philistines, you might have jumped at the chance.

We live in difficult times: embassy bombings, Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, war with Iraq, and domestic crime. Americans aren't used to being victims; we want to do something about it. As I write this, it's five hours since the destruction of the *Columbia* space shuttle. There is shock, grief, and a palpable urgency to know what happened, do something about it, and make everything right. Even Christians find it difficult sometimes to "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10, NKJV).

In his address to the nation concerning *Columbia*, President Bush has quoted from Isaiah 40:26, "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing" (NIV). Isaiah seems to be telling us to remember who's in control, not only as Judah faced the Assyrian army's impending onslaught, but also as modern Adventists try to identify our niche and responsibilities here at the close of time. How much do we do, and when do we let go and let God? Our opening verse holds some poignant advice. He says His people "will be called oaks of righteousness" (Isa. 61:3, NIV). We've considered the lilies of the field; let's take a moment to consider oaks:

**We live in difficult times.**

- An oak doesn't march to war, lead fanatic protests, or attempt to legislate morality. It simply reflects the grace and glory of its Creator, as should we.
- A mature oak is one of nature's greatest organisms, yet it must begin from the small acorn. No matter where Christians begin, the Spirit can lead them to grow into a mighty work for the Lord.
- Oaks provide comfort from the heat and offer cool peace to those who rely upon them. They provide homes for those smaller and weaker than they, protecting others from dangerous elements.
- And finally, an oak reaches for heaven every moment of its time in the earth.

Thursday  
June 17

## It's Been Time for Some Time

### OPINION

Lam. 3:40

Men and women have hardened their hearts against the Spirit of God. People who attend church every single week and hold leadership positions in the church have hardened their hearts against God. People who preach sermons and who have given thousands of dollars to the church have hardened their hearts against

**I have hardened my heart  
against the Holy Spirit.**

the Holy Spirit. People who do not even realize it have hardened their hearts against God's Spirit.

Now that I have stepped on a few toes and caused your mouth

to drop wide open, let me say this. I have hardened my heart against the Holy Spirit. It is unfortunate, but true. Sometimes God impresses us to do things we do not want to do. The children of Israel struggled with hardening their hearts to God's impressions and commands. Isaiah wrote to tell the Israelites what God required of them. Isaiah 1:19, 20 says, "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword" (NIV).

Refuse and rebel are two powerful words. Those two words caused the vast majority of Israelites never to see the promised Canaan. Often our lives and attitudes can be uncomfortably synonymous with what is written about the children of Israel.

It is time to evaluate our lives. Lamentations 3:40 says, "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord" (NIV). It is time clearly and intentionally to search our souls and search the innermost parts of ourselves. It is time to take a close look at each decision we make and carefully weigh every choice we make. It is time for you and me to seek whole-hearted service to God. Now is when we must seek no compromise, big or small. It has been time for a long time now. Jesus is coming soon, and our hearts must be responsive and connected to Him.

### REACT

1. What can we do to increase our ability to listen and respond to the impressions of the Holy Spirit? Be specific.
2. How can doing personal evaluation bring you into a closer relationship with God?
3. Read Psalm 139:23, 24. What would God find in the place of highest priority in your heart? What anxieties would He find? How can God lead us "in the way everlasting," right now in our lives?

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*Debbie Battin, Keene, Texas*

# Aliens and Strangers Reaching Pagans

## EXPLORATION

Isa. 61:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:9-12

## CONCLUDE

Living the Christian life means reflecting the character of Christ in our actions, words, thoughts, and life. It means we are to bind up the brokenhearted, comfort those who mourn, and preach the good news. This isn't always easy, but Christ Himself told us it wasn't supposed to be easy. Peter told us we are a chosen people who are supposed to declare praises to God.

We are to live our lives in such a way that pagans and strangers will see our good deeds and know that we walk with a Higher Authority who leads us through the maze of life.

