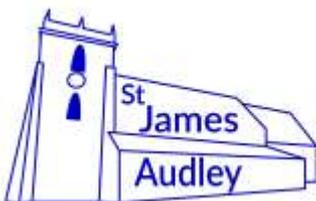




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August 2023 – Isaiah 56-66



How to use these Bible Reading Notes:

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you feed on God's word a little and often and allow it to change your life. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever you left off – it doesn't matter if it's the wrong date.

Here are some tips on how to get the most out of this:

1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake. Maybe set an alarm on your phone to remind you each day.
2. Pray. Ask God to help you understand what he says.
3. Use the notes to help you think about the Bible passage (use a good translation of the Bible like the NIV).
 - 'Read' tells you which verses to read.
 - 'Think' shows how it affects you.
 - 'Pray' suggests ways to talk to God about it.
4. Pray about what you have read.
5. Look for a chance to share with someone what God has been saying to you.

These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets.
Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'Add Subject → Biblical prayers & devotions → Real Food.'

If you have any problems, email info@prayermate.net

1st August

Jerusalem...we have a problem

Isaiah is written 120 years before God's people go into exile. It tells of a society riddled with sin that has turned away from God. The consequence of their sin is God's judgment on them as waves of enemies attack them, culminating in the Babylonian exile and destruction of Jerusalem. Yet despite this bleak picture, Isaiah is full of glimmers of salvation. Although it was written nearly 700 years before Jesus, it's a book quoted many times in the gospels. Out of the ashes, a wonderful new plan emerges – a plan for a real, permanent, perfect salvation.

Read Isaiah 1:21-28

- What is the problem?
- What is God's solution?

Think

- About a third of the bible (all the major and minor prophets in the Old Testament) was written around the exilic period. Why do you think God wanted so much airtime to explain the exile?
- Why do you think the exile happened?
- What happened after the exile in God's big plan (hint – the next thing is Jesus!)?

Pray for God to speak to us through the prophet Isaiah. Pray we would understand more of His character, our sin and the wonderful salvation we have in Jesus. Pray that we would be humbled by God's word and more prepared to share his story with others.

2nd August

A Welcome for All

One of the big shifts from the Old Testament to the New Testament is that God is not just working in the ethnic Jewish nation descended biologically from Abraham – through Jesus ALL people from every tribe, tongue and nation are invited into the family of God. Here in Isaiah God starts to explain this good news.

Read Isaiah 56:1-8

- What does the Lord want to say to the foreigner and eunuch (both outcasts in Old Testament Israel society) who feel like they don't belong with God's people?
- If the qualification to be part of God's people is not ethnicity/status/reputation, what does God value in his people according to these verses?

Think

- How would this chapter be challenging to the ethnic Jews of the time who prided themselves on their status as God's people through biological right?
- What is wonderful about a God who does not exclude anyone from his family?
- When have you or those you know struggled to believe they too can be part of the family of God?

Pray

Thank God that he welcomes anyone and everyone who loves him into his family and pray for those on your heart that need to hear that invitation.

3rd August

Except.... God will not tolerate selfish leaders

Yesterday we saw God wants everyone and anyone to feel welcome in the family of God. But that doesn't mean that in God's family you can behave any way you like.

The leaders of God's people, Israel's watchmen, are doing a terrible job of caring for God's people in Isaiah's day. Israel is really suffering because of it. And God has something to say about that.

Read Isaiah 56:9-57:2

- What is the tone of this passage? How is it different from yesterday?
- What does God teach us about 'Israel's watchmen'?

Apply

- What do you think it's like to live in a society where those who are supposed to care for the people are like this?
- What would you want God to do about leaders like this? Why is it important that God does something?
- Can you think of examples where bad leadership like this has damaged the church over the years (either in the public sphere or in your own personal experience)?
- How do you think church leaders can avoid becoming like this?

Pray now for leaders of God's people, both in your life and around the world, and praise God for his righteous anger and judgement against bad leaders.

