

The Fifth Gospel

Verse by Verse Through Isaiah

Teachings by Shwabe

About this book

Isaiah gets called the fifth gospel, and once you read it you understand why. Seven hundred years before Bethlehem, Isaiah is already talking about Jesus: a Child born for us, a Son given, the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, a green branch rising out of a chopped-down stump. This book walks verse by verse through Isaiah 1 to 19 and follows that thread the whole way.

It does not flinch at the hard parts. Isaiah preaches to a nation that looks religious on the outside, packed services and all, while its heart has wandered off, and he says out loud what that costs. But judgment is never God's last word here. Every warning comes wrapped in mercy. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. The God who exposes the sin is the same God pleading with people to come home.

Underneath it runs one question the book keeps asking. Whose strength are you trusting, God's or your own? King Ahaz ran to a pagan army instead of God, and the thing he trusted to save him turned on him. Babylon built walls hundreds of feet high and still fell on the night God had already named. Isaiah keeps showing a God who holds the future, who tells you what is coming before it comes, so you can stop being afraid and start trusting Him.

It is a different time, but it is the same story, and the same God. What Isaiah said to Judah he is still saying to us, to our nation, our homes, and our own hearts. These are Shwabe's teachings through Isaiah, in his own voice, and from the first chapter to the last they are really about one Person: Jesus.

Introduction: The Book of Isaiah

Before we walk through Isaiah verse by verse, I want to tell you why. Isaiah is a hard book. It is long, it is old, and it is heavy. But it is worth every minute, and by the end I think you will love it the way I do.

Let me give you three reasons we are doing this.

First, because the New Testament will not leave Isaiah alone. He gets quoted around sixty times. He is named around forty times, by Jesus, by Paul, by Peter, by John, by all of them. Isaiah is so important that some preachers call it the fifth gospel. You have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Go ahead and add Isaiah. Why? Because who do Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John talk about the whole time? Jesus. And who does Isaiah talk about the whole time? Jesus. Starting in chapter two you get prophecy after prophecy about Him, and this is a thousand years before He ever set foot on the earth.

Those prophecies are so exact that the scholars cannot handle them. There are professors who teach, and I am not joking, that there had to be more than one Isaiah. One man wrote the first part, a second man wrote the second part, maybe a third wrote the middle. Why would anybody teach that? Because the prophecies are so specific about Jesus that if one man really wrote them all, a thousand years early, then this book proves Jesus is God. And they would rather invent three Isaiahs than admit that. But when Jesus and Paul and Peter quote him, they quote him from beginning to end as one man. There has only ever been one Isaiah.

Second, because the whole book runs on one theme: salvation through a coming Messiah. The servant who would die for sinners and rise and return to reign. Hold onto that. It is the thread that ties all sixty-six chapters together.

Third, because what is happening in Isaiah is what is happening right now. Different time. Same story. Same God. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New. So let's read it, and then let's look in the mirror.

Let me introduce you to the man.

He calls himself Isaiah the son of Amoz. Not the prophet Amos, that is a different man with a similar-sounding name. This is just his dad. He was married, and the Bible calls his wife the prophetess, though it never gives us her name. He had two sons, and God had him give those boys names that preached. One was named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means swift to plunder, quick to spoil. The other was Shear-Jashub, which means a remnant shall return. One name is judgment. The other is restoration. Isaiah could not even call his kids in for dinner without preaching the whole message of his book.

He was called in the year King Uzziah died. Uzziah was one of the good kings, one of the best Judah ever had. He finished badly, he got proud and God humbled him, but watch how God remembers him. God records him as a good king. I love that. Read Hebrews 11 sometime, that great list of the heroes of faith. David is on it. Abraham is on it. Sarah, Samson. And your mind immediately goes, wait, those

people were sinners, those people failed. That is exactly what we do. If I wiped a whiteboard clean, stuck it in the middle of the room, and put one black dot on it, what would every one of you stare at? The dot. We do it to people too. We find the stain and we cannot see anything else.

I have a shirt my friends hate. A good shirt, but it has a coffee stain right on the gut. People cannot stop looking at the stain. That is how we are with each other, and it is not how God is with us. In Zechariah, Satan drags Joshua the high priest into court and says, look at him, look at your minister, he is covered head to toe in filth. And God does not argue the point, does not list the man's sins back at him, does not make him grovel or earn his way back, He simply has the filthy clothes stripped off him and a clean robe put on in their place and tells the accuser to be quiet. That is the difference. We stare at the dot. God covers it. Not because you are special, but because the blood of Jesus was enough to cover even you. I need that more than anyone. It is the only reason I am able to teach at all.

So Uzziah, that great king, dies. And I bet you could have seen the look on Isaiah's face. This king led us into victory, led us back toward God, and now he is gone. You have felt that. You watch a great man of God fall or die and you think, well, that is it, it is over. What a foolish thing to think. Because here is what the Bible says happened the same year Uzziah died. Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple. The king's throne was empty. God's throne never is. God never once gets up and walks away from it.

Let me tell you what kind of man Isaiah was.

He was a man in touch with God. I want to be that. Think of Elijah, so close to God that when a word did not come, he was surprised by the silence. That tells me constant contact with God is actually possible, and the only reason we do not have it is that we are buried in noise. When Elijah ran from Jezebel and hid in the cave, God was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. God was in a still, small voice. You will not hear a still, small voice over Netflix and Instagram and a phone buzzing every ten seconds. Turn the noise off and it is amazing how you start to hear Him again. **"My sheep hear My voice,"** Jesus said. You just have to get quiet enough to listen.

He loved his nation. Twenty-six times in this book he calls them my people. He pleaded with them to come back to God, and he warned the kings when their politics ran against God's will. That is real love for a country. It does not mean you agree with everything your nation does. It means you pray for it and you tell it the truth.

He hated sham religion. His favorite name for God in this book is the Holy One of Israel, and he uses it twenty-five times. He looked at the packed temple courts and cried out that these people had forsaken the Lord. He looked at the leaders running to Egypt for help instead of God and said woe to them. We can hear the same warning. Woe to us when the government becomes our god and the real God does not.

And he was bold. He was not afraid to confront a king. For three years, Isaiah walked around in nothing but a loincloth to dramatize a coming judgment and get the people's attention. Three years. Picture that. I just want to ask you the question it forces: what are you actually willing to do to get the gospel to

somebody? He wore something humiliating for three years. I get nervous pacing a basement before a Bible study, and I do it anyway, because I believe God told me to. If you do not know what God is asking you to do, that usually means one thing. You are not seeking Him. **"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."** That is a promise. If you are hearing nothing, check the noise.

Now the message of the book.

Isaiah opens with sermon after sermon against sin, and that is the one thing the modern church is scared to preach. But Jesus talked about sin more than anybody. Nobody wants the good news until they know the bad news. You tell someone God loves them and they shrug and go back to their life. You have to tell them why they need saving in the first place. So Isaiah names it. The sins of the people, the sins of the leaders, the sins of the nations around them. He warns of judgment and he begs for repentance.

But he never leaves them there. Isaiah weaves hope straight through the judgment, every time. God says knock it off, and in the same breath says and I love you, and I will restore you. Do not ever picture God as a cop with a warrant out for your arrest. Picture a doctor who loves you too much to lie to you. Stop eating that, your heart cannot take it. Stop doing that, it is killing you. That is not a cop. That is a Father. The book of Jeremiah says He will not snuff out a smoking wick or snap off a bruised reed. Maybe your fire has been down to smoke for a long time. Maybe you feel like a reed already bent over and cracked. God says I am not going to break you off. I am going to restore you.

The rabbis called the last part of Isaiah, chapters forty through sixty-six, the book of consolation. It was written to discouraged people coming home to a ruined land and a wrecked temple, and it is comfort for God's people in every age and every kind of trouble. Here is the beautiful part. The Hebrew word for comfort also means to repent. God does not bring His comfort to a rebellious people. He brings it to a repentant one. Come back, and the comfort is yours.

And through all of it runs the Messiah. Isaiah predicted His birth, that **"unto us a Child is born."** Then, centuries ahead of time, he laid out the rest of the life of Jesus in order, the voice crying in the wilderness, the ministry up in Galilee, the rejection by His own people, the suffering, the death, the empty tomb, and the day He comes back to reign, every piece of it written down and waiting long before a single part of it happened. Chapter 53 goes further. It describes the crucifixion in detail, a man beaten past the point you could recognize his face, soldiers gambling over his clothes while he died, and here is the part that should stop you cold: crucifixion had not even been invented yet when Isaiah wrote it. People say they doubt God is real. Usually that is not an evidence problem. It is that we want to run our own lives and we do not want to answer to anybody. The evidence is right in front of us, and Isaiah is a stack of it.

Let me say one more thing before we start, and I mean it as a warning. The gospel can never become old news to you. The moment the death and resurrection of Jesus gets boring, a red alert should go off in your life, because it means His sacrifice has stopped being fresh and sweet to you, and you need it fresh every single day. We are going to be talking about that cross in heaven. Jesus will still carry the

scars, not to shame you, to remind you how much He loved you. If that message bores you now, the problem is not the message.

So that is where we are headed. Judgment and hope. The Holy One of Israel and the coming Savior. A God who tells His people the hard truth because He will not let them go.

Isaiah says it as plainly as it can be said. **"Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."** And again, **"Look to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other."**

Let's open the book.

Chapter 1: The Cost of Hypocrisy

Isaiah 1:1-20

Before we open Isaiah, let me tell you why we're going through it, because I'll be honest with you. Isaiah is a hard book. But it's worth every minute.

Think of yourself as a tree. Not physically. Physically you're a human being, you've got flesh and skin. But spiritually you're like a tree, and a tree needs one thing to grow: water. The Bible calls itself living water, over and over. Without that water you end up like those trees out here in Arizona: skinny, scraggly little mesquites that get blown flat every time a storm rolls through. Why do they blow over so easily? Because they hardly ever get water. So here's my promise to you, and I mean it: if you come with a heart that says, *God, what do You have to say to me? I want to hear from You.* Then, as sure as I'm standing here, you'll start to grow. Not because of me. Despite me. You'll grow because the Word of God is alive and active, because this book has the power to raise the dead through the Holy Spirit. You do your part, I promise I'll do mine.

Now, why Isaiah? Three reasons.

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Those prophecies are so specific that the scholars can't handle them. There are professors who teach, and I'm not joking, that there had to be *multiple* Isaiahs, that one Isaiah wrote the first part and a second Isaiah wrote the second part and maybe a third wrote the middle. Why would anybody teach that? Because the prophecies are so exact about Jesus that if one man really wrote them all, a thousand years early, then this book proves Jesus is God. And they'd rather invent three Isaiahs than admit that. But when Jesus and Paul and Peter quote Isaiah, they quote him from beginning to end as one man. There's only ever been one Isaiah.

Third reason: because what's happening in Isaiah is exactly what's happening in America. It's a different time, but it's the same story, and the same God of the Old Testament is the God of the New. So let's read it, and then let's look at the comparison.

"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."

First note of the day: when Isaiah prophesied, he was mostly prophesying under *godly* kings. Look at those names: Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah. Those were good kings. They rolled into Jerusalem, tore down

the false gods, chopped up the idols, cleansed the temple, cleared out the chaos. The people followed. The temple was packed. And the modern equivalent of a packed temple is a packed church.

So that sounds good, right? Good leaders, full house. Then why is God sending a warning? Hold that question and keep reading.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: 'I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider.'"

Look closely at who God is talking to. He wants to speak to His people, Israel, but instead He's addressing the heavens and the earth, the mountains and the sky and the ground. Why is God talking to the dirt instead of the people? Because the people aren't listening.

Here's what I've noticed about God's Word: God is always trying to get your attention. Always. The problem is we're not always listening. There are times you're so worn out from school or from work that I could stand up here and say "refrigerator, turtle, Camelback" and somebody would still go, *Amen, preach it*. It's like when you're trying to talk to someone and they tune you out, so you give up on them and start talking to the cup on the table instead. *As I was saying, Mr. Cup...* That's what God is doing here. His people quit listening, so He turns and preaches to the sky.

And notice how patient He is. "The ox knows its owner." An ox is a cow. A dumb cow. That dumb cow, standing there chewing grass, knows exactly who he belongs to. A donkey knows its way back to its master's house. But Israel? *My people do not consider*. God is saying it is painfully, embarrassingly obvious who made us and how much He loves us. Even the cows and the donkeys have it figured out. So why are we the ones who can't?

"Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters!"

Hear God's cry in that word *alas*. *Iniquity* is just another word for sin. These people are *full* of it. A *brood of evildoers*. Picture a nest of baby snakes. *Children who are corrupters*. They corrupt everything they touch, like the kid you hand your laptop to for five minutes and get it back loaded with viruses, everything infected.

Now go back to verse one in your mind. Didn't I just say the temple was full? Didn't I just say they had good leaders, that they'd gotten rid of their idols? Here's what we have to get: **Israel looked good on the outside, but on the inside it was disgusting**. And I have to ask you honestly, because I can't always tell from up here. Are some of you just pretending to be Christians? You never actually spend time with God. You've got sin at home you're hiding. You don't have to tell me. But you need to know this: God knows. You can fool me all day. Pack this room out and I'll think everything's wonderful, because I'm easily fooled. That doesn't mean anyone's following God. Write this one down: **God knows where you're at**. You can fool me. You can't fool Him.

"Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints."

God's saying: I already sent other nations against you to wake you up, and you still wouldn't change. Have you been through that yet? Rebelling, and God doing things in your life to get your attention? The Bible says God chastises the ones He loves. He spans His own children. If you're really His and you go home and sin, He is going to discipline you. Not to crush you, to wake you up. And here's the flip side: if you can sin and not care at all, that's a warning sign, because a father doesn't discipline the neighbor's kids. He only disciplines his own.