## CONSIDER

- Drawing or painting a picture depicting a Christian in some way reflecting an aspect of the character of Christ.
- Writing an allegory that teaches about 1 Peter 2:9-12.
- Performing a skit about waking up a sleeping church. What are the challenges of such actions? The pitfalls? The results?
- Envisioning with your Sabbath School class ideas that you can do to reach an unreached people group in your community.
- Interacting regularly with someone outside your personal comfort zone who is brokenhearted. Consider the homeless, the elderly in nursing homes, street kids. What can you do to reflect Christ to them?
- Organizing a bread-making ministry and delivering loaves of fresh bread each week to single mothers and their families. Attach a note with a Bible promise or word of encouragement each week.
- Forming a group to perform random acts of kindness for unsuspecting people. You might consider planting flowers, raking leaves, mowing lawns, buying and delivering groceries, or throwing a party for no reason at all.

## CONNECT

*Steps to Christ*, "The Work and the Life."

Hannah Whithall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*; Elizabeth Prentiss, *Stepping Heavenward*.

# Rebirth of planet Earth



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“ ‘I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind’ ” (Isa. 65:17, NIV).



# Leaving the Shadow-Lands

## INTRODUCTION

Isa. 65:17

It all started when Professor Kirke was young and his uncle threatened him and his neighbor friend Polly into using magic rings to leave this world entirely. And on the dying planet of Charn, Digory Kirke woke the witch queen and brought her back to England. Then those three with others ended up on an empty planet in time to witness its Genesis chapters one to three.

To escape the bombing of London during World War II, the four Pevensie children were sent to the grown-up Digory Kirke's mansion in the country. Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy entered Narnia on that world through a wardrobe in a back room of the old house. In that land they experienced joy, sorrow, pain, suffering, happiness, and wisdom. Best of all they grew to know and love Aslan, the great lion in that world, so they would better know Him in His guise in this world.

**Peter, Susan, Edmund, and  
Lucy entered Narnia  
through a wardrobe.**

Much happened in the land of Narnia and its world over the centuries. There were many years of peace and prosperity alternating with times of trouble. Often Aslan would bring children from our world to Narnia in order to help set right the dark times. Finally evil became so pervasive, and the knowledge of good so rare, that Aslan stepped in and brought an end. The children had grown too old in this world to go back there. But at this point in the story, they are with Aslan once again.

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.

"And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had been only the cover and the title page: now, at last, they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on for ever, in which every chapter is better than the one before."\*

\*C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, pp. 183, 184.

Sunday  
June 20

# It's the End of the World as We Know It

## LOGOS

Isa. 65:17-25; 66

### New Heavens and a New Earth

Speculation on humanity's future has always been an interesting subject. Some predictions of the future now seem foolish and funny—like space travelers arriving at Venus and finding the inhabitants speak English, or great aerial ships with up to 37 propellers on each mast, or an invasion by giant lobsters! Visions of the future

**Isaiah's vision of the future is in complete contrast to all these pessimistic speculations.**

in the 19th century were generally of a perfect world in which progress had brought about an earthly paradise.

But this human-produced utopia is not what God speaks of through Isaiah. Notice the strong emphasis God uses: "I will create . . ."

It is reminiscent of Jesus' words "I will come again." Both statements are absolute guarantees of the plan and purpose of God as He fulfills his promise: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

### Rejoicing in My Creation

In our despairing world of today the focus is not on whether there will be an end, but just how it will happen. In contrast to the former belief in humanity's steady progress to some scientific Golden Age, the future concept of the end of the world has become a Hollywood disaster movie, through fire, ice, flood, drought, disease, war, and cosmic apocalypse. This is the pessimistic theme of the modern future:

- Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (The world slowly but inexorably dies from nuclear fallout.)
- John Christopher, *The Death of Grass* (The end comes through a virus that kills all grasses—including wheat, barley, and rice.)
- Thomas M. Disch, *The Genocides* (The world is taken over by an alien civilization for growing crops; humanity is exterminated like unwanted crop pests.)

Again God responds to our concerns. He reminds us that He is the Creator and that He continues to create. The new heavens and the new earth are not going to be subject to evil and sin, but will be truly wonderful—because "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God

---

himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:3, 4, NIV [compare to Isaiah 65:19]).

## No Longer to Build Others’ Houses

Nor will there be dying infants, or houses you never get to occupy, or vineyards from which you never taste the fruit. So much of our present life is full of frustration: we fail, we are exploited by others, we fall sick, we die.

But in God’s eternal future, the temporary nature of our lives is transformed into eternity. “We will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor. 15:51-53, NIV).