4th August

And God will not tolerate rivals

Israel as a nation in Isaiah's time was full of sin towards one another – Jerusalem was a city of oppression, corruption and iniquity. However, they weren't only hurting each other. Israel was also really hurting God. Israel was forsaking their God for the allure of pagan idols.

Read Isaiah 57:3-13

- God's people are entangled in worshipping idols and pagan rituals (this is what is referenced in oaks, sacrificing children, offerings, loft hill, pagan symbols, realm of the dead). How does God describe their idolatry in this passage?
- What is God's response to their idolatry?

Think

- Why is God so upset about his people worshipping other gods (idols)?
- Lots of these pagan ideas are a bit unusual to us now. But can you think of some of the things in the 21st century that we might worship or put our hope in to save us?
- Why is trusting something that is not God utter foolishness and dangerous?
- 'Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have not been true to me?' Are there things in your life that you fear more than God? How have those fears pushed you into trusting in things other than God?
- 'But whoever takes refuge in me will inherit the land'.

Pray that you would be someone who fully takes refuge in the Lord. Pray this also for your closest Christian friends and family.

5th August

God will dwell with the contrite in spirit

After stern rebukes for those in Israel embroiled in sin and idolatry, Isaiah comes back to what the true people of God will be like. They will include eunuchs and foreigners (and every tribe, tongue and nation). But that's not all.

God wants to get more specific about who they will be on the inside.

Read Isaiah 57:14-21

- What do we learn about God and his plan in this passage?
- In God's plan, who will it be a happy ending for? Who won't it be a happy ending for?

Think

- If someone asked you – “who are God's people?” – what would you answer from this passage?
- If someone asked you – “why is it good to be one of God's people?” – what would you answer from this passage?
- According to the dictionary, contrite means ‘expressing remorse at the recognition that one has done wrong’. What do you think it means to be a ‘contrite and lowly in spirit’ Christian? When have you seen that either in yourself or others?
- How can we ensure we remain ‘contrite and lowly in spirit’ Christians?

Pray for yourself that you will keep a contrite heart before the Lord and pray that your church would continue to encourage remorse at sin and repentance as part of our Christian discipleship.

6th August

Sin really damages our relationship with God

We saw yesterday that God will dwell with the contrite in spirit. But Israel is not contrite – she is blind to the consequences of her sin and doesn't think she has done anything wrong. Time for a wake-up call!

Read Isaiah 58:1-5

- What is the problem with the relationship between Israel and God in this passage?
- Why do you think Israel didn't grasp how serious a problem they had with God? Why did they expect their 'voice to be heard on high'?

Think

- Israel's rebellion and sin ultimately led to a breakdown of the relationship between God and his people manifested in Israel being exiled & Jerusalem destroyed. Do you think that is fair? Why/why not?
- Why is it not ok to fulfil religious duties while hurting your fellow man?
- Can you think of examples of this happening in Christian communities (either on a large scale or more personally)? What do you think it is like to be in a Christian community where that is happening? How might you feel?

Pray for your church to be a place where worship of God is joined with righteousness. Pray particularly into any hurts you are aware of – pray for repentance, forgiveness and healing that relationship with God and one another may be restored.

7th August

But righteousness heals

What a mess the community of Israel is, full of sin! Today, God describes what he intended her to be like as she worshipped Him and related well to each other. It is a bitter sweet picture – full of blessing and hope, yet ultimately something Israel never achieved because she was so enslaved to her sin. Praise God for Jesus, in whom true righteousness dwells forever!

Read Isaiah 58:6-14

- What does God want his people to be like?
- What will be the outcome of living like this?

Think

- What would it be like to live in a society where everyone behaved like this?
- Israel has been failing to obey God and love each other well for hundreds of years and at this point in history, their society is full of injustice, oppression and iniquity. How hopeful do you feel for them as they receive this instruction from the Lord? Will they be able to keep it?
- When Jesus comes to earth, how does he live this out in practice?
- In the strength of the Spirit, what would it look like for you to follow Christ's example more in this passage? What areas do you most need to work on?