I'll be honest with you about myself. When I sin, I can't sleep. I toss and turn all night, because the Holy Spirit is in me and God is saying, *You need to make this right*. I can force my eyes shut and get the worst sleep of my life, and I wake up miserable, until I finally say, *God, I'm sorry*, and I let the sin go. That's what it's like to be His.

"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 soothed with ointment."

That's the picture of a person who won't deal with their sin, covered head to toe in open, oozing sores that nobody's cleaned or bandaged. Sin is not a joke. Left alone, that's what it does to you.

And watch how it progresses. "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire." First your world starts falling apart. Then comes the loneliness. You can be surrounded by people and still feel completely alone. I've been there. I went to a party once, a good party, a lot of fun, dancing and everything, and in the middle of all of it there was this sadness, like somebody had stuck a vacuum in my heart and was pulling everything out of me. My face was happy. Inside, every feeling was draining out. That's where sin takes you, and it only gets worse.

But there's a cure. Stay with me.

"Now hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!"

He just called His churchgoing people *Sodom*. Sodom was the city so wicked God burned it to ash. You can still find the sulfur in the ground out there. And He's saying: your religion has gotten so hollow I'm going to name you after the worst city in history.

"'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?' says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings...'"

Here's the first thing about the cure: you will not fix this with sacrifice. If your plan is *God, I'll start coming to church, I'll start reading my Bible, I'll give up this one thing, and then we'll be square*, no. God says He doesn't delight in that. First Samuel says it's better to obey than to sacrifice, because rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. He's not impressed by a full building. "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?" All those crowds the leaders

were bragging about? God says all they're doing is trampling His courts and making a mess.

"Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me." Incense was a picture of prayer. He's saying, *Your prayers, I can't stand them.* The new moons, the feasts, the sacred assemblies. Modernize it: the camps, the retreats, the get-togethers. "I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting." Now, He's not against camps. He's against camps run by people hiding sin. "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood." Do you see how plainly He's saying it? *I won't listen to your worship. I won't listen to your prayers. Your hands are dirty.*

So how do we fix it? Here's the cure.

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil."

Number one: **get rid of your sin.** Can you go home and get rid of the thing you've been hiding? Because Scripture is clear. If you won't forgive someone else, God won't forgive you. If a husband won't love his wife, God won't hear his prayers. "Iniquity keeps me from You, O God," David said. If we come to church with sin we're clinging to, God is not listening. Deal with it.

"Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Number two: **learn to do good.** We've got a hundred jokes to rip on each other and almost no practice at loving each other. So learn it. Seek justice: wrong should be punished, good should be rewarded. Don't be the generation that cheers when somebody does something evil because it looked cool. Rebuke the oppressor. That's the bully at school; you walk up and say, *knock it off.* Defend the fatherless. That's the kid everybody picks on, the weird one, the one nobody wants. Does the verse say *defend him unless he's annoying?* No. It says defend him. Plead for the widow. That's grandma, honestly. Go visit grandma. Make sure she's okay. Be a voice for the people nobody listens to.

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

This is my favorite verse in the whole Bible. Look at that word *scarlet*. In Isaiah's day they didn't have dyes like we do. To make the color red, they used a little worm. The worm would crawl up onto a tree and die there, and when it died it left a deep red stain, a stain so strong you could never wash it out. They'd crush those worms by the handful to dye their cloth. And here's why that matters: on the cross, in the Psalms, Jesus says of Himself, *I am a worm.* Those are His words. The One who called Himself a worm was crushed on that tree so that your scarlet stain, the one you could never scrub out on your own, could be turned white as snow. He was crushed by the nails, crushed under the judgment of God, whipped and mocked and suffocating, His blood spilled everywhere. The only way you and I are ever forgiven is by the blood of Jesus. He didn't do it so you'd feel a little better about yourself. He did it so you could actually be forgiven and saved.

"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

So there it is. *If you are willing and obedient.* Are you? As you walk out of here, are you willing to do what's right and follow God? Because those are the two roads, and God lays them both out plain: eat the good of the land, or be devoured. My job isn't to make you comfortable. My job is to give you the choice and to tell you honestly where each road ends.

Let me pray for you. *God, I pray we would go home and live right before You. Show us the change we need. Help us be the light we're supposed to be. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Chapter 2: The Mountain of the Lord

Isaiah 2

Quick recap, in case you missed the first chapter. Any time God's people stop following Him, God sends a message through a messenger, a prophet. And here's the background in Isaiah's day: church is happening, the temple is packed, and people are going, they're raising their hands, they're singing out to God. But their hearts aren't in it, their hearts aren't set on Him. So even with a full house, God still had a message, and it was this: I need you to get your life right. I'm not impressed you showed up. I don't care about attendance. I care whether your heart is here and actually wants to hear from Me.

So we have to ask the same thing of ourselves. If God sent that message to Israel, is He sending it to us? Why are you here? Are you here for God, to hear from Him and worship Him, or are you here because you got dragged in and had nothing better to do? A lot of people think that just being in the building makes them right with God. It doesn't. Your heart has to be right.

And I'll be honest with you, because God's Word says it, not me: if you're not here for God, it's actually better if you don't come. That sounds harsh at a church. I'm not saying be perfect. None of us are perfect. I'm saying God wants your heart, and He wants all of it. Remember Laodicea in Revelation? God looked at that church and said, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. It's 100 percent or nothing. That's the challenge.

But here's the good news. Isaiah 2 has more scolding in it, yes. It also has hope. Let's read it.

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it."

Circle that phrase, *the latter days*. It shows up all over the Bible, and here's the short version of what it means. The last days started when Jesus came into this world two thousand years ago and died on the cross. They're not a couple of days. They've been running for two thousand years now. When Jesus came, a clock started ticking. He brought a message of grace and a way out of judgment, He died and rose, and when He ascended He told His disciples: the same way I'm leaving is the same way I'm coming back. And when I come back, I will judge the world. Count on it. I am coming back.

Jesus said certain things would mark those last days. One of them is a rise of false teachers. So look around. Are there false teachers right now? Yes. Turn on most of the religious television, the big networks, and you're getting bad teaching dressed up as Christianity. Jesus said it would be like this. And right in the middle of a time like this, look what God promises. The mountain of the Lord's house established, lifted up, and all the nations flowing to it.

What is that? Revelation 20 tells us. God is going to establish His reign on the earth. Jesus left, He's coming back, and when He comes back He does away with the governments of this world, this time with a forceful hand. The first time He came as a baby in a manger and died on a cross. The second

time is not going to be so gentle. He comes on a white horse with the church behind Him, and He conquers. The Bible says He destroys the armies of the world with the breath of His mouth. Then He sets up His reign for a thousand years, and for a thousand years there is peace on the earth. And if you belong to Him, you reign and rule with Him in that kingdom, because when He comes back He brings the church with Him.

Keep reading verse 3. "Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.'" Everybody flows in. God sets up His capital in Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem He runs the world, and the world finally has peace. Now watch the middle of verse 3, this is my favorite part. "He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Do you catch what that is? In the kingdom, we're going to gather and study the Bible. So if you don't like Bible study now, you'd better get used to it. And here's the best part: you finally won't have to listen to me. Who's your teacher going to be? Jesus Himself. You're going to sit through Isaiah 2 with Jesus teaching it and go, *oh, that's what Shwabe was trying to say*. And I'm hoping I don't sit there going, *I really botched that one*. This is what Jesus was always doing anyway. Read the New Testament. He's walking along, the Pharisees try to trap Him, and He pulls out the Scriptures and says, let Me show you what's happening here. He did a Bible study every chance He got, straight out of the Old Testament. If you love Jesus, you love the Word of God.

"He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Nukes into tractors. Guns turned into farm tools. No more war. To see how we get there, let me give you the timeline, and then ask me anything after.

We're in the last days right now, which means Jesus could come back at any moment. He said before He comes there would be so much false teaching it would be hard to tell a real Christian from a fake one, that's how crazy it gets. What happens next is the rapture. First Thessalonians talks about the church being caught up. Jesus sounds a trumpet, and in the twinkling of an eye every Christian on the earth is taken to heaven. If you're still here after that, it's because you were never really His.

Then you can start a seven-year clock. That's the tribulation. Satan gets cast down to the earth and is handed control for seven years. Cut it in half. The first three and a half years, he fakes peace. He plays the hero, the savior, the leader the whole world has been begging for, and most of the world falls for it because the church is gone. Look at the news. People are already crying out for one leader to unite the world. They're going to get one. He's the Antichrist, the fake Christ. Then in the middle of the seven years he shows who he really is. He turns on the Jewish people, turns on everyone who has come to faith, sets up a statue, and demands the world worship him. That launches the great tribulation, where God judges the world and plagues it.

At the end of the seven years the world is chaos, bodies everywhere, plagues everywhere. And God shows up. Not a trumpet this time. He comes down, in a valley called Megiddo, which is where we get Armageddon. Every army on earth is gathered there fighting, and when they see Jesus coming from the clouds, they actually turn their weapons on Him and try to kill Him, and He destroys them. Then He sets up the millennial kingdom. He fixes the world. He goes to every nation and says, I'm in charge now, and they turn their weapons into farming tools, and nobody carries a weapon for a thousand years. His throne is in Jerusalem, there are still people alive on the earth, and they come to worship, and we rule with Him over the earth for a thousand years. I'm not joking. We rule with God.

Then the thousand years is up, and Satan, who had been locked in a bottomless pit, gets released. And you know what he does? All those people who lived through a thousand years of peace under God, he tricks them into rebelling against Him, and a lot of them go for it. Even with God Himself ruling, the human heart is so wicked it would still rebel. So God finally says, I'm done, and He destroys the world with fire. Second Peter says the day of the Lord comes like a thief, the heavens pass away with a great noise, and everything you see around you, the cars, the homes, the screens, is burned up. And then God makes a new heaven and a new earth. Read Revelation 21. There's no sun in it, because God Himself is the light.

Here's the application. Even in the kingdom, in heaven, we're learning about God and His Word. If it matters that much then, how much more should we be in it now? God puts a high priority on His Word. There's a reason we do this.

Come back to verse 5. "O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord." That's God reaching out His hand to you. He's telling you what's coming, and He's saying: all this stuff we treat as so important isn't going to last. Come walk with Me. Live in the light instead of the darkness like everybody else.

Then look at what went wrong, verses 6 and following. They filled up with eastern ways. They ran to soothsayers. Their land was full of silver and gold, full of horses and chariots, full of idols they made with their own hands and then bowed down to. Jeremiah says it best. God says My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and they have dug for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Picture a clean, beautiful fountain, and then picture a cracked, dirty well that leaks everything out. Two wrongs, not one. First, they left Him. Second, they built things to replace Him.

And notice, they didn't flat-out reject God. That's the sneaky part. They kept worshiping Him, but they mixed in other things He never told them to do. Eastern mysticism. The power of positive thinking. Tarot cards and crystals, the idea that if you just think positive enough, good things have to come to you. Books that look Christian, wear the label, and quietly teach the opposite of the Bible. Here's what those do: they keep the Bible, and they add to it. It's like taking a bowl of brownie mix and stirring in a little bit of poop. Would you eat those brownies? That should be your reaction to false doctrine. They didn't throw God out. They added to Him. That's why you have to actually learn the Book.

Which brings us to the last word, verse 22. "Sever yourselves from such a man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?" God says look around, and stop putting your trust in all of this. Don't trust what people are selling you. Trust Him. Trust what this Book says.

So that's my call to you. Take what you heard, walk it out the door, and learn to trust God. *Lord, thank You for these students. They know we're walking through Isaiah, and they still came. Fill them with Your knowledge. Let them know right from wrong, and what they're living for, and the things that don't last. Let them take You seriously in this dark world. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Chapter 3: A Nation's Spiritual Temperature

Isaiah 3-4

Isaiah chapter three gives us the spiritual temperature of a nation. Not the temperature outside. We live in Arizona, we already know that number is going to be ridiculous, but this is the temperature inside the people, the reading that shows what happens when a people who once knew God decide they do not want Him anymore. What does a sick nation look like?

God works in patterns, and although you cannot put Him in a box, He is consistent with His Word, so what happened in Judah gives us a picture worth looking at across a different country and a different century. Same human heart.

"For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store."

That word *behold* means pay attention. Wake up. The One speaking here is not Isaiah trying to fill time. This is the Lord of hosts, the God of armies, with more angels at His command than anybody could count. And He says He is going to take things away.

First, **"the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water."** Food and water. Pretty important things. Then He names the mighty man, the soldier, the judge, the prophet, the elder, the captain, the honorable man, the counselor, and the skilled worker, because God is describing more than empty grocery shelves, He is removing competent leadership, and the people who know what they are doing will be gone.

Then comes this terrible promise: **"I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them."** He is not only talking about age, because you have seen grown people act like little kids, people who may have an office and a nice suit and a nameplate on the door but inside are selfish, touchy, foolish, and completely unready to lead anybody. Judah would get the leadership it wanted.

Why would a loving God allow that? Because God does not care as much about your comfort as He does about your character, and because He loves you He will discipline you rather than let you continue in comfort all the way to hell. His goal is to wake you up, turn you around, and make you more like Him.

The people rejected good leadership, even though Isaiah was standing there giving them the Word of God, and according to church history they eventually killed him because they did not want the truth. So God said, in effect, *You do not want godly leaders? I will give you what you asked for.* Sometimes judgment is not God throwing something strange into your life, it is God stepping back and letting you have exactly what you demanded.

That should scare us.

"The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor." The collapse moves through the streets and right into the home. Children become insolent toward their elders. Honor disappears. Everybody pushes everybody else around, and nobody wants responsibility. The nation becomes so desperate for a leader that one man grabs his brother and says, **"You have clothing, you be our ruler."** That is the qualification. You own a shirt. Congratulations, you are in charge.