## The Wolf and the Lamb

“The problem with trying to see the future is the present. What we know usually overpowers our ability to see what might be coming. What is is; it has the advantage of tangible existence. This makes the present hard to shake, no matter how smart you are.”\*

Just because such a possibility seems so remote does not mean it cannot happen. Many attack the Christian hope, denying the promises of God and saying that “‘Everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation’” (2 Pet. 3:4, NIV).

The cast-iron guarantee of the new heavens and new earth is the assurance of the God who is totally trustworthy. In the words of Adoniram Judson, “My future is as bright as the promises of God.”

“‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the Lord, ‘so will your name and descendants endure’” (Isa. 66:22, NIV).

This is the promise of glorious permanence to a world in despair. Pessimism about the future is vast. People become subservient to a technological state (as in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*), or brainwashed into oblivion (as in George Orwell’s *1984*), or enslaved by and eventually destroyed by robots (as in Karel Capek’s *R.U.R.*). H. G. Wells describes a future in *The Time Machine* when the energy of the solar system—even that of the universe—just runs out.

Isaiah’s vision of the future—God’s future—is in complete contrast to all these pessimistic speculations. Totally confident that the future is in the hands of his trustworthy God, Isaiah can speak with absolute assurance of the tomorrow that God will surely accomplish.

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\*Robert G. Kaiser, *International Herald Tribune*, Nov. 10, 1999.

Monday  
June 21

## Above All We Ask or Think

### TESTIMONY

Ps. 87:7; Isa. 24:14; 51:3

"Of every gift that God has bestowed, leading men to unselfish effort, a record is kept in heaven. To trace this in its wide-spreading lines, to look upon those who by our efforts have been uplifted and ennobled, to behold in their history the outworking of true principles—this will be one of the studies and rewards of the heavenly school.

"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 the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's children."**

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. . . .

"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.

"All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's children. With unutterable delight we shall enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. We shall share the treasures gained through ages upon ages spent in contemplation of God's handiwork. And the years of eternity, as they roll, will continue to bring more glorious revelations. 'Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20) will be, forever and forever, the impartation of the gifts of God.

"'His servants shall serve Him.' Revelation 22:3. The life on earth is the beginning of the life in heaven; education on earth is an initiation into the principles of heaven; the lifework here is a training for the lifework there. What we now are, in character and holy service, is the sure foreshadowing of what we shall be."\*

\**Education*, pp. 306, 307

# The Hope of Everlasting Life

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 56:6, 7; 65:17, 23; Rom. 5:12, 15

Nearly every world religion offers some form of life after death. But none offers life after death without a cost. Hindus believe in a cyclic pattern of death and rebirth in order to reach the ultimate perfection in order to be released into eternity. Muslims believe in following a strict moral code in order to attain salvation. Only Christianity offers a free gift of eternal life through the love and salvation of a grace-giving God. How does this play into the hope that Isaiah offers in chapter 65? The Israelites spent hundreds of years making sacrifices and following a strict code of ceremonial living. Isaiah came along in the midst of these ceremonial Jewish practices and hopeless religions of neighboring civilizations and offered a glimpse into the future of God's people. He foreshadowed the gospel story and the exciting gift of grace that was to come. God's people, by trusting in the Savior God to redeem them from their sins, were to experience a life unlike what they had ever known before.

Isaiah not only offers this hope to the Israelites, but also to Gentiles: "The sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:6, 7, NKJV).

Paul adds, "Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. . . . But the free gift is

not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many" (Rom. 5:12, 15, NKJV). From the moment Adam

and Eve took bites from that tempting fruit, all humankind, Jew and Gentile, have lived in sin and death. But because of the new covenant made between God and humanity through Jesus Christ, humanity can be restored to its original design. Along with this restoration of humanity, a restoration of the entire world will take place as well. As promised in Isaiah 65, those who choose God as their savior, will no longer weep and will never grow old or die, but will be "a people blessed by the Lord" (verse 23, NIV).

**Nearly every world religion  
offers some form of life  
after death.**

Wednesday  
June 23

## How to Live in the Waiting Room

### HOW-TO

Heb. 11:13-16

I will never forget attending the funeral of a good friend who was killed by a drunk driver. His wife and two small daughters were sitting on the front row. Our hearts were broken. Times like this remind us that we are not home. I will also never forget my sister's wedding.