Pray to God about how you have failed in living like this. Ask him for forgiveness and praise God for Jesus who did this perfectly. Ask for his help to live more like this as you follow his perfect example.

8th August

The endemic, incurable sin problem

Is it too strong to claim that Israel could not stop her sin? Surely sometimes she was righteous?

God doesn't want us to be deceived about the depths of the problem of human sin. Here is his description of what Israel as a society was truly like, right down to its core. It is not a pretty picture.

Read Isaiah 59:1-8

- Prophecy is famous for its vivid images. Dwell on some of the different pictures Isaiah paints of the sin problem in Israel. What response do the pictures evoke in you?
- Ultimately, what is the consequence of Israel's sin?

Think

- Imagine a leader, a merchant and a widower in this society. What might each of their lives be like in a society like this?
- What would you think about God if he ignored sin like this and didn't take offence to it?
- Where do you see sin like this in the world today? Can you give some examples of things in the public sphere and things you have personally experienced?
- How do you think God feels about these sins?

Pray

Spend some time lamenting the horror of sin and the damage it causes. Pray for those suffering in our sin-soaked world. Pray for God's mercy and judgment on sin.

9th August

Sin is ruining our lives

What is it really like to live in a society ruled by sin? For the first time in this part of Isaiah we hear directly from the mouth of Israel. We hear her speaking about her own experience of this time. And it is awful – she is in deep darkness.

Read Isaiah 59:9-15a

- What are the consequences of sin for the society of Israel?
- How does this description of what sin does to a society make you feel?

Think

- 'Darkness', 'Dead', 'Lies'. How are these accurate descriptions of the effect of sin?
- If we saw more clearly how much damage sin causes, how would that change the way we live? How would it change the way we feel about Jesus dying for our sins?
- Think of people you know who are still in the darkness, facing death, believing lies. Pray for them now.
- Think about sin that still has a grip on you. Think about how it brings darkness, how its consequence is death, how it is a lie.

Pray now for God to show you how evil sin is and pray he would help you turn away from evil and step into the light & truth of Jesus.

10th August

God will intervene!

So, what is God going to do about this huge sin problem?

Here we see God's plan to get someone to sort it out. And the person for that job? It is, of course, God himself.

Read Isaiah 59:15b-19

- What is God's response to the lack of justice? What is God going to do?
- What will be the outcome of his actions?

Think

- 'There was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation' – how do we see this prophecy fulfilled in the Lord Jesus?
- Do you think this passage is good news for Israel? Are they in view for salvation or for vengeance? What do you think?
- Our God is a God who will save and judge – a day of judgment and reckoning is coming. Is this good news for our world?

Pray

Think about injustices in the world today and in your own life. Praise God that he will intervene. Pray that many will fear the name of the Lord and revere his glory before the day of judgment and take refuge in Jesus.

11th August

A Redeemer for those who repent

Our covenant God is determined to have a people for himself. The relationship with Israel is all but destroyed because of her sin, yet out of the ashes a new and better covenant emerges. A Redeemer for those who repent and the blessing of his Spirit and word forever.

Here we see the seeds of the New Covenant church of Christ.

Read Isaiah 59:20-21

- What does God promise in these verses?
- Who is this promise for?

Think

- Yesterday we wondered if God coming to intervene was good or bad news for Israel. What do you think today?
- In chapter 57 God said he would be near those who are 'contrite and lowly in spirit'. Today God's promise is for those who repent of their sins. Describe in your own words what it means to repent of our sins.
- Belonging to ethnic Israel (the Jewish nation) is no longer the key to receiving God's promises – repentance is. How do we see that in the message of Jesus to all the nations? How do we see the promised Spirit at work in the church today?
- Spend some time repenting of your sins. Thank God for our Redeemer.