And the brother says no. *I cannot fix this. I do not even have food or clothing in my own house, so do not make me the ruler of these ruins.* Nobody capable wants the job, and anybody with the smallest achievement gets shoved toward it because the standard has fallen through the floor.

Here is the part we miss. A nation's health does not begin in its capital, it begins in its houses, and while we stare at presidents, judges, elections, and officials, the Bible brings the question home and asks what is happening around the dinner table, what is happening between parents and children, and what we are teaching by the way we speak, forgive, work, and worship.

It does not matter what is happening in the White House as much as what is happening in our houses.

That means you matter to the health of your nation, even if you feel small and do not lead anything beyond a group project that nobody else wants to do, because you are becoming the next parent, teacher, pastor, mechanic, artist, business owner, soldier, nurse, or public official. It starts now. Honor God in the house where He put you, honor whoever is caring for you, and build something healthy among the people close enough to see whether your faith is real.

Isaiah tells us why Jerusalem fell: **"Because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord."** Their mouths and their actions. They did not merely sin in secret. **"They declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it."** They bragged about it.

Sodom had become an example of open evil, and now Jerusalem, the city of God, was trying to outdo it as the people spoke against God, practiced what they praised, wore their rebellion on their faces, and wanted everybody to know. No shame. No hiding.

Take the temperature around you. Do people boast about things God calls sin? Is obedience treated like a joke? Tell people you want to honor God with your body and wait for marriage, and somebody will probably laugh. Tell them you do not want filthy words and images living in your head, and you may be the weird one. But being laughed at does not make you wrong.

We also need to be honest about what we support. I have watched shows I should not have watched, telling myself, *I would never do what these people are doing, so it is fine*, while I was still giving my time and attention to it and every view was saying, *Please make more of this*. Then one of those curse words from a scene popped into my mind while I was listening to a Bible study. Great. I asked God to take it out, and He forgave me, but the word had gotten in there, and images have a way of playing back when you never invited them to return.

You may be free to watch something, but that does not mean it is good for your mind, because God looks at the heart and sin can happen there before your hands ever do anything. Jesus said anger can

become murder in the heart and lust can become adultery in the heart, and while we like to rank the outside above the inside, God deals with both.

And let me clear up something about hypocrisy. If I have lied before, I am still allowed to tell you that lying is wrong, because that is not hypocrisy, that is a sinner admitting the truth and warning another sinner. Hypocrisy is when I tell you not to lie while making an exception for my own lies: *You must obey, but I do not have to*. That is hypocrisy.

Failure does not remove your right to say what God says, but it should make you humble when you say it, so you can tell somebody, *Do not go down that road. I did, and it hurt me*. We have all failed to keep God's standard, and the answer is not to erase the standard, it is to confess, turn around, and stop playing with the thing that is killing us.

Then Isaiah puts two roads in front of us.

"Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." If you hear God's Word, realize you have sinned, and go to Him saying, *God, I am sorry. What I did was wrong. I want to follow You*, He honors that. If you belong to Him and are trying to live faithfully, even though you fail, He sees it. There is reward with Him. The great reward is ahead, when His servant hears, *Well done*.

But the second road is just as real: **"Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him."** You can dismiss the warning. You can call Isaiah crazy, call the Bible crazy, and keep doing whatever you want. Eventually God may say, *You do not want Me? Then I will give you what you want*.

Judah chased the gods of the nations around it, so God allowed one of those nations to conquer Judah and carry the people away. They wanted Babylon's gods, and God gave them Babylon. That is the horror of a life that rejects Him, because even now, in a chaotic world, we still experience the kindness and presence of God, but complete separation from Him is darkness. The absence of light.

You have a choice. Hearing the Word puts it in front of you.

Now the Lord rises to judge the leaders. **"You have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses."** These elders and princes were supposed to protect the people, but instead they used them, so God asks, **"What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?"** That is strong language because God takes oppression personally, and although the poor may have no influence, no money, and nobody returning their calls, He sees what is being done to them and will call their leaders to account.

Then Isaiah turns to the daughters of Zion. They were proud, walking with stretched necks and flirtatious eyes, jingling the ornaments around their ankles so everybody would look. The list of jewelry and clothing is long. Scarves, pendants, bracelets, veils, headbands, perfume boxes, rings, nose jewels, purses, mirrors, fine linen, turbans, robes. Jerusalem must have had some pretty good malls.

The problem was not that a woman looked pretty, and Scripture is not saying makeup is evil or that godliness means finding one plain white dress and throwing everything else away. The problem was what these women lived for, because their whole identity had become appearance, attention, possessions, and attracting men, although guys can do the same thing. Pride shops in every department.

First Peter says God cares about the hidden person of the heart, a gentle and quiet spirit that is precious to Him. Dress your character with peace, love, joy, and patience. Care more about becoming the person God wants than getting every eye in the room. If marriage is in His plan for you, trust His timing. Do not build yourself according to what the world says will get attention. Honor God. Let Him handle the rest.

Everything on Isaiah's list could disappear in an afternoon.

"Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench." Instead of a sash, a rope. Instead of styled hair, baldness. Instead of a rich robe, sackcloth. Instead of beauty, a brand. The invading army would be brutal. The men these women were trying so hard to impress would fall by the sword, the city gates would mourn, and Jerusalem would sit desolate on the ground.

Chapter four begins with the word *and* because the thought never stopped. **"In that day seven women shall take hold of one man."** So many men would die in war that the women would offer to provide their own food and clothing if only one man would give them his name, and everything they had lived for would be gone. God warned them before it happened. Change. Stop. Turn back. They heard Isaiah and kept going.

So realize what is important, because houses, clothes, beauty, money, entertainment, and public attention can vanish fast, even though we act as if the things around us are permanent because they were here yesterday. They are not. Only God is.

But chapter four does not end in ruins. Isaiah suddenly looks past the fire and sees Someone beautiful.

"In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious." The Branch is Jesus. Judgment is not God's final word for His people. Judah would spend seventy years in captivity, then a remnant would return. They would rebuild the temple, cast away the false gods, and look again for the Messiah. Before the captivity the temple had been busy, but their hearts did not care about God. After the fire they came back hungry for Him.

Why does God allow hard things? To wake us up to what matters. Maybe your life is falling apart because you are refusing Him, and although God has not sent a Babylonian army to your door, He may be letting the things you trusted shake because He wants you to see that they cannot hold you. His purpose is not merely to threaten you, He is taking away what you thought was everything so that you can discover Jesus is better.

Isaiah's prophecy also looks farther ahead, to the day Jesus returns to rule, when there will be judgment but those who remain will be **"called holy."** Holy means set apart. The Lord will wash away the filth of Zion and purge the blood from Jerusalem **"by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning."**

The fire is severe. It is also cleansing, because God is making His people what He intended them to be.

Then the picture changes again. Over Mount Zion there is a cloud and smoke by day, and flaming fire by night, and if that sounds familiar, it should, because in Exodus God led Israel through the wilderness with a cloud by day and fire by night. It meant, *I am here. I will lead you. You can see My presence with you.*

Isaiah says there will be a covering, shade from the heat, "**a place of refuge, and a shelter from storm and rain.**" After all the false shelter is stripped away, God Himself becomes their shelter. After leaders fail, He leads. After beauty fades, the Branch is beautiful. After the city sits empty, His presence fills it.

That is where both roads end. One road says, *I do not want God*, and finally gets its wish, while the other says, *God, even when You correct me, I want You*, and receives the greatest reward He can give: Himself.

Take your temperature honestly. What do your words celebrate? What do your actions support? What is happening in your house? What are you building your identity on? You can fool people for a while. You cannot fool God. And you do not need to. He is warning you because He loves you, and if you turn to Him, the same God who burns away the filth will cover you in the storm.

Let me pray for you. *God, show us where we have trusted what cannot last. Help us turn from sin and desire what is right, even when we fail. Wake up our homes and our nation. Make us holy, keep us near You, and be our shelter in every storm. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Chapter 4: The Branch of the Lord

Isaiah 4:1-5:7

Israel was prosperous. God had given the nation a great king in Uzziah, and although Uzziah did not finish perfectly, under his leadership the people came back toward God and the nation became strong. Then the old cycle started again. God blessed them, they became comfortable, and they forgot the God who gave them everything.

We do the same thing.

You start following God. There are still hard days and struggles, of course, but God gives you fulfillment, direction, peace, maybe even prosperity. Then, once you are comfortable, you begin to live as if you created the blessing yourself. The gift replaces the Giver. Israel had money, clothes, jewelry, beauty, houses, and plenty of disposable income, but instead of using those things for good they indulged themselves. Isaiah chapter three is stacked with warnings about it.

They looked beautiful and successful, the kind of people who had the best clothes and knew exactly how to make an entrance, but under all that shine the nation was drifting from God, because prosperity can hide spiritual sickness for a surprisingly long time before the collapse becomes visible.

So Isaiah wakes them up. Judgment is coming. Everything around you that looks permanent can disappear.

Then he does something he will do all through this book. He is preaching judgment, and suddenly he jumps far into the future and shows us the Messiah. It can feel like somebody changed the channel in the middle of the story, but there is a reason for it. Isaiah is saying, *All this is temporary*. Everything we live for here will fade. Only what is done for Christ will last.

Before that beautiful prophecy begins, chapter four opens by finishing the warning from chapter three: **"In that day seven women shall take hold of one man."**

So many men would be lost to war and famine that seven women would ask one surviving man to give them his name. They would provide their own food and clothing. They wanted no financial support, only the chance to have a child and preserve the family name.

You have to put on a Hebrew thinking cap for this. In that culture, a woman without a husband or child carried a terrible stigma. People often treated her as if God had cursed her. The family inheritance also passed through the family line, so no husband and no son could mean the loss of the family's land and name. These women are desperate.

That is where sin takes people. Desolate places. Devastating places. It promises freedom and ends in desperation.

But remember, Isaiah gave the warning before the disaster. Israel could still turn. God was not delighting in what would happen. He was calling His children back before they reached that place.

That is the mercy inside the warning, because when God tells you where a road ends before you arrive there, He is not standing at the bottom hoping you fall off the cliff, He is calling from beside you, telling you to stop while there is still room to turn around.

Then comes the real turn in the chapter.

"In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious."

The Branch is Jesus. This is another name for the Messiah, and the word gives us a picture of a small shoot pushing up from what looks like a dead stump. Israel would be cut down. The Assyrians would destroy the northern kingdom and carry people away with a brutality so terrible that some cities would rather die than surrender. Later the Babylonians would finish Judah. A remnant would return and rebuild, but centuries later the people would be under Rome.

Then Jesus came.

Not as the mighty conqueror people expected. Not in a palace. He came as a baby born to a poor family, laid in a manger because there was no room for Him. He grew up in Galilee, not among the powerful in Jerusalem. A little shoot. Easy to overlook.

But that shoot becomes a branch, stable and strong enough to hold you. Jesus came the first time clothed in humility. When He returns, He will come as King. Isaiah looks beyond the ruin of Israel and says the Messiah will restore His people despite their sin and rebellion. **"The Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious."**

The first time He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, exactly as prophecy had said, and people could reject the carpenter from Galilee or dismiss the Man who chose humility, but when He comes again nobody will mistake who He is, because the little shoot will be revealed as the conquering King.

God is the God of reconciliation. God restores.

Somebody always thinks, *You do not know where I have been. You do not know how far I have gone.* That is true. I do not. But I know Israel's story, and it is ugly. I also know what God said to them: **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."** If you are willing to turn to God today and confess your rebellion, then restoration is available today.

Do not wait to get your life together before you come to Christ. That is the lone wolf Christian idea, and it does not work. You do not make yourself strong enough to deserve His help. Go to Christ now. Hang your weight on the Branch. He can lift you and support you while He changes you.

This name for Jesus appears throughout the prophets. Jeremiah says God will raise to David **"a righteous Branch"** who will reign as King and execute justice. Zechariah calls Him **"My Servant the Branch,"** and then says, **"Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch."** Isaiah is not throwing out a random plant illustration. He is pointing to a Person. A Man. A King.

And when that King rules, **"he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy."** God will wash away the filth of His people and purge the blood from Jerusalem **"by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning."** That sounds severe because it is. Sin is severe. But the fire is not pointless destruction. God is cleansing and restoring a people for Himself.

Then above Mount Zion and every dwelling place there will be **"a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night."** Any Bible student should recognize that picture from Exodus. When Israel traveled through the wilderness, God led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

The cloud gave direction and shade. If you have ever hunted for one tiny scrap of shade in a Tucson parking lot in July, you understand why that matters. We will squeeze a car under a scraggly Arizona tree that is barely taller than the vehicle and act like we found gold. God shaded His people in the desert. Then the temperature dropped at night, so He gave them light and warmth.

He provided exactly what they needed.

Isaiah says God will dwell with His people again, not merely over one sacred building, but over every dwelling place and every assembly. **"Over all the glory there will be a covering."** There will be shade from the heat and **"a place of refuge, and a shelter from storm and rain."**

Why should we care about future prophecy? Why study things that have not happened yet?

Because what you believe about tomorrow changes how you live today. First John says that everyone who has the hope of Christ's return **"purifies himself, just as He is pure."** If I know Jesus is returning and this present world is temporary, then going to work is not merely about paying bills. I am representing a coming King. Time with friends matters. Time alone matters. What I watch when nobody is around matters. The pleasure sin offers is temporary, and the kingdom of God is forever.

People say you can become so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good. I think that saying is garbage. If you are truly heavenly minded, you become extremely earthly good. You work faithfully because your work matters to God. You love people because they will live forever. You say no to sin because you know where history is going.