Times like this remind us  
that we are not home.

The happiness of two people who love and celebrate each other was a taste of heaven. How should I then live where I have to be, that is not home? Do

I live for heaven or demand that life here be like heaven, without pain? Do I despair and become cynical? Do I retreat from reality and live for the future? Hebrews 11:13-16 shows us three principles of living while waiting:

**1. They welcomed them from a distance.** Those who lived by faith did not receive the things promised. They believed and celebrated the reality of what God has promised. This suggests an acceptance of the reality that this is not my home. If I expect my life to be settled and comfortable, I am in some ways settling in here.

**2. They admitted they were aliens and strangers on earth.** An alien and a stranger often have different beliefs and customs from the surrounding culture. When I admit this, I am called to live like a citizen of heaven and build relationships to invite others to "come" (Rev. 22:17).

**3. They were longing for a better country.** The word for "longing" means literally to reach or stretch out with stress on the object desired. It is also used in 1 Timothy 6:10 to refer to greed, "eager for money." And in Romans 1:27 as "inflamed with lust." Longing for a better country is believing that only heaven and its restored relationships can fulfill my true longings. The longings we have for money or sex are surface exhibits of our deepest longing for a God who created us for fellowship with Him. "He has put eternity in their hearts" (Eccles. 3:11, NKJV). This being true makes knowing Jesus the only true expression of authentic living (John 17:3). Let us live extravagantly!

### REACT

1. What are the signs that a person is retreating from reality and living in the future?
2. How do you personally balance living here and now with the delayed gratification of waiting for heaven?
3. How does longing for something affect our sense of the passing of time?

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*Bill Roberts, Auburn, Washington*

# Who Dies in Heaven?

## OPINION

Isaiah 65; 66

The prophet, lyrically and memorably, looks forward to a day when God's kingdom is established on earth. The picturesque phrases resound in memory: "'I create new heavens and a new earth'" (Isa. 65:17, NKJV). "'The wolf and the lamb shall feed together'" (verse 25, NKJV). Isaiah impresses the Christian collective unconscious with pictures of God's peace, justice, and devotion.

Nevertheless, common use of these prophecies to refer to a time beyond Christ's second coming troubles the reader of more than the most familiar verses. Isaiah 65:20 says, "No longer will people be considered old at one hundred!" (NLT). In Isaiah 66:19, after God gathers the nations, He sends messengers to those who have not heard of Him. At book's end, right after the standard "Sabbath kept in heaven" proof text, those who have gathered to keep the Sabbath "As they go out, they will see the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me" (66:24, NLT). How do we deal with the uncomfortable bits?

In a devotional dated November 27, 2001, Victor Stoltzfus of Mennonite Goshen College, clarifies, "Prophets strain credulity. They see over the horizon to what is not yet. They are absolutely convinced that God will one day fulfill His amazing world peace promise." Isaiah does see God's kingdom on earth. He ardently believes in the power of God to recreate and reclaim His original creation.

And indeed it is possible! We, too, must never give up. In these days of end-time intensity, the incurable optimism of Isaiah educates us in a hope that refuses to stop working for good. Though all may seem lost and despite the depredations of war, starvation, and economic hegemony, God is still in charge and still wishes us abundant life. Yes, the satanically driven human race will push this planet to the place where God must

**We live His victory in the  
here and now.**

intervene, but at no point do we as Christians surrender the already-won battle. We live His victory in the here and now.

Isaiah's poetic representation of the kingdom applies to the present as God wishes with all His heart for our good. (Look at Isaiah 65:23, parents: "They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble" (NKJV), and to a future well worth working toward as well as the earth made new. God protests, "'Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?'" (66:9, NKJV). After all He has done, will He not come through?

Friday  
June 25

## In the End, Came the Beginning

### EXPLORATION

Luke 23:40-43

### CONCLUDE

A Scottish preacher went down with the *Titanic*, but he didn't go down passively or screaming. He went down with grace. He assisted people into lifeboats and gave his lifejacket away, then jumped into the water with the other people destined to die. He then proceeded to save them one-by-one with the gospel message. What those people thought was the end, became the beginning—the beginning of a better life in eternity. Just like the thief on the cross, the next thing those people will see is being welcomed into Paradise all because one man refused to let anyone be lost.