Pray

Think of those in your life and neighbourhood who have not repented. Pray they would hear the call to repent of their sins.

12th August

A wonderful new world

The final section of Isaiah is filled with vivid new creation pictures. A central theme in Isaiah is the wonderful new world God is promising his people, even as they go into a miserable exile. The new world will be so much better than this world. The next few studies will help us see why.

Read Isaiah 60:1-9

- In the new creation, what will it be like for the people of God? How will they feel? How will they relate to the nations around them?
- How would this be particularly good news for an Israel under attack from other nations and facing exile because of their sin?

Think

- Spend some time imagining the situation described here for God's people. What would it be like to be there? How would you feel about God?
- How is it different to living in this world now?
- How often do you think about this future reality? Does it feel real to you or 'pie in the sky/too good to be true'?

Pray that God would help you believe this is the destiny for all those in Jesus. Pray that you would be full of confident hope as you wait for this future.

13th August

Wonderfully different from this world

One of the main reasons the new world will be so much better is because of the ways it will be different from this world now. God sees it all and knows it all – and he has a plan to save us from this broken, sin-soaked world.

Read Isaiah 60:10-22

- This description of God's new world is full of comparisons. Make a list of how the new world will be different from Israel's current experience.
- What does this picture of the new world teach us about God's character?

Think

- Read Revelation 21:22-27. What similar pictures / ideas from Isaiah 60 do you find in these New Testament verses?
- God's people (including us) are still waiting for this promise to be fulfilled. What in this description gets you excited about the new world God has promised us?
- Some hard things about living in this world are mentioned in this passage – they won't be in the new world. What will you be particularly pleased to leave behind?

Pray

Spend some times talking to God about his salvation – not just on the cross as he saved us from our sins, but when Jesus comes back and saves us out of the broken world full of the consequences of sin. Praise God for his salvation!

14th August

Jesus is the way to the new world

This new world sounds so good – but how will sinful, broken, exiled people get there? Here we focus in on a person – God’s anointed – who is the one to get us there. All blessings flow from him.

Read Isaiah 61:1-3

- This passage is quoted by Jesus (see Luke 4:16-21) in the temple and Jesus tells us he is the fulfilment of it. How does Jesus fulfil this prophecy in his life and ministry (and if you’d like to stretch it a bit further – in his first and second comings)?
- Why is Jesus such good news for people?

Think

- How have you seen Jesus doing this in your own life and in the lives of those around you?
- How is Jesus such a better leader than the political leaders and kings/queens of this world?
- Who do you know who is broken-hearted/captive/in darkness? How could you proclaim the good news of Jesus to them?

Pray

Praise God for Jesus and the ways he has healed, helped and blessed us. Pray for those in your life who don’t know him yet. Pray for opportunities to share the good news with them soon.

15th August

And a joyful covenant relationship with God

But of course, Jesus is not just the way to a place. He is the way to a person. In this passage we see the relationship that flows out of salvation and how we will relate to God in the new world.

Read Isaiah 61:4-11

- Again, in 61:4-9, we see the contrast between what Israel has experienced in this world and what the new world will be like. How will the new world be better than this world?
- 61:10-11 records a response to this good news. What does that look like? What is giving this person so much joy?
- Why is it so good that righteousness will clothe God's people and spring up everywhere? How will this prevent all the problems Israel has now?

Think

- What particularly gives you joy in your life? What might it look like to rejoice more like 61:10-11 for you?
- What does the Lord's blessing look like now as Christians? What will it look like in the new world?

Pray for more joy in your covenant relationship with God and spend some time rejoicing in his salvation, blessing and promises.

16th August

The Holy City - God's bride

This wonderful covenant relationship is deeper and stronger than we could imagine. In fact, the best picture of it is a marriage. God will marry his holy city filled with his holy people. What amazing news! This is news to share!

Read Isaiah 62:1-12

- What is coming for Jerusalem?
- How is this a contrast to the city she is now which is facing God's judgment & exile?