Prophecy is not there so we can make charts, argue over every detail, scare ourselves, and then go home unchanged, because if the study of Christ's return does not affect what I do at work, what I watch alone, how I treat people, and what I live for, I missed the point.

Israel needed that view. So do we.

But Isaiah is not finished. At the beginning of chapter five he turns back toward the present warning, and this time he sings it. The people had heard sermon after sermon. Some of them probably had that glazed look, the look people get when words are landing all around them and none are getting in. So Isaiah casts the truth alongside them in a song, something beautiful enough to catch their attention.

That is what a parable does. The word carries the idea of casting something alongside. Jesus used parables, not because every listener wanted truth, but because many did not. He scattered the seed. Some people heard a story and walked away. Others came closer and asked, *What does that mean?* The same Word reveals whether you want God to speak to you.

Isaiah begins, **"Now let me sing to my Well Beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard."** The vineyard is Israel, and the owner is God.

The Beloved planted His vineyard on a fruitful hill. He dug the ground, removed the stones, planted the choicest vine, built a tower in the middle, and cut out a winepress. He did not abandon the field and then complain about the crop. He prepared everything. He protected it. He gave it every advantage.

"So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes."

Wild grapes may look like fruit from a distance, but they are bitter and worthless. That was Israel. God removed the wicked nations from the land, gave His people cities they had not built and farms they had not planted, protected them, taught them, and dwelt among them. He looked for justice and found oppression. He looked for righteousness and heard a cry for help.

They could point to the land, the temple, the history, and the promises and assume all of it proved they were fine, while the poor were being crushed and cries were rising around them, which means religious advantages do not excuse rotten fruit, they make the absence of good fruit even more serious.

God asks the people to judge the case themselves: **"What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?"**

That question should stop us. What else was God supposed to give them? And what else is He supposed to give us? We have His Word. We have the cross. We have the Holy Spirit. We have forgiveness offered freely through Jesus Christ. Yet we can sit in churches with air conditioning, sound systems, comfortable seats, Bibles on our phones, and every advantage imaginable, then complain that following God is too difficult.

He has cared for the vineyard. Where is the fruit?

Because Israel refused Him, God said He would remove its hedge. The wall would break down, the vineyard would be trampled, and briars and thorns would take over. He would even command the clouds not to rain on it. This is God withdrawing the protection they had treated as if it were automatic.

Sometimes judgment looks like God giving people what they insisted on. They said they did not need Him, so He allowed them to learn what life without His protection was like. Assyria came. Babylon came. The fruitful land became desolate.

But even that was not the end of the story. A remnant returned. In time, the land produced again. God was still keeping His promises.

So here is the lesson for us. If we keep pushing God out of our lives, we should not be surprised when the blessings begin to dry up. This applies to a nation, a city, a church, and an individual heart. We can have more possessions than any generation before us and still be empty. We can decorate the vineyard while the grapes are rotten.

The answer is not more stuff. The answer is to learn from Israel, turn from sin, and return to the God who forgives. The same chapter that warns of a ruined vineyard shows us the Branch of the Lord. Judgment is real. So is reconciliation.

The Word has been cast alongside you. Do not let it fall to the ground. Ask God where He expected fruit and found wild grapes. Ask what you have trusted that cannot last. Then come to Christ now, because the Branch is strong enough to hold you, the King is coming, and the God who cleanses His people is still willing to restore them.

God, thank You for giving us the warning we need and the hope we do not deserve. Show us the wild grapes in our lives. Help us turn from sin, receive Your forgiveness, and bear the fruit You intended. Keep our minds on Your coming kingdom, and make Your presence our shelter. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 5: The Six Woes

Isaiah 5:18-30

Isaiah chapter five is God calling His people to repentance. What does repentance mean? It means you are walking toward sin, then you stop, turn around, and start walking back toward God. Very basic. Very important.

Israel was not doing that. They kept going down the same road, and here is the strange part: they were still worshiping God, going to the temple, singing the songs, and bringing the sacrifices, as though it were good to worship God and keep your sin at the same time. It is not. God is not asking for a religious hour attached to a rebellious life. He wants the whole thing.

At the beginning of the chapter, God compares Israel to a vineyard, and He gave that vineyard everything it needed: good soil, a fence, a tower for protection, rain, seed, cleared ground, and the choicest vine, then He waited for good grapes. Instead, it produced wild grapes.

God was saying, *Israel, what else could I have done for you?*

We ought to feel the weight of that because we have the Word of God everywhere, on our phones, on our shelves, and in churches all around us, along with teaching, fellowship, and more access to truth than most people in history could have imagined. We have everything we need to follow God, yet it is possible to have all of that and still move away from Him. A stocked vineyard can still grow wild grapes.

So God pronounces six woes over the nation. A woe is not Isaiah getting annoyed and calling people names. It is a declaration of grief and judgment. Cursed are you. This road ends badly. And the six woes show a progression, because a people who walk away from God do not stay in one place. They go from bad to worse.

The first woe was covetousness. **"Woe to those who join house to house; they add field to field."** The rich wanted more land, more houses, and more room for themselves, even if getting it meant pushing poor families off their property. Covetousness is wanting what you do not have and refusing to be satisfied with what God has given you.

It is the voice that says, *Once I get that phone, that house, that outfit, that car, that game, then I will be happy.* You finally get it, and for a little while it feels wonderful, but then the game you had to own sits on a shelf, the phone becomes the old one, and the clothes move to the back of the closet. Stuff makes a terrible god because it keeps promising satisfaction and never has enough power to deliver it.

That leads into the second woe, drunkenness. **"Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink."** When possessions stop satisfying, people go looking for a stronger feeling. They move from getting things to escaping through alcohol or drugs, but the high wears off too. Then it takes more. The hook goes deeper while the satisfaction gets smaller.

Isaiah gives us a terrifying picture: **"Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure."** It is like a snake unhinging its jaws to swallow something larger than its body, or a house being prepared for a crowd of guests. Hell is making room because people keep walking toward it.

That should send a chill down your spine. Hell is real. Judgment is real. God is not warning people about an imaginary cliff.

Now we come to the third woe: carelessness.

"Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope." The picture is of people dragging their sin around like a parade float. Their idols are on the cart, the ropes are over their shoulders, and they are pulling the whole thing down the street so everybody can see it. They are no longer hiding their rebellion. They are proud of it.

Then they mock God: **"Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it."** In other words, *If God is real, let Him do something. If this is actually wrong, let Him strike me down.* Isaiah is warning them, and they are yawning. They have heard the Word of God so many times without obeying it that they do not care anymore.

That is a frightening place to be. You can sit under the Bible until its warnings become background noise. You can hear about sin, conviction, the cross, and repentance, then shrug because you grew up in church, got baptized, prayed a prayer, or stood up once when somebody gave an invitation. None of those things gives you permission to plan your rebellion.

The Old Testament calls this sinning with a high hand. It is deliberate, premeditated, and bold enough to say, *I know God calls this sin, but I am going to do it anyway, and it is fine because He has to forgive me.*

Do not confuse that with a believer who falls and hates what happened. We all fail. There is a difference between falling into sin, confessing it, and crying out, *God, I am sorry. I do not want this. Help me follow You,* and planning sin because you think grace gives you a free pass. One heart is broken over sin. The other uses the blood of Jesus as an excuse to keep sinning.

You cannot wave God's name over a life that has no interest in God and assume everything is fine. Taking His name in vain is bigger than using His name as a curse word, although you should not do that either, because if you call yourself a Christian, you carry His name like a banner and tell your family, your friends, and everybody watching, *This is what following Jesus looks like.* Then you lie, hate people, worship what the world worships, and live exactly like somebody who does not know Him, all while His name is still on the banner.

Walk worthy of the name you carry. That does not mean never failing. If it did, none of us could do it. It means we seek God's power to live like Jesus, and when we fail, we confess it instead of defending it.

The fourth woe is deception. **"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness."** After people stop caring what God's Word says, they become morally

confused. Wrong gets renamed as right. Darkness gets a fresh coat of paint and everybody calls it light. What God made sweet is called bitter, and what He calls bitter is advertised as sweet.

How does a person get to the place where they cannot tell the difference between good and evil? They ignore the Word of God, and although at first the Word knocks on the heart and they simply refuse to answer, they keep refusing until eventually their understanding becomes dark. The scary part is that they may sincerely believe they are right. Sincerity is not the test. God's Word is.

We do not get to rewrite Scripture whenever it confronts our desires. If you want to know the straight and narrow road, learn what God has said and obey it, especially when the culture around you has switched the road signs.

The fifth woe is pride. **"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!"** These are people who cannot learn anything because they already know everything. Romans says they professed to be wise and became fools. You can collect degrees, memorize arguments, quote Bible verses, and still become too proud to hear the truth.

I have watched people who grew up in church do this. They know all the right words. When somebody confronts the way they are living, they grab verses out of context, stack up excuses, and talk circles around the plain meaning of Scripture. No matter how obvious the problem is, they will not listen.

You can become so smart that you become stupid. That is what the Bible says. Real wisdom is teachable. It can be corrected. It opens the Bible and asks, *God, am I wrong? Show me.* Pride opens the same Bible and looks for ammunition.

Then comes the sixth woe, injustice. **"Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man!"** These leaders are heroes at the table and cowards in the courtroom. They can hold their liquor, but they cannot hold a straight line when money shows up.

This is what happens when leaders in government or in the church can be bought: they stop caring about right and wrong, go where the money is, twist the rules for their own plans, and use the law or the Bible instead of teaching it faithfully. The wicked person pays, so he is declared innocent. The righteous person cannot pay, so justice is taken from him.

Look at the path. Covetousness says, *I need more.* Drunkenness says, *I need to escape.* Carelessness says, *God will not do anything.* Deception says, *My evil is actually good.* Pride says, *Nobody can correct me.* Injustice says, *Now I will use my power to make everyone else live inside my lie.*

That road ends in fire.

"As the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rotteness." Why? **"Because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."** The deepest issue was not land, wine, parades, education, or crooked courts. They rejected God's Word. Everything else grew from that root.

God says His anger is aroused, the hills tremble, and bodies lie in the streets. Then comes the repeated line: **"For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."** Picture Israel in its sin and God's hand lifted above it, holding the hammer of judgment. Does God have the right to bring it down? Yes. They have heard warning after warning and refused every one.

So why has He waited?

Mercy.

He is giving them a chance to change. That raised hand is a warning, and the fact that judgment has not fallen yet does not prove judgment is false. It proves God is patient. He is waiting for somebody to cry out, *God, I hear You. I have been fake. I have not cared, but I want to care now. Have mercy on me. Give me grace. Turn me around.*

God tells His people that if they humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways, He will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land. Notice who must humble themselves. His people. Judgment begins at the house of God, so repentance must begin there too.

Every generation has to decide whether it will live for God. You cannot borrow your parents' faith, your pastor's faith, or the faith of people who lived before you. You have to choose. First Corinthians says these Old Testament stories were written as examples for us. We are supposed to look at Israel, see what happened, and say, *That was foolish. Let us not make the same mistake.*

At the end of this chapter, God whistles for nations from far away, and they come fast, armed and ready, roaring like lions, while nobody can rescue Israel and the land fills with darkness. The warning eventually becomes history because the people would not listen.

But when Isaiah first spoke, there was still time. And if you are hearing God's warning now, there is still time for you. Do not drag your sin one more step. Drop the rope. Stop calling darkness light. Stop using grace as permission to rebel. Humble yourself, turn around, and ask God to make your life worthy of the name you carry.

He is holy. Take Him seriously. He is merciful. Come back while His hand is still waiting.

God, keep us from repeating Israel's mistakes. Show us where we have ignored Your Word, excused our sin, or carried Your name carelessly. Give us humble and teachable hearts. Help us turn from evil, seek Your face, and live wholeheartedly for You. Have mercy on us, cleanse us through the blood of Jesus, and make us light in our homes and our nation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 6: God's Call

Isaiah 6

A quick word before we go on. The teaching on Isaiah 6 was never captured. The recording failed, and only a few seconds of it survived, so rather than put words in Shwabe's mouth we are going to pass through this chapter briefly and let the passage speak for itself. It is too important to skip entirely.

Isaiah 6 is the call of the prophet, and it happens, the text says, in the year King Uzziah died. The throne in Jerusalem had just gone empty, and in that same year Isaiah saw the throne that never empties. **"I saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple."** The angels covered their faces and cried **"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."** And Isaiah did not feel impressive standing there. He fell apart. **"Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips."** That is what happens to anybody who actually sees God. You stop grading yourself against other people and you see yourself against Him.

But God did not leave him on the floor. An angel took a live coal from the altar and touched his mouth, and his guilt was taken away. Cleansed, not because Isaiah earned it, but because God reached down and did it. Then came the question: **"Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"** And the man who had just been wrecked and then cleansed said the words the whole rest of this book is built on. **"Here am I. Send me."**

That is the pattern for every one of us. See God for who He is. See yourself honestly. Let Him cleanse you. Then go. Keep that in your mind as we move into chapter seven, because the Isaiah who speaks to kings from here on is a man who met God in this room first.

Chapter 7: God's Word Is Always True

Isaiah 7

Isaiah chapter six is where Isaiah receives the call of God. God cleanses him for the work, then empowers him for the work. And what is the work? Isaiah has to warn a nation that judgment is coming, that God is angry, but that God still loves them, and if they will turn back, God will forgive them.

Only one problem. God already told Isaiah the people would not listen.

Now we come to Ahaz. His grandfather Uzziah was a very good king. Judah did not have many of those. But Ahaz was wicked, and I mean terribly wicked. He worshiped Molech, a false god represented by a bronze statue heated with fire, and children were sacrificed on its burning arms. Ahaz did not merely tolerate that evil. He led his people into it.