### CONSIDER

- Reading John's description of the New Jerusalem and heaven in Revelation 21; 22 and drawing a picture(s) of what you imagine heaven will be like from those texts.
- Interviewing several friends about their perception of what heaven will be like.
- Walking through nature collecting leaves, flowers, small rocks, etc., and creating a collage from the items with your favorite text about heaven.
- Selecting several of your favorite songs about heaven. Record them on one cassette tape or CD and label it "Heaven." Whenever you long for heaven, listen to your collection.
- Viewing the film *Deep Impact* and considering its viewpoint of preparation for end times.
- Contrasting your life now with what your life will be like in heaven.
- Making a list of people you could share Christ with. Create a unique way to introduce them to Christ. Invite them to High Tea, create a cookie sampling afternoon, read a book together, etc.

### CONNECT

Matthew 5.

*The Faith I Live By*, chap. 12; *The Great Controversy*, chap. 40.



## Next Quarter's Lessons

# RELIGION IN RELATIONSHIPS

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 2004, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### Lesson 1: Created for Community

**Scriptures:** *Exod. 20:2-17; Isa. 1:10-17; 1 Corinthians 13*

**KEY THOUGHT:** In today's world, many people are utterly lonely; they live without meaningful relationships, without a sense of being needed or loved, without a sense of true belonging. Some are married, even have children, yet in their deepest self they feel alone. Others appear to have an intense social life but would, nonetheless, in a moment of honest selfassessment, admit to desperate loneliness. Many who share their apartment block with dozens of others and mingle everyday with thousands in the metro or commuter train are incapable of reaching out to those around them.

And yet, amid all this loneliness, is the biblical ideal, which is that we live in community with others, with family, friends, colleagues, authorities, fellow-church members, etc. The question is, How does God want us to do it?

### Lesson 2: "Honor Your Father and Your Mother"

**Scriptures:** *Gen. 22:1-14; Exod. 20:12; Luke 2:41-52; Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Pet. 5:5*

**KEY THOUGHT:** As Seventh-day Adventists we point to the seventh-day Sabbath as one of our core-beliefs. And rightly so. It is part of the Ten Commandments, which encapsulate the basic principles for humanity. But to "honour your father and your mother" is also one of the foundational principles for a healthy society. It is interesting to note that these two principles—keeping the Sabbath and honoring our parents—are singled out and mentioned together: "Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths" (Lev. 19:3, NIV).

This week we'll take a look at just that this specific concept, that of how children, or even how adults, should relate not only to their parents, but to those who are older in general. Because, in almost all cases, no matter who we are, we come in contact with those who are older still.

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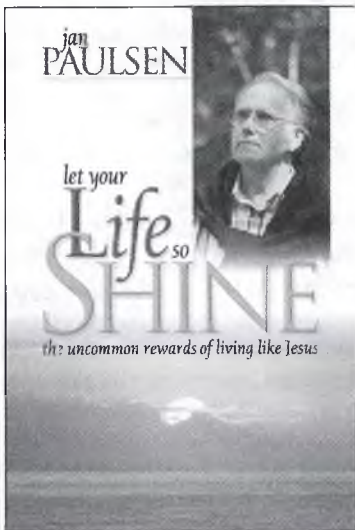
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All Roger Wazoua wanted was to be excused from classes on Sabbath, but he got more than he bargained for.

Roger is a refugee living in the Republic of Congo. When he enrolled at his new school he told the school director that he wanted to be excused from classes and exams on Saturday so he could worship on his Sabbath. But God had other plans. Soon all his teachers and fellow classmates learned of his “strange” faith and strong determination to honor God, even if it meant failing his graduating exams that fell on Sabbath.

Roger answered the questions his classmates and teachers posed about his faith until one of his teachers asked him a simple question he could not answer: “Where is your church?” Why couldn’t Roger give him an answer? Find out by reading Roger’s story, “Where Is Your Church,?” in this quarter’s *Mission*.

Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build at least two church evangelistic centers in the Republic of Congo.



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