Think

- Read Revelation 21:1-2. How does this New Testament passage pick up ideas from Isaiah 62:1-5?
- Why do you think God wants to talk about the 'city' rather than individual people? What does this teach us about God's salvation plan and his new world?
- The author in this passage 'will not keep silent... till [Jerusalem's] vindication'. How have we seen people 'not keeping silent' about God's plan throughout the bible and history?
- How have we seen people 'not keeping silent' in our lives and churches? How could we be better at 'not keeping silent' about God's plan for his holy city?

Pray now that you would long for this future city and marriage. Pray that you would not keep silent about it. Pray specifically for some people you want to talk to about it.

17th August

Salvation through judgment

The pictures of the new world have been so beautiful, and almost unbelievable given where we live now. The pictures change dramatically in today's passage. God tells us that the new world is only possible through a very special person, but this time he's not just the Redeemer - He is the judge.

Read Isaiah 63:1-6

- Imagine this passage as a painting. How does it make you feel? What is surprising / shocking about it?
- Is the coming of this person good news or bad news? Who do you think he is?
- How might judgment also be salvation? How does that work?

Think

- Imagine a world where sin is never punished, justice is never done, enemies are never defeated. Why would that be an awful world?
- How can we have the perfect, righteous, peaceful new creation without destroying the evil, unrighteousness & violent first?
- Think about those you know who have committed terrible crimes (Hitler, Islamic extremists). How does God feel about their crimes?

Pray

Talk to God about his promise to judge. Ask him to show you why it is part of his good plan. Praise him for Jesus who will save us from this evil world and destroy all God's enemies.

18th August

Who is to blame?

Israel comes back into the spotlight at this point in Isaiah, but in this passage, we hear Israel herself talking about what is going on between her and the Lord. The relationship has broken down – but whose fault is it?

Read Isaiah 63:7-19

- How has the Lord treated Israel over their history together?
- How have Israel treated the Lord over their history together?
- What has been the outcome of their rebellion?

Think

- Imagine God and Israel are guests on the Jeremy Kyle show (a programme to sort out grievances / issues in relationships). Do you think Israel is in the right or do you think God is in the right in this relationship? Why?
- List the ways the Lord has been compassionate and good to you.
- Think of times you have rebelled against the Lord, grieved his Holy Spirit, wandered from his ways and hardened your heart. Why is this a terrible way to treat our kind God?

Pray

Spend time repenting of your sin and thanking God for Jesus, who offers forgiveness for all the ways we've failed to treat God as we should. Pray we would continue casting ourselves on his mercy.

19th August

Begging, but not repenting

Israel is desperate for God to stop their enemies attacking them and halt the forthcoming exile – and with good reason. It's going to be horrific. They are pleading with God to relent of these disasters. They realise their sin has made God angry with them. How can they get God back on their side?

Read Isaiah 64:1-12

- What does Israel want God to do for them?
- How has Israel treated God?
- Do you think they deserve another chance from God?

Think

- This is a hard passage to read, and our hearts naturally want our merciful God to give Israel another chance. But imagine he did. What would happen next do you think (given Israel's track record since Moses)?
- Think about what happened next in God's big story – the arrival of Jesus, his death and resurrection and the birth of the church? Ultimately, did God 'keep silent and punish us beyond measure'?
- I've called this study 'begging, but not repenting'. How is Israel begging but not actually repenting here?

Pray

Thank God that this is not the end of the story. Praise him for Jesus and his grace & mercy in the gospel. Thank God that Jesus takes the punishment we deserve for our sins. Pray that we wouldn't take sin lightly, but would live repentant lives.

20th August

Israel has provoked God for too long

The hard truth is that God has given Israel enough chances to repent. In this passage we hear from his side of the story. He has reached out to Israel over and over again. She has rejected him and cheated on him over and over again. At some point, enough is enough.