That is the king God is about to help.

"Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it." At this point the nation had split in two. The southern kingdom was Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital. The northern kingdom was still called Israel, or Ephraim. Israel joined forces with Syria and attacked Judah.

Judah survived the first attack, but barely, soldiers died, places were destroyed, and everybody knew Syria and Israel were coming back for more, which meant that even though Jerusalem was still standing, nobody felt safe inside it. **"His heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind."** Picture a forest in an Arizona monsoon, every branch whipping around. That was Ahaz. That was the whole nation.

And here is the theme of the chapter: God's Word is always true.

Despite what you feel, despite what a teacher says, despite what your friends say, even despite what your parents may say, God's Word is always true. Ahaz is terrified because two armies are planning to tear Jerusalem apart. But God knows what will happen before it happens, and His Word is more solid than the army outside the wall.

So the Lord tells Isaiah to meet Ahaz, and He tells Isaiah to bring his son Shear-Jashub. That name means a remnant shall return. Isaiah's children had names that preached. Just having the boy stand there was a message. Judgment is coming, but God will preserve a remnant.

God even tells Isaiah where to find the king: **"at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field."** That may sound like a useless detail, but it is not. The Bible speaks about real kings, real roads, real pools, real wars, real places you can locate, and events you can check against history. God did not set this story in some foggy imaginary land. He put names and places on it.

That matters because Isaiah is full of prophecy. Critics have claimed that Christians must have changed the book after the events happened, but the Dead Sea Scrolls gave us an ancient copy of Isaiah that could be compared with the text already in our hands. It matched apart from minor copying differences that did not change the message. The prophecies were there.

Some scholars then decided there must have been multiple Isaiahs. Why? One Isaiah could not have predicted the future that accurately. But that is the whole point. God told him the future. And when Jesus quoted from the beginning, middle, and later parts of the book, He called the prophet Isaiah, singular. Not Isaiah number one, Isaiah number two, and Isaiah number three. One Isaiah. One God who knows the end from the beginning.

Isaiah finds Ahaz and says, "**Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted.**" I love that. Ahaz is panicking, planning, pacing, probably trying to figure out where he can hide, and God's message is basically, *Calm down and be quiet.*

Some of us need that word.

Have you ever had a test coming, known for a week that you needed to study, and then played video games or watched Netflix all night instead, so now the test is in front of you, the paper hits the desk, panic takes over, and you are staring at questions you could have answered if you had used the time you were given? Whose fault is this? Yours. You had time. You wasted it.

Judah is in this mess because Ahaz has been wicked and has led the people away from God. It is his fault. Yet God comes to him with mercy. *You made this mess, Ahaz, but I am reaching out to help you anyway.*

Maybe you have made a mess of your own life. You knew what God said and did the opposite, and now you are in turmoil, full of anxiety, blaming people, talking about them, getting bitter, trying to find somebody else who can carry the fault. Stop. Calm down. Confess what you did and listen to God.

Isaiah has already given the promise: "**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.**" First John says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That is a promise. Philippians says, "**Be anxious for nothing,**" but pray, give thanks, bring your requests to God, and His peace will guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

God knows what you have done. You might fool me. I am pretty easy to fool. You can sit there with your Bible open and look interested, and I will probably think you are doing great. God is not fooled. He knows every hidden thing, and He still reaches out His hand. *I know you have been rebellious. I want to help you. Listen to Me now.*

That is what He does for Ahaz.

Syria and Israel have plotted to break through Judah's wall and install their own king. God calls those two enemy kings "**two stubs of smoking firebrands.**" Ahaz sees a raging wildfire. God sees two burned sticks with a little smoke coming off the ends. They look frightening to Ahaz because he is

staring at them instead of God.

"It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass." That is God's verdict. Then He gets specific. **"Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people."** God puts a number on the prophecy. Ahaz can mark it down. The enemies he fears will not last, and history shows that they did not.

But then God says something Ahaz cannot afford to miss: **"If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established."** God's Word is going to happen whether Ahaz believes it or not. His unbelief cannot knock God off His throne or make prophecy false. But if Ahaz refuses to believe, his own heart will never be steady.

The same thing is true for us, because God's promises are real, but you have to believe them and act on them. If you confess your sin, He forgives, if you bring your anxiety to Him with prayer and thanksgiving, His peace guards you, and if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Those promises are going out. The question is whether you will believe.

You can reject every word and call yourself an atheist. God will still do what God will do. Hell does not disappear because somebody does not care about it, and the resurrection does not become false because somebody laughs at it. Your opinion does not edit reality. God's Word is always true.

How foolish is it to have a promise from God and freak out anyway? And yet we do that constantly. God tells Ahaz, *I have this. Your enemies will not win.* Ahaz keeps shaking.

So God gives him an amazing offer: **"Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."** Pick a sign, Ahaz. God is offering evidence to settle his heart.

Ahaz answers, **"I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord."** That sounds spiritual, does it not? There is a verse in Deuteronomy about not testing God. Ahaz can quote the rule and look very humble. But God told him to ask. Refusing a direct command from God is not humility.

Ahaz does not want evidence because evidence would leave him responsible to believe. That happens now. A person says, *Show me why the Bible is true*, but the moment you show him something, he changes the subject. The problem is not that there is no evidence. The problem is that if God is real, then he cannot keep running his life as if he is god.

Isaiah sees straight through the act. **"Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?"** Ahaz treats people like trash, and now he is treating God the same way, dressing rebellion up in religious language.

But Ahaz cannot stop God from giving a sign.

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." This is one of the great prophecies of the Messiah, quoted in Matthew chapter one. Immanuel means God with us. The child is Jesus.

Prophecy sometimes has a near fulfillment that people in that generation can see, and then a greater fulfillment later. God had given Israel a way to test prophets. If every prophecy only happened centuries after everybody listening was dead, how could they test it? So this sign spoke into Ahaz's own day. A young woman would bear a son, and before the child was old enough to know right from wrong, the two kings Ahaz dreaded would be gone.

Then Matthew shows us the greater fulfillment. Mary, a virgin, conceives by the Holy Spirit and bears Jesus. The prophets themselves did not always understand the full meaning of what the Spirit gave them. They knew it pointed toward the Messiah, but they could not see every detail. We can look back and see it. God with us.

Isaiah says the child will eat curds and honey. That was poor people's food, what remained when the land had been devastated. Jesus did not arrive as the rich political ruler people expected. He came humbly. The Jews wanted a mighty king to crush Rome, but Scripture had told them their Messiah would come lowly, a servant among ordinary people.

What does Ahaz do with all this mercy, evidence, and warning? He refuses it. He decides to hire the king of Assyria to rescue him. And because he does not have enough money, he strips the gold and valuables out of God's temple and sends them to a wicked king.

Think about what he is saying. *I do not trust God to help me, so I will sell what belongs to God and use it to buy help somewhere else.* Like Esau trading his birthright for one meal, Ahaz gives away what is holy to solve the panic right in front of his face.

And the nation he hires becomes the nation that destroys him.

God says He will whistle for the fly from Egypt and the bee from Assyria, and they will swarm into the valleys, rocks, thorns, and pastures. **"The Lord will shave with a hired razor."** The very razor Ahaz rented will shave Judah bare. The Assyrians humiliated their captives, stripped them, shaved them, put hooks through them, and marched them away. Ahaz thinks he is purchasing protection. He is paying for judgment.

Those left in the land will keep a young cow and two sheep. They will eat curds and honey because fields that once held valuable vines will be covered in briars and thorns. Men will enter with bows and arrows because wild animals will roam where farms used to be. The productive land will become a place for cattle and sheep to wander.

All because Ahaz would not trust the God who told him exactly what He was going to do.

There is the choice. God's Word goes out, and every one of us decides whether to believe it. Ahaz chose not to, because he heard mercy and reached for a mercenary, he was offered peace and kept panicking, he was offered a sign and hid behind a religious excuse, and he was promised rescue but hired the instrument of his own ruin.

Do not make his choice.

When God exposes your sin, confess it. When anxiety shakes you like a tree in the wind, pray and bring Him your need. When Scripture gives you a promise, stand on it. You may have caused the mess. You may deserve every consequence headed your way. But if God is reaching out to you, do not slap His hand away because you would rather control the rescue yourself.

Your fear is not always telling the truth. Your circumstances are not in charge. God's Word is always true.

Let me pray for you. *God, help us believe Your Word. When we have sinned, bring us to confession instead of excuses. When we are afraid, steady our hearts and teach us to trust You. Make us men and women of Your Word, and keep us from trading what is holy for an answer that cannot save. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Chapter 8: Am I God's Friend or Enemy?

Isaiah 8

King Ahaz is in charge of Judah, and unfortunately Ahaz is a bad king. Israel and Syria have joined together against him. Their armies are in his territory, Jerusalem is threatened, and Ahaz is freaking out.

Back in chapter seven, God sent Isaiah to this wicked king with an offer Ahaz did not deserve. *I will help you. Turn to Me. Trust Me.* God even offered him a sign, anything from the depths to the heights, and Ahaz refused. Instead of trusting God, he ran to Assyria, the biggest world power around, and asked an ungodly nation to save him.

That brings us to the question running through this chapter: is God my friend or my enemy?

God can be your enemy. We like saying God loves us no matter what, and He does love us, but the Bible also says we come into this world as enemies of God, so unless you are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, unless you have turned to Him and belong to Him, you are still standing against Him. I have had human enemies before. They are a pain. But I do not want God as my enemy, because who could fight Him, who has the power to stop Him, and where could you possibly run from the One who made everything and sees everywhere? I would rather have Satan and every demon against me than have God against me.

So which side are you on?

The Lord tells Isaiah, **"Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man's pen."** Picture a billboard beside the freeway, one of those enormous signs you can read before you are anywhere near it, because God wants this message written big enough that everybody passing by can see it, and He wants it written with the pen of a common man, plain enough that anybody can understand. This is not a secret for scholars. God is trying to get Ahaz's attention.

Think about the patience in that. Ahaz has ignored Him again and again, and God is still speaking. Still warning. Still offering a way back. God is not hiding His will from this man. He is putting it on a billboard.

Then Isaiah has a son, and the Lord tells him to name the boy Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. There is a name for you. Try saying it five times fast. It means swift to the spoil, quick to the plunder. Isaiah could not call his own child without preaching judgment.

God says that **"before the child shall have knowledge to cry, 'My father' and 'My mother,'"** the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria, which means that before this baby can put a sentence together, before he can run through the house calling for his mom and dad, the two kingdoms frightening Ahaz will be broken.

And it happened. Assyria came in and crushed them, exactly as God said. This is one reason we can trust the Bible. God tells the future before it happens. He does not make a vague guess and clean it up

afterward. He names what will happen and even gives the timetable.

But the prophecy is not only evidence. It is another ringing phone. God is calling Ahaz. God is calling Judah. Pick up. Listen to His Word. Trust Him while there is still time.

The phone may be ringing in your life too. Maybe you have done whatever you wanted for years, and now things are breaking around you. You feel surrounded. You feel attacked. God may be using the pressure to get your attention, and His message is not complicated: come back to Me. Trust Me.

Then God gives Judah a picture of two kinds of water.

The first is "**the waters of Shiloah that flow softly.**" Shiloah was a quiet stream that supplied Jerusalem with what the people needed. It was not impressive. Nobody stood beside it and said, *Now that is a mighty river*. It was small, gentle, and easy to overlook. But it was enough.

Sometimes God does not give us what we want. He gives us what we need.

I needed another vehicle once. My truck was broken, I lived about half an hour away, and I needed to get to church almost every day. Somebody found out and gave me a minivan. A minivan. I remember thinking, *God, could You give me something cooler?* My friends started calling me soccer mom and wanted to put a sticker on it. Very thoughtful of them.

But do you know what that minivan did? It ran. It got me where I needed to go. God provided exactly what I needed, even if it did not look like what I would have picked from the lot.

We struggle with that. We look at the little stream God gave us, then look at the world with its money, attention, parties, houses, cars, and pleasure, and think, *Their river is bigger. Their life looks better*. Christians can start believing they are missing out because the Bible puts boundaries around them, and young people raised in church can look outside at everybody who seems to be having fun, doing whatever they want, answering to nobody, and think the grass must be greener over there.

That is what Judah did. Assyria's capital, Nineveh, sat near the Tigris River, with the Euphrates tied to the strength of that empire. Those were mighty waters. Compared with them, Shiloah looked like a bathtub. Judah looked at God's quiet provision, looked at Assyria's visible power, and decided the world had something better.

So God said, in effect, *You want that river? You can have it.*

"The Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty, the king of Assyria and all his glory." The river would rise over its channels and banks, sweep through Israel, pour into Judah, and reach all the way to the neck. Assyria would destroy the enemies Ahaz feared, but it would not stop there. It would turn on Judah and nearly drown the nation that invited it in.

That is what sin does. What looks stronger, bigger, freer, and more exciting becomes the thing that enslaves you, because you think you are inviting it in to serve you, you think you can enjoy it for a while and send it away whenever you are finished, then suddenly the water is at your neck and you are

fighting to breathe. The Bible says sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. God puts up boundaries because He knows where the current goes.

Do not despise the quiet water.

Jesus stood and cried out, "**If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.**" He promised that whoever believes in Him would have rivers of living water flowing from within, speaking of the Holy Spirit. The world promises a mighty river and gives you a flood. Jesus gives living water. He gives what your soul was thirsty for before you even knew its name.

Assyria's invasion would leave Judah almost ruined. Yet God says to the raging nations, "**Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces.**" They could prepare for war, make their plans, and speak their threats, but their counsel would come to nothing. Why? "**For God is with us.**"

That phrase is Immanuel. God with us.

Here is the strange and serious truth of Isaiah 8: the same God can be a sanctuary to one person and a stumbling stone to another. He does not change. Our relationship to Him does.