Read Isaiah 65:1-7

- How does God describe Israel's treatment of him?
- "All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people" – have a think about the story so far in the bible. When and how have you seen God reaching out to obstinate people?

Think

- Yesterday we were wondering if it is fair for God not to give Israel another chance. How do you feel today after reading this passage?
- How do we see people today rejecting God as he reaches out to them? (Both through Jesus and through his word and church)
- We are in an era of God's patience as he holds out his hands to the world through the gospel. What can we do to help people realise God wants to be found?

Pray for the ministry of your church to the lost – pray urgently for many to find God and receive his mercy before it is too late. Pray particularly for any non-Christians coming along to your church at the moment.

21st August

And yet – the exile isn't the end

Enough is enough. But we're only halfway through the story... while the exile marks the end of a whole chapter of God's story (his relationship & blessing to Old Testament ethnic Israel), it also marks the beginning of God talking about his new plan. He still wants to have his chosen people and he is determined they will be blessed.

Read Isaiah 65:8-10

- What glimmer of hope do we see in these verses?
- Why is this a surprise given the last few studies?

Think

- What do you think this promise shows about God's character and priorities?
- A bit like bringing Noah through the flood, God's story with his people isn't going to finish with the exile. Why is this such good news for us?
- 1 Peter 2:9 says that Christians 'are a chosen people'. How does this passage help you understand what that means? Chosen for what?
- Think about the fact God has chosen you to be part of his people. How does that make you feel?

Pray

Thank God for his mercy in not destroying all us sinners. Thank him for including you in his chosen people. List others that you know whom God has chosen and praise & thank him for his kindness to each of them.

22nd August

But it is the end for some

Rightly and fairly, not all of Israel will be saved though. God has had enough of their sin. While they may believe they are God's chosen people, in no way do their lives reflect this. And God will separate his true servants from the fake ones.

Read Isaiah 65:11-16

- 1) Compare and contrast what will happen to those who forsake the Lord and those whom God calls his 'servants' & 'chosen ones'
- 2) On reading these verses, do you think all of Israel will be part of God's chosen and blessed people in the future?

Think

- How do you think this would have been received by Isaiah's readers? How might this be a shock to complacent, entitled Israel (and even some of our Jewish friends today)?
- How does this passage persuade you that the best thing is being a servant of the Lord?
- Think about those in your life who might call themselves Christian (nominal Christians) but are not listening to the Lord and who are forsaking him and forgetting him. Perhaps they only go to church Christmas and Easter. Perhaps their lives and ethics do not match up with God's ways. How might you go about talking to them about the seriousness of an insincere faith?

Pray for the people mentioned above now and ask that God would show them the danger of nominal Christianity and bring them to true repentance and faith.

23rd August

'I am making everything new'

In Revelation 21:5 God tells us that he is making everything new. At the end of the bible, the climax of God's story, God will make all things new. This world will pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth.

In our passage today, we get a description of this new creation God has planned for his people.

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

- What does God have planned?
- Imagine what it would be like to live in this place. Try to go into the details and specifics of the prophecy.

Think

- Do you think we could ever have a place and society like this in our present world without God's dramatic intervention? Explain your answer.
- What does it show you about God that this is his big plan?
- How often in your daily life do you think about the new heavens and the new earth God will create?
- How could you think about it more? Why do you think this might be helpful?

Pray

Thank God for his promise to create a new world with no weeping, death or pain. Pray that he would help you to imagine and look forward to the joy and blessing of our new home in heaven. Pray that we would keep it as our goal and hope in this life.

24th August

How do we find God's favour?

How do we find God's favour? Especially if we want to make it to his wonderful new creation. At the end of Isaiah, God clearly states how we enter his good favour. It is the foundation of the gospel of Jesus. In Mark chapter 1 – Jesus calls us to 'repent and believe'. Or in Isaiah language – be humble & contrite and tremble at God's word. This is the key to being God's people now.