God tells Isaiah not to walk in the way of the crowd. "**Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats.**" Frightened people grab onto rumors. They imagine hidden groups controlling everything, or they chase political alliances because an alliance feels safer than faith. Fear makes the world look enormous and God look small.

Do not join the panic. Do not let everybody else's fear tell you what is true.

"**The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear.**" Jesus says the same thing in Matthew: do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Fear the One who holds body and soul in His hands.

Fear of God is not pretending He is a monster hiding around a corner. It is seeing Him as He is, holy, powerful, and worthy of obedience, so His opinion weighs more than the whole room, His command matters more than peer pressure, and His warning matters more than any threat coming from the crowd around you. When God is the One you fear, everything else shrinks to its proper size.

And then "**He will be as a sanctuary.**" A sanctuary is a place of worship, but it is also a place of protection. When you are scared, stressed, or surrounded, you can run to God. He is not merely somebody you sing about on Sunday. He is safety. Strength. The place you hide when the water rises.

But the verse continues. He will also be "**a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.**" The God who shelters those who trust Him becomes the stone rebellious people trip over. Jesus said, "**Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.**"

Those are the choices. Fall on Jesus now, broken over your sin, or keep resisting until judgment falls on you. Come to Him and say, *God, I am sorry. I have disobeyed You. I got distracted. I trusted everything except You. Please forgive me.* Or keep walking against Him and discover that nobody wins that fight.

There is no safe middle. Jesus said, "**He who is not with Me is against Me.**" Psalm 2 says, "**Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.**" Who is Jesus to you? Is He your enemy or your friend? Growing up in church does not answer that question. Knowing Bible stories does not answer it. Have you fallen on Him? Have you asked Him to forgive you and rule your life?

Isaiah answers for himself: "**I will wait on the Lord...and I will hope in Him.**" The nation may refuse God, but Isaiah will not. Ahaz may buy help from Assyria, but Isaiah will wait. People may panic and chase every rumor, but Isaiah will hope in the Lord.

Then Judah runs in another direction. When God seems silent, the people seek mediums and wizards who whisper and mutter. Today we have new packaging for the same old rebellion: tarot cards, horoscopes, astrology, Ouija boards, psychics, any attempt to find supernatural direction somewhere other than God. People will ask the dead for help before they ask the living God.

Isaiah's answer is sharp: "**Should not a people seek their God?**" Why are the living asking direction from the dead? Why search darkness for light?

"To the law and to the testimony!" Run to the Word. Open the Bible. Test every voice by what God has already spoken, because Isaiah says if people do not speak according to this Word, there is no light in them.

That is why we spend time studying this book. It is spiritual food. Jesus said man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God, yet we feed ourselves hours of shows, clips, posts, messages, and noise, then wonder why we are spiritually starving and why God seems so far away. Turn some of it off. Open your Bible. It may take time to acquire a taste for God's Word, but keep coming to it, read it, think about it, and obey what you understand. **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."**

Without that light, Isaiah says the people will look around and see **"trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish."** They rejected the quiet water, so they got the flood. They rejected the sanctuary, so they tripped over the stone. They rejected the Word, so they wandered in darkness.

But you do not have to follow them.

God has put the message where you can see it, like a billboard beside the road. Trust Me. Receive what I provide. Fear Me more than the crowd. Run to Me as your sanctuary. Seek My voice in My Word.

The phone is ringing. Pick it up.

Let me pray for you. God, forgive us for despising the quiet ways You provide and chasing what the world promises. Teach us to fear You more than people, to run to You when we are afraid, and to love Your Word. Make Yourself our sanctuary. Thank You that through the blood of Jesus, enemies can be brought near and called Your friends. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 9: Those in Darkness

Isaiah 9:1-5

Judah had a promise from God, and Judah did not trust Him.

God had warned them that an enemy was coming, and He had also told them what to do: trust Me, turn from your sin, and do not panic and run toward some other nation as if its army can save you. I will defend you.

It sounds so simple when it is somebody else's life. We look at Judah and think, *How dumb can you be? God gave you a promise. Just trust Him.* But bring it home for a minute. God has given you another chance to change. You know there is sin in your life. Maybe it is something hidden at home, something nobody at church knows about, and God is saying, *Trust Me enough to let it go.* What do you do then?

That is where this gets real.

Judah did not get rid of its sin. The people went deeper, and instead of seeking God, they started seeking mediums and wizards, trying to speak with the dead and looking for spiritual help in demonic places while their leaders told them to do it. God answered, **"To the law and to the testimony!"** In other words, go back to the Word and read your Bible. If a teacher does not speak according to God's Word, Isaiah says, **"there is no light in them."**

When a nation rejects God, darkness follows. Not because God enjoys watching people stumble, but because they have walked away from the light and demanded another road. Judah wanted spiritual answers without the living God. It wanted rescue without repentance. It wanted a promise without trusting the One who made it.

Then Isaiah gives us one of the best words in the chapter: nevertheless.

"The gloom will not be upon her who is distressed."

Everything was dark. The nation was falling apart, the people were chasing evil, and armies were on the way, yet God says the darkness will not last forever because judgment is coming, but judgment is not the last page. One day Jesus will make all of this right.

That promise reaches all the way to the end. Revelation tells us about a new heaven, a new earth, and a New Jerusalem where the city does not need the sun because Jesus Himself is its light. Think about that. No more kingdom of evil. No more shadow hiding what is broken. No more night. Jesus will reign, and everything sin ruined will finally be made right.

But Isaiah is not only looking that far ahead. He points to a particular place in Israel, a place that had lived under the shadow for a long time.

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali," he says, **"Galilee of the Gentiles."**

Zebulun and Naphtali were in the north. Picture Israel on a map and look near the top, because when the Assyrian army swept into the land, that northern region was hit first, then later invaders came through the same area, crushed towns, carried people away, and settled foreigners among those who remained. It happened so often that the region became known as Galilee of the Gentiles.

This was the beat-up part of the country. The mixed-up part. The place respectable religious people did not brag about coming from. If you wanted status, education, or a name among the important people, Galilee was not the address you picked. Jerusalem was the capital. Jerusalem had the temple, the religious teachers, and the institutions. Galilee had poor villages, spiritual darkness, hurting people, and a reputation.

And God chose Galilee.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined."

Matthew quotes that verse when Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee. Isaiah wrote it hundreds of years before Jesus came, then Jesus walked right into the place Isaiah named, grew up in Nazareth, taught beside the Sea of Galilee, called fishermen there, healed the sick, cast out demons, preached repentance, and brought good news to people everybody else had written off.

That is prophecy. God named the region while it was still being trampled by invading armies, and then the Light of the world came there.

Why did Jesus spend so much time in Galilee? Why not stay in Jerusalem, where the temple was and where all the trained religious leaders lived? Jesus answered that question when the Pharisees complained about Him eating with tax collectors and sinners. **"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."** Then He said, **"I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."**

Jesus went where people knew they were sick.

If He began that same kind of ministry in our city, He would not spend all His time in the cleanest room with the people who had the nicest clothes and knew the most Bible answers. He would be with the hurting, going down the streets we avoid after dark, toward the people whose lives have been torn apart by drugs, violence, shame, and demonic bondage, sitting with the people everybody whispers about. Not because their sin does not matter. He calls sinners to repentance. But sick people who know they are sick will reach for a doctor.

The danger of having a comfortable life is that you can stop seeing your need for God. You have a home, air conditioning, a car, clothes, food, and people who care about you. Those are blessings. Thank God for them. But blessings can become padding around your heart, and after a while you start thinking you are fine because your life looks fine.

Everybody needs Jesus. The difference is that some people realize it and some people do not.

When I came to God, I knew I needed Him because I had lost what little I had, my grades were bad, I could not see where my life was going, and I was close to suicide. My life did not feel polished and complete. I felt broken, and in that brokenness I could finally see the truth: without Jesus I am nothing. I need a Savior. I need forgiveness. I need help. I need change.

The religious leaders needed Him too, but many of them could not see it. They had the temple. They had their Bibles. They knew how to look spiritual in front of other people. So when Jesus stood in front of them, they acted as if they had everything they needed already. Imagine being so proud of your religion that you reject the God your religion is supposed to worship.

Do not confuse being around Christian things with belonging to Christ. Going to church does not make you a Christian. Christian parents do not make you a Christian. Carrying a Bible does not make you a Christian. You become His when you admit your sin, believe that Jesus died and rose again to forgive you, turn from that sin, and give your life to Him. You will not become perfect overnight. Christians still fail. But there is a new desire inside you. You want to obey Jesus, and when you sin, you want to come back.

The light shines brightest when you know you are in darkness.

That gives me hope when I look around at a nation that seems spiritually confused. Darkness can get deep. People can chase pleasure until it leaves them empty, call evil good, curse the people trying to help them, and become tired of the sin they once thought would set them free. But those are exactly the moments when people begin to cry out. They look around and say, *This is not working. We need God.*

That happened during the Jesus Movement. The culture was drowning in drugs, immorality, anger, and confusion, but then people who had tried all of it got tired of their sin, cried out to God, and were saved by the thousands, with hippies becoming pastors, missionaries, and evangelists. God brought light into a dark generation.

He can do it again.

So what is the application? Cry out to God. Do not sit in the dark describing how dark it is. Do not spend your whole life complaining about the country, the schools, the leaders, and everybody else's sin. Ask God to start with you. Confess what you have hidden. Pray for people who seem too far gone. The northern edge of Israel looked like the wrong place for God to begin, and that is where Jesus began.

Isaiah keeps going: **"You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy."** The people rejoice like farmers at harvest and soldiers dividing spoil after a victory. This is not a tiny private happiness. The whole picture is full. A nation restored. A harvest brought in. A battle won.

Then he tells us why they are rejoicing: **"You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian."**

The day of Midian points back to Gideon. Israel was crushed under an enemy it could not defeat. Gideon did not have the numbers. He did not have the strength. God cut his army down to three

hundred men, sent them into the night with trumpets, jars, and torches, and won the battle in a way that made one fact impossible to miss: God did this.

That is how Isaiah describes the coming rescue. The yoke gets shattered. The rod that beat God's people gets broken. Not because Israel finally becomes stronger than every empire, but because God steps in and saves.

Israel itself is a reminder that God keeps His promises. Assyria came. Babylon came. Rome came. Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jewish people were scattered among the nations for centuries, which normally means they lose their identity, settle somewhere else, mix into another culture, and after enough generations the old nation is only a memory. Yet in 1948 Israel became a nation again. You can argue over modern politics, borders, leaders, and every decision a government makes, but do not miss the plain fact sitting in front of us: God did not forget the people He promised to preserve.

God keeps His promises.

And God gives second chances, third chances, fourth chances, and more chances than any of us can count. Judah had ignored Him, chased evil, and refused His warning, yet Isaiah still spoke of light, joy, and a broken yoke. God's forgiveness is bigger than the sin you think has finally made you unreachable. If your sin were as tall as Mount Everest, picture His forgiveness like the waters of the flood rising over it. Your mountain would disappear underneath.

But you have to come to Him. Judah's mistake was hearing His promise and refusing to trust Him. Do not repeat it. Darkness does not become light because you deny it is dark. A burden does not break because you pretend it is not heavy. Bring your sin to Jesus. He already knows all of it, and He came for sinners who know they need a Savior.

Verse five finishes with the battlefield going quiet: **"Every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning and fuel of fire."** The boots are no longer marching. The bloodstained uniforms are no longer needed. They get thrown into the fire because the war is over.

That is where the prophecy is headed. Jesus does not shine a little flashlight into the corner and leave the rest untouched. He breaks the oppressor's rod. He lifts the burden. He ends the war. The same God who brought light to battered Galilee will one day remove darkness completely.

Maybe you feel like Galilee. Beat up more than once. Passed over by people who seem important. Known for the worst thing that happened to you, or the worst thing you did. Listen to what Isaiah says. The place everybody called dark was the place where the Light appeared. Your darkness is not too dark for Jesus. Your past is not too ruined. Your sin is not too high. But do not hide in it and call it home.

Come to the light.

God, we need You. Show us the sin we have hidden and help us turn from it. Shine into the darkest parts of our lives, our homes, and our nation. Break every burden that keeps us from You, give us a real

desire to follow Jesus, and make us people who carry Your light to those who are hurting. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 10: A Child, Our Savior

Isaiah 9

You know these verses. If you have ever celebrated Christmas, you have heard them. They have been printed on Christmas cards for longer than any of us can remember, and even people who want nothing to do with Christianity recognize the words. But I do not want this passage to become decoration. I want it to provoke us to fall in love with Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and to get as close to Him as we possibly can.

Because you can be a believer and still not be where you are supposed to be.

Look at Lot. He started by looking toward the well watered plains around Sodom. Then he moved near Sodom. Then he moved into Sodom. Eventually he became a leader there. Compromise usually works like that. Nobody wakes up and decides to wreck their whole life before breakfast. We look, move a little closer, settle in, and one day realize we are somewhere we never meant to live.

So this is not only about knowing the right Christmas passage. You need to know the Savior in it. The whole Bible is about Jesus. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples were crushed because the One they believed was the Messiah had been crucified, then Jesus came alongside them, though they did not recognize Him, and walked them through the Scriptures, showing that the Messiah had to suffer. From Genesis to Revelation, it is about Him. His mission, His ministry, His suffering, and His kingdom are all there in the Old Testament.

Isaiah is quoted by the Gospel writers more than any other Old Testament prophet because Isaiah cannot stop talking about Jesus.

Think of Luke chapter four. Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth, and the scroll of Isaiah was handed to Him. He read that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed Him to preach good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and give sight to the blind. Every Jew in that room knew this was about the Messiah. Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down, and said, "**Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

Can you feel that room?