Read Isaiah 66:1-2

- What do we learn about the Lord in these verses?
- What do we learn about what response he wants from his people?

Think

- Why is this kind of response to God entirely appropriate given who He is?
- And yet... Is this the response people have to God generally? Was this Israel's response? What about people in your life?
- Given these verses, who do you think will be in the new creation? Who will NOT be in the new creation?
- What do you think it means in practice to be humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at God's word?

Pray

Praise God that He is Lord of all, the Creator of everything and everyone. Pray that you would always have a right humility & contrition before him. Pray particularly for yourself and others you know to tremble at his word.

25th August

God isn't impressed by 'lip-service'

Meet Priya – “Yes, yes – I know I should be humble and contrite. I know I should tremble at God’s word. But I’m busy, and it’s not like I’m not invested at all! I go to church, I’m on the tea & coffee rota, I give money to charity, I’m doing my bit... me & God are fine”

Are Priya and God fine?

Read Isaiah 66:3-6

- The majority of Israel is not humble, contrite and trembling at God’s word. How does God feel about the way they are behaving according to these verses?
- Why do you think God is so offended?

Think

- ‘Your own people ... hate you and exclude you because of my name’ – How do we see this prophecy fulfilled as Jesus met Jewish leaders in his day? How do we see it fulfilled in the early church as Paul and Peter share the gospel among the Jews?
- If someone asked you – “who are the true people of God?” – what would you say?
- God seems to really care that we listen to him, answer him and tremble at his word. When and where in your life do you hear the Lord? How do you respond to his word to you?

Pray

Repent of the times you have failed to listen to the Lord. Pray that you would organise your life to better listen to the Lord and to help others listen too. Pray that you would have a soft and humble heart to respond rightly to his word.

26th August

Suffering now, glory later

After 66 chapters, Isaiah has shared a lot of truth and prophecy with his readers. And the most pressing & frightening prophecy for this people is the forthcoming exile & fall of Jerusalem. That is what is in store for the generation hearing Isaiah's words first-hand. How are they going to get through it?

Read Isaiah 66:7-14

- The exile was the greatest tragedy and hardship for Israel. It was devastating. And yet here God compares it to childbirth. How does that help us to understand what was happening during the difficult exile period for God's people?
- What response does Isaiah call for in this passage?

Think

- Pain before glory: this is a theme all over the bible – in Jesus' life, in the lives of the disciples. How does God want his true people to feel as they go through suffering?
- 'If it's not okay it's because it's not the end yet' – how is this true of the Christian life and gospel story?
- We are not going into exile – but we do suffer and Paul in Romans 8 says 'the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth'. How have you and your loved ones been groaning in this broken world recently?

Pray

Pray that we would endure the suffering of this world for the glory that is to come. Pray for comfort and hope in the midst of suffering. Pray particularly for loved ones you know who are really feeling the brokenness of the world at the moment.

27th August

Judgment is coming

In this final, climatic chapter of the great book of Isaiah, he oscillates between salvation pictures and judgment pictures. They are indeed two sides of the same coin. Final judgment day is the precursor to the final, full salvation of God's people into the new creation. You cannot have salvation without the judgment. And you cannot realise how much you need salvation without fully grasping how serious judgment is.

Read Isaiah 66:15-17

- How is the judgment of the Lord described in these verses?
- Why do you think God's judgment is so fierce?

Think

- Imagine a world where God never judges the idolatrous, the unjust, the murderers, the rapists, the exploiters, the abusers, the sinners.... Why would that just not work?
- In Isaiah 53:6 we hear 'we all, like sheep, have gone astray...and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all'. How has Jesus saved us from the anger of God that is coming on judgment day?
- If this day of judgment is really coming, what should we do to get ready?

Pray

Thank God for Jesus, who has taken the punishment for our sins so that we may not face the Lord's fire on judgment day. Pray for those in your life who are not trusting in Jesus to save them – pray they would hear that judgment is coming and they would repent and take shelter in Jesus.

28th August

A story for all nations & languages

This book of prophecy has so much to challenge Israel – not least, the expansion of God’s plan beyond ethnic Israel and historical Jerusalem. As God moves forward in his story, he will be showing his glory not just to Israel, but to every corner of the globe.

Read Isaiah 66:18-21

- What is God’s plan for the nations?
- What do you think is surprising / exciting about this plan?

Think

- Back in Exodus, God wanted to show everyone that He is the Lord. In Acts, Jesus commissions the disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. How have you seen God making himself known among the nations throughout his story?
- What does it show you about God that he wants everyone to see his glory?
- List some of the Christians you know from different nations.
- Our God is not a tribal God, he is a global God. What implications should this have for how we organise church and our evangelism?

Pray

Praise God he is the true God of the whole world and that his good news is for every tribe, tongue and nation. Thank God for the spread of the gospel across the world. Pray for the continued work of missionaries around the globe gathering people back to God.

29th August

A story with two endings

As we get to the final few verses of this huge book, God sketches a very vivid picture of the end of his story. And ultimately it is a story with two endings.

Read Isaiah 66:22-24

- What is the tone of the ending to this story in v22-23?
- What is the tone of the ending to this story in v24?

Think

- Again, we see salvation and judgment mixed together. Why do you think God wants to show us clearly what happens to his people vs what happens to his enemies?
- Just using this passage, how would you describe heaven and hell to someone if they asked you about it?
- How do these verses help you to be more humble and contrite in spirit? How do they help you tremble at God's word?
- How do they motivate you to tell others about the salvation of your God, which is available to anyone who repents?

Pray

Pray that God would keep you humble and repentant before him. Thank God that eternal life with God is available for anyone and everyone who repents and believes in Jesus. Pray that those who are unrepentant would hear the warning of hell and cast themselves upon the Lord's mercy. Pray that God would help you to persevere in holding on to and holding out this message of salvation & judgment.

30th August

The new creation is awesome

We're going to spend the last two studies dwelling on some of the truths we have seen from this section in Isaiah. Feel free to glance back through the studies if it would be helpful to refresh your memory. First of all, let's think about the new creation.

Think

- What will the new creation be like:
 - In terms of our relationship with God
 - In terms of how we relate to the nations
 - In terms of how it is different from our world now?
- Imagine what it will be like in the new creation. What pictures come to mind? What are you most looking forward to?
- We talk a lot about what Jesus has achieved at the cross but find it harder to talk about when Jesus returns and brings us to the new creation. Why do you think that is?
- If the new creation is this amazing, how should that shape our priorities here on earth?
- What might it look like to prioritise you and many others getting to the new creation in your own life?

Pray

Praise God for the promise of a wonderful new creation. Thank him specifically for the things you are looking forward to. Pray that God would help you to long for heaven. Pray that God would help you arrange your life so that you keep your hope in his future promises. Pray you would have many opportunities to share the hope you have with those who don't yet know God.

31st August

So who is going to get there?

As we get to the last study, we're going to think about one of the big questions that this section of Isaiah is trying to answer. WHO will be saved? Who will be rescued and brought to this wonderful new world? Are God's people still just ethnic Jews biologically related to Abraham... or has something shifted....?

- Describe what these character traits mean and how they factor in being one of God's people:
 - Humility
 - Contrite spirit
 - Trembling at his word
 - Repentance
 - Eunuch or foreigner
- How is it great news for us (given most of us aren't ethnic Jews)?
- How do we see Jesus prioritise these things in his teaching and ministry on earth?
- Think about the first time you repented/trembled at God's word. How did it change your life?

Pray

Pray on for your church family to prioritise repentance, humility and God's word. Pray that your church would welcome anyone and everyone into God's family. Pray for yourself to keep this contrite spirit all the days of your life. Pray you would tell people what it means to repent. Pray that more people in your community would tremble at God's word, repent and receive life in Jesus' name.