If Jesus was not the Messiah, He had just blasphemed. But He was telling them plainly that the One they had waited for was sitting in front of them.

Jesus stopped before Isaiah spoke of the day of God's vengeance and the restoration of Zion. That matters. The people expected the Messiah to overthrow Rome, restore Jerusalem, and put Israel on top. Jesus came, Rome stayed in power, and He was crucified. So what happened?

The first time Jesus came, He came to deal with sin, my sin and your sin, and open the way of salvation. When He returns, He will deal with the governments of this world and make things right. Both parts of Isaiah's promise will be fulfilled: His first coming brought salvation, and His return will bring His

kingdom.

That brings us back to chapter nine. Judah was surrounded. Israel and Syria had joined forces against King Ahaz, and the people were terrified. Ahaz would not trust God, and judgment was coming. Yet right in that darkness Isaiah announces light.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

Where would that light shine? In Galilee of the Gentiles, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Not Jerusalem, the center of religious authority. Not Rome, the center of political power. Galilee. I think of it like Tucson, Arizona. Not the place the world would choose as the center of everything.

Galilee had poverty, disease, spiritual darkness, and places people avoided. Jesus went into that darkness, crossing the water into a region where demon possessed men lived among the tombs, broke chains, ran naked, screamed, and attacked anyone who came near. It looked like something out of an apocalyptic movie, but when Jesus arrived, the demons knew exactly who He was and trembled before Him.

That is a sobering thought. Demons can know who Jesus is. Pharisees could memorize Scripture, win every Bible trivia game, sit in the synagogue while Jesus read a prophecy about Himself, and still miss Him while He stood right in front of them.

It is not only what you know. It is who you know.

Going to church is not the same as knowing Jesus, and growing up in a religious home is not the same as knowing Jesus. You can know theology and still keep the Savior at a distance. He is real, He loves you, and He wants to guide you, teach you, and bring you near.

Then Isaiah gives us the Child.

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."

Seven centuries before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah wrote those words. Every person has to deal with that prophecy. You may believe it, reject it, or try to ignore it, but it is sitting there in history. A Child would be born. A Son would be given. Not an ordinary child, but God coming down for us.

Notice those words: *unto us*. This is a gift, and it speaks of inheritance. Romans says that the Spirit bears witness that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. This inheritance is not money, gold, or land. It is salvation. **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."** The Son was given so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Salvation is not a feeling. Sometimes you will feel like you are on fire for God. Sometimes you will feel like trash. Feelings come and go, and they can be beautiful when they come, but they do not change what Jesus did for you. If you belong to Him and start living in sin, the Holy Spirit will convict you. A Christian can sin, but cannot settle comfortably into sin without God pressing on the heart and saying,

Knock it off. You do not belong here.

This Child also shows us the incarnation. God came to earth as a human being. Think about how shocking that is. Human bodies get tired, hungry, dirty, and sick. We are not impressive creatures. Yet Almighty God entered our world as a baby, born to a poor family, laid among animals because there was no room for Him. He did not arrive in a rich house with every advantage. He entered hardship. For you.

How big is your God? There is only one God, but we build fake versions of Him in our minds, and then our fake god cannot save us, change us, or give us strength to do what He calls us to do. The God of the Bible is mighty enough to come down and rescue us.

A lamb could not finally save a human being, a bird could not take your place, and another sinner could not die for your sin because that sinner would have his own debt. We needed a perfect human substitute, and mankind could not produce one. So the Word who was with God and was God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus switched places with us. Fully God. Fully man. The perfect One given for the guilty.

Love is a decision, not merely a feeling, and the cross is God's decision written in blood. You may say, *I have messed up too much. God could not love me.* But the Son was given for you. Galatians says that when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman and born under the law, to redeem those under the law so we could receive adoption. He did not only clear a criminal record. He brought us into the family.

Then Isaiah says, "**The government will be upon His shoulder.**" That part was not fulfilled during the earthly ministry of Jesus. Rome rejected Him. Religious leaders demanded His death. He did not take Caesar's throne. The government resting on His shoulder points ahead to His return.

We live on earth, but this is not our real mailing address, because although we may be American citizens, believers are citizens of heaven. His government rules within us now, and one day He will rule openly over the earth, carry its justice on His shoulder, and unlike every human ruler, He will not bend under the weight.

"His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Christians have argued over whether Isaiah means *Wonderful Counselor* as one title or *Wonderful* and *Counselor* as two. Honestly, either way is awesome. He is wonderful, and He is a wonderful Counselor. We get so silly sometimes.

The idea behind *wonderful* includes something hidden, something to be searched out. God is not hiding because He does not want to be found. He wants you to seek Him with your whole heart. If you want to live your own life and ignore Him, He may let you do your thing. But He promises that when you seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him.

And He is Counselor. Guide. Director. Instructor. Gathering with other believers to study, pray, and worship is good, and Christians have done it for two thousand years. But there are things God will press into your heart when you leave the crowd, shut out the noise, open His Word, and spend time with Him alone. Nothing that contradicts Scripture. Nothing weird. He counsels through His truth, gives direction, exposes sin, and brings a peace that surpasses understanding.

We have phones, cars, air conditioning, entertainment, and more ways to numb ourselves than any generation before us, yet we are stressed out of our minds. What would happen if, before reaching for another distraction, we went to the Counselor?

He is "**Mighty God**." The Child is not a lesser god or a little god. Isaiah identifies Him with the God of Scripture, the Lord of lords, great and mighty. The baby in the manger is the Creator who made the manger, the animals beside it, the mother holding Him, and the lungs taking His first breath.

He is "**Everlasting Father**," the Father of time and eternity. He is not trapped inside time like we are. He governs it. History does not surprise Him, delay Him, or make Him nervous.

And He is "**Prince of Peace**." Our world does not need one more chemical escape, one more glowing screen, or one more human promise that everything will be fine. Tucson needs Jesus. Our homes need Jesus. Our minds need Jesus. Do not back down from telling people about Him, because He is the peace the world is trying and failing to manufacture without God.

"**Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.**" God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on a throne established forever. Jesus came through that line, and His kingdom will never be replaced. Every empire in history has risen, flashed for a moment, and fallen. His reign only increases.

He will establish it "**with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.**" When we pray, *Your kingdom come*, we are asking Jesus to return, rule, and set everything right. Every injustice that looks unanswered now will meet a perfect Judge. No corruption. No forgotten victim. No crooked scale.

And this kingdom is for His people. There will not be one corner for Gentiles and another corner for Jews, as if heaven is carved into competing sections. Everyone who belongs to Christ will be together as God's children. We will all be in the Jesus section. That is the section I want.

So after all the Christmas cards and familiar words, here is the question: have you put your faith in this Jesus? Not one you invented, not a small god who cannot change you, not a religious idea you keep at a safe distance. This Child. This Savior. This mighty God who came down, gave His life, rose from the dead, counsels His people, brings peace, and will reign forever.

The Bible says that if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. To confess means you agree with God. He is right. You are wrong. You stop defending your sin and trust the Son who was given for you.

That is the promise. The light has come into the darkness. Know Him.

God, thank You for this Child, our Savior. Thank You that Your love does not run out when we fail, and that the Son was given for sinners like us. Clean us from compromise, draw us close, counsel us through Your Word, and help us trust the real Jesus revealed here. Bring Your peace into our hearts and Your kingdom to this earth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 11: King, Messiah and Savior

Isaiah 9

Judah had a promise from God. Trust Me, He said. I will defend you.

That sounds simple until you put yourself in Judah's place. You are in sin. You are not living the way you should. God exposes it, gives you another chance, and says, *Trust Me*. What do you do? Do you get rid of the sin you have been hiding? Do you actually trust Him?

We read these stories and think, *I would never be that foolish*. Judah did something worse than refusing the promise. Instead of seeking God, the people went deeper into darkness. They sought mediums and wizards. They turned to demonic things for answers while the living God was calling them back.

That is not only an ancient problem, because when people reject God, they do not become spiritually neutral and float through life believing nothing, trusting nothing, and worshiping nothing. They look somewhere else for truth, direction, comfort, and power. We were made to worship. If we will not seek the Lord, we will find a substitute, and every substitute eventually becomes a master.

Isaiah 8 tells us what the leaders were saying: "**Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter.**" Imagine that. The people responsible for leading the nation are directing everybody toward darkness.

God answers, "**To the law and to the testimony!**" In other words, go back to the Word of God, because you do not ask the dead how the living should live, and you do not build your life on whispers, horoscopes, spiritual fads, or whatever makes you feel powerful for ten minutes before leaving you more confused than you were before. Read your Bible. Measure every voice by what God has already said. Isaiah says that if people will not speak according to this Word, "**there is no light in them.**"

The result is painful. The people become hungry and enraged, then curse their king and their God. They look up and blame heaven. They look down and find "**trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish.**" They are driven into darkness.

When a nation rejects God, darkness follows.

But then comes one of the best words in Isaiah: *nevertheless*.

"**Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed.**" Everything is breaking. Judgment is coming. The people have refused God and run toward evil. Nevertheless, darkness will not have the final word. God is going to make this right.

That promise reaches all the way to the end, when Jesus will destroy the evil kingdoms of this world and establish His own. Revelation describes a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem where God's glory supplies the light. No sun is needed. Jesus Himself is there.

That is our future hope, but Isaiah also points to a place in Israel and to something that would happen in history. He names Zebulun and Naphtali, the land beside the sea, beyond the Jordan, "**Galilee of the Gentiles.**"

Picture Israel on a map, with Zebulun and Naphtali up north where any army coming down into the land from that direction would hit them first, and that is exactly what happened again and again as invaders marched through, Assyria crushed the region, other empires came later, people were removed, foreigners were brought in, and cultures mixed. The area became known as Galilee of the Gentiles.

It was beat up. More than once.

Galilee was not the place an ambitious religious person chose to build a reputation. If you wanted education, influence, and respect, you went toward Jerusalem. Galilee was associated with poor people, uneducated people, spiritual darkness, and trouble. It was the kind of place respectable people joked about and important people avoided.

Then Isaiah says, "**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.**" Matthew quotes that verse when Jesus begins His public ministry in Galilee. God named the battered place centuries ahead of time, and when the Messiah came, that was where the Light shone.

Jesus did not begin by planting Himself among the people most impressed with themselves, even though Jerusalem had the temple, trained religious leaders, respected teachers, powerful families, and people who knew all the right language and could give all the right answers without ever letting God touch their hearts. Jesus spent most of His ministry around Galilee, among fishermen, tax collectors, sick people, sinners, and people tormented by demons. He went to the hurting. He went to people who knew they needed help.

The Pharisees hated that. They asked His disciples, "**Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?**" Their real complaint was, *Why is He with those people instead of us? We know the Bible. We are important. We have our lives together.*

Jesus heard them and said, "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.**" Then He made His mission plain: "**I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.**"

Jesus was not saying the Pharisees had no sin. They were sick too. Their problem was that they could not see it. A patient who knows he is dying will call for the doctor. A patient who is dying while insisting he feels wonderful will refuse the help standing beside his bed.

Everybody needs Jesus. Some people know it, and some people do not.

Comfort can make that hard to see, especially when you have a decent home, air conditioning, clothes, a car, food in the refrigerator, people who love you, and enough entertainment to keep you from sitting quietly for five minutes and asking what is happening inside your soul. Those are good gifts. Thank God for them. But it is possible to stack blessings around yourself like pillows until you cannot feel the

condition of your own soul, and because your life looks fine from the sidewalk, you assume you must be fine with God.

When I came to God, I knew I was not fine. I had lost what little I had. My grades were bad. I could not see my life going anywhere, and I was close to suicide. Some people have stories far worse than mine, but I had reached the point where I could see my need. I was broken. I needed a Savior, forgiveness, help, and change. I realized that without Jesus I am nothing.

That is why some people keep coming back to God's Word. They know they need Him. Religious pride says, *I have the temple. I carry a Bible. I know the answers. I am good.* Faith says, *I am a sinner and I need Jesus.*

Do not confuse being around Christian things with knowing Christ. Church attendance does not save you. Christian parents do not save you. Carrying a Bible does not save you. A Christian is someone who has admitted his sin, trusted that Jesus died and rose again, turned toward Him, and now wants to live for Him. Christians still mess up. We are not perfect. But God puts a real desire inside us to obey Him, and when we wander, He calls us back.

The fact that Galilee was dark made it the perfect place to display the light.

That gives me hope for our country. We can look around and see addiction, immorality, moral confusion, cruel people, frightened leaders, broken families, and young people trying to destroy themselves before they are old enough to understand what they are losing. The darkness is real. I am not happy about it. But dark times are often when people finally get tired of their sin and cry out to God.

That happened during the Jesus Movement, when drugs, rebellion, and sexual sin were everywhere, and people who had tried freedom without God discovered that what they called freedom was another kind of slavery that could not heal them, forgive them, or give them any reason to wake up in the morning. Many of those same people got tired of the emptiness, heard the gospel, and gave their lives to Jesus. Hippies became pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. Churches were born. God moved in the middle of the mess.

He can do that again.

So what should we do when the world looks dark? Cry out to God. Not merely complain about the news. Not point at everybody else's sin while protecting our own. Ask God to begin with us. Repent. Pray. Bring the Word of God into places where people are hurting. A great light does not need the darkness to cooperate before it shines.

Isaiah continues, **"You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy."** The people rejoice like farmers bringing in a harvest and soldiers dividing the spoil after victory. Then he tells us why: **"You have broken the yoke of his burden,"** the staff on his shoulder and the rod of his oppressor, **"as in the day of Midian."**

The day of Midian takes us back to Gideon. Israel was being crushed by an enemy it could not defeat. Gideon started with an army, and God kept cutting the number down until only three hundred men remained. That is not how you build confidence before a battle. God did it so nobody could look at the victory and say, *We were brilliant. We were strong. We saved ourselves.* The rescue had to point to Him.

Isaiah sees another rescue like that. The yoke is broken. The rod of the oppressor is shattered. Bloody garments and the boots of marching soldiers are thrown into the fire because the battle is finished. God wins, and His people know who saved them.

Isaiah can move across time so quickly that you almost get whiplash, because one moment he is talking about armies threatening Judah, then he points ahead to Jesus ministering in Galilee, and then he looks farther still, past our own time, toward the final kingdom where oppression ends and the instruments of war are burned because nobody needs them anymore. One prophecy holds a near judgment, the Messiah's first coming, and the King's future victory.

History gives us reasons to take God's promises seriously. Israel was struck by Assyria, Babylon, and Rome, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jewish people were scattered among other nations for centuries, which normally means that after enough generations the old language fades, the old identity disappears, and the descendants simply become part of whatever country received them. Yet Israel became a nation again in 1948.

God keeps His promises.

He also gives more chances than we can count. Judah had heard Him, ignored Him, and chased darkness, but He still spoke about light. He still promised joy. He still described the broken yoke and the end of war.

Charles Spurgeon gave a picture I love. Suppose your sin were piled as high as Mount Everest. Then picture God's forgiveness like the waters of Noah's flood covering the whole earth. The mountain disappears under the water. That is how great His forgiveness is. There is nothing you have done that Jesus is unable to forgive.

But you must come to Him. Judah's failure was not that God refused to speak. God spoke, promised, warned, and invited. Judah refused to trust Him.

Do not make that mistake. You may feel like Galilee, trampled, mixed up, and known for all the wrong reasons. You may have hidden sin at home and learned how to look fine around Christians. Jesus already knows. The King did not come only for polished religious people. The Messiah walked straight into Galilee. The Savior came for sick people who know they need the Physician.

Step into the light. Confess your sin. Believe that Jesus died, was buried, and rose on the third day to forgive you. Turn from the darkness and follow Him. Not as a performance. For real.

The darkness does not last forever. The King is coming, the Messiah has shone His light, and the Savior still calls sinners to repentance.

God, thank You that darkness does not have the final word. Show us the sin we have hidden, give us courage to turn from it, and teach us to trust Your promises. Shine through us in the hurting places around us. Thank You for Jesus, our King, Messiah, and Savior. In His precious name, amen.

Chapter 12: The Wonderful Counselor

Isaiah 9:6

Israel had been given chance after chance to come back to God. That is what makes this part of Isaiah so frustrating. God warned them, corrected them, invited them, and kept holding out mercy. **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."** He was not looking for an excuse to destroy them. He was pleading with them to turn around.

But they would not.

King Uzziah had been a good king who brought the nation back toward God, and Isaiah served during his reign, but then Uzziah died, Ahaz came to power, and everything godly got flushed down the toilet. The people chased witchcraft, idols, drunkenness, and every kind of spiritual confusion, showing up to worship God one day, then turning around and worshipping something else the next. Their leaders were terrible. The whole nation was sick.

At the same time, Judah was surrounded. The northern kingdom of Israel had joined Syria against it, and Ahaz was terrified. God told Ahaz, in effect, *Trust Me. I will take care of you.* That was the whole assignment. Trust God.

Ahaz would not do it.

Instead he hired Assyria, the great military power to the north, to rescue him, and Assyria came down and crushed Syria and Israel. Problem solved, right? Not quite. Once Assyria started moving, it did not stop, and the army Ahaz trusted to save Judah turned around and attacked Judah too.

That is what happens when we refuse to trust God and hand our lives to the world. The thing that promises to rescue us becomes our master. Sin always sends the bill later.

Judah was beaten up and barely hanging on, yet God still gave them a promise. Not because they deserved another chance. Grace is not deserved. He promised light to people walking in darkness, then He told them where the light would come from.

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."

Isaiah suddenly jumps from armies and judgment to Jesus. He does that all through this book. One moment Israel is being warned about destruction, then there He is. The Messiah. God is saying, *You have rebelled against Me. You have trusted everyone except Me. Judgment is coming. But I am going to send you My Son.*

That is the heart of God: after every warning was ignored, after His people chose idols, after their king trusted a pagan army and brought disaster to his own doorstep, God pointed into the future and promised them Jesus.

The people who first heard Isaiah needed that promise, and we need it now, because if you look honestly at our nation, our schools, our homes, and our own hearts, there is plenty of darkness. Addiction. Anger. People hurting themselves, trying every spiritual substitute they can find while refusing the God who made them. We do not need to pretend everything is fine. Isaiah did not.

But darkness is exactly where light shines brightest. Jesus spent much of His earthly ministry in Galilee, the northern region that had been trampled by invading armies and mixed with pagan religion. It was not the polished religious center. It was the place people looked down on. And that is where Jesus went.

Jesus loves to move in dark places.

Maybe that describes your school, your house, or, if you are honest, your mind right now. Do not conclude that the darkness means Jesus has no interest in coming near you, because Galilee says the opposite: **"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."** He walks straight into places everyone else has given up on.

Then Isaiah gives Him a name: **"Wonderful Counselor."**

People who know far more grammar than I do debate whether Isaiah means that Jesus is *Wonderful* and also *Counselor*, or whether the two words belong together as *Wonderful Counselor*. Honestly, either way is awesome, because He is wonderful, He is a Counselor, and He is a wonderful Counselor. We can get so busy arguing over the comma that we miss the Savior standing in the verse.

So what does the name tell us?

First, it tells us that Jesus understands us. Isaiah does not say that a grown man suddenly appeared out of nowhere. **"A Child is born."** Why did Jesus come as a baby? Why not arrive at thirty years old, preach for a few years, die on the cross, and rise again?

Because He came all the way into human life. Hebrews calls Him our faithful High Priest. A priest represents people before God, and Jesus did not save us from a safe distance. He entered our weakness.

Think about a human baby. Completely helpless. A baby cannot feed himself, protect himself, find shelter, or explain what hurts, and Jesus entered the world that way. He was not born in a palace with servants lined up outside, but in Bethlehem, a little town whose name means house of bread, and He was laid in a feeding trough because there was no room for Him. The One who made the stars slept where animals ate.

He knows what it is to be hungry, thirsty, and exhausted, what it is to obey parents, learn a trade, work with His hands, and live in a family. He knows rejection, because His own people turned against Him, His friends ran away, and He was publicly humiliated and suffered the cross.

So if you think Jesus cannot relate to you, you do not know your Bible. He can relate to you, and He does. Scripture says He was **"tempted in every way, yet without sin."** That last part matters. Jesus understands temptation without ever surrendering to it. If He had sinned once, He could not have been

the sacrifice for our sins. He would have had His own guilt to answer for.

But He did not fail. He kept the law completely, died in our place, and rose on the third day, and the empty tomb is the Father's declaration that the sacrifice was accepted. Our Counselor is not merely sympathetic. He is able to save.

Second, this name tells us that Jesus wants to direct us, because a counselor gives advice, wisdom, and guidance, and every one of us needs that. You may be choosing a school, considering a job, wondering whom to marry, trying to repair a friendship, or simply asking, *What am I supposed to do next?* We all want direction.

Jesus wants to give it.

But the word *wonderful* carries the idea of something extraordinary, something beyond us that must be searched out. That does not mean Jesus is hiding because He does not want to be found. It means you do not treat the wisdom of God like a snack machine. Put in one hurried prayer, press the button, and get an answer before you leave the room.

We treat God like a butler sometimes, as if we can ring the little bell and say, *God, I need an answer*, then wait five minutes, get nothing, announce that prayer did not work, and go do whatever we wanted to do in the first place.

Jesus said, **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened."** The sense is to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Not because God is cruel or hard of hearing, but because seeking exposes whether we truly want His will. Sometimes we are not asking for counsel at all. We are asking Him to sign a decision we already made.

Daniel sought God for twenty one days, praying and fasting because his heart was broken and he needed an answer. He was saying, *God, I am not letting this go. I need Your direction more than I need comfort.* That is very different from tossing a five second prayer toward heaven and then grabbing the steering wheel again.

Fasting is not a hunger strike to force God into doing what you want, and it is not a way to impress Him. In Scripture, people often fasted because they were so burdened that food felt less important than seeking God, looking at the condition of their people, their nation, or their own sin and saying, *God, this is breaking my heart. I need You.* They denied a physical appetite for a time because their need for God was greater.

Do you seek Him like that?

I do not mean that every decision requires twenty one days without food. Use some common sense. If Scripture has already spoken, you do not need a sign. You do not need to pray about whether lying is all right, whether you should forgive, or whether you should obey God. He has already counseled you. Open the Bible and do what it says.

But when you truly need direction, stay with Him. Pray. Read His Word. Get quiet. Ask mature believers who know Scripture to pray with you, and make room to listen, remembering that Jesus will never counsel you to contradict what He has already written, He will not guide you into sin, and His counsel always agrees with His character.

Some of us say we want God's direction while filling every silent second with noise. The phone comes out before our feet hit the floor. Music, videos, messages, opinions, arguments, one voice after another all day long, then we wonder why we cannot hear the still, small voice of God. Turn some of it off. Sit with the Wonderful Counselor.

And keep seeking until He answers.

Third, you can trust His counsel because Isaiah calls this Child "**Mighty God.**" Jesus is not one adviser in a crowd of advisers. He is not giving His best guess about tomorrow. He is God.

That truth is not a side issue, although some religious groups will say Jesus was a god, a created being, or something less than the Lord Himself. Isaiah will not allow it. The Child who is born is called Mighty God, the same title used for the Lord, and if Jesus is not God, then He does not have the power to save us, His death cannot pay for our sins, and Christianity falls apart.

Love people who disagree. Treat them with kindness. But do not pretend the identity of Jesus does not matter. If you deny who He is, you have denied the center of the gospel.

Isaiah also says, "**The government will be upon His shoulder.**" Look around. The nations are not submitted to Jesus right now. Human rulers do not line up to obey Him. Is Isaiah wrong?

No. The prophecy reaches across both comings of Christ.

When Jesus read Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, He stopped in the middle of the prophecy, before the part about judgment, then sat down and said that the Scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing. He came the first time as the suffering Savior, to meet us in our weakness, carry our sin, die on the cross, and offer mercy. The people expected the Messiah to crush Rome. Jesus dealt with a greater enemy first. Sin.

But the rest of the prophecy still stands. Jesus will come again. The second time He will not come as a helpless baby or return to the cross. He will come as King and Judge. The government really will rest on His shoulder. Every nation will answer to Him, every injustice will be exposed, and every knee will bow.

Right now He holds out mercy. Right now He says, *Come to Me. Trust Me. Follow Me.* Do not harden your heart because judgment has not arrived yet. Ahaz mistook God's patience for permission to keep refusing Him, and the rescue he built without God turned against him.

Do not make the same trade.

You need counsel, someone who knows your weakness, knows the future, tells the truth, and loves you enough to lead you away from what will destroy you. Jesus is that Counselor: He came as a Child so He could stand with us, remained without sin so He could stand for us, is Mighty God so His wisdom does not fail, and is the coming King, so history will end exactly where He says it will.

Are you seeking Him? Not playing church. Not asking for five seconds and quitting. Not demanding that He approve your plan. Are you opening His Word and saying, *Jesus, You know me. Show me what is right, and give me the strength to do it?*

The world will offer a thousand voices. Some will sound powerful. Some will promise quick rescue. Remember Ahaz. Then remember the Child Isaiah promised in the middle of the wreckage.

He is wonderful. He is our Counselor. Seek Him.

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming into our darkness and sharing our weakness without sin. Forgive us for trusting the world and demanding our own way. Quiet the noise in us. Give us hearts that keep asking, seeking, and knocking, and counsel us through Your Word. Help us trust You as Mighty God, receive Your mercy today, and live ready for Your kingdom. In Your name, amen.

Chapter 13: God's Outstretched Hand

Isaiah 9:8-21

We just came from one of the brightest verses in the Bible. **"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."** Isaiah looked ahead and saw Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. It was like watching one of those Arizona sunsets where the whole sky turns orange and red and gold. Beautiful.

Then the clouds roll in.

Isaiah takes his eyes off Jesus and looks back at humanity, and everything gets dark again. I heard it said like this: if you look to the world, you will be distressed. If you look within, you will be depressed. But if you look to Jesus, you will be at rest. That is exactly what happens in this chapter. The light is shining in verse six, but when Isaiah looks at the people in verse eight, he sees pride, rebellion, corrupt leaders, hypocrisy, violence, and sin spreading like a wildfire.

Here is the background. The nation had split in two. Judah was in the south and Israel was in the north. The northern kingdom had no good kings. None. They disobeyed God again and again, and now Assyria was coming. Assyria was the top dog in the world. Biggest army. Best weapons. More soldiers than Israel could hope to stand against. If they had tanks and missiles back then, Assyria would have had the biggest ones. You get the picture.

Meanwhile Judah had seen some good kings, men who pulled the people back toward God for a while, but now Ahaz was leading them into idolatry, witchcraft, and the vile worship of false gods, so the southern kingdom was watching its northern neighbor collapse while walking toward the very same cliff.

God had warned His people, and they would not listen. So judgment was coming. But even in this dark passage, watch the patience of God. Four times Isaiah gives the same awful line: **"His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."**

That is the title of this chapter. God's outstretched hand.

And it is not a comforting picture.

"The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel." God spoke, and the warning landed. Everybody heard it. But instead of humbling themselves, the people answered **"in pride and arrogance of heart."** They said, **"The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars."**

Do you hear what they are saying? Bring it, God. Tear down our little brick houses and we will build better ones. Knock down our cheap trees and we will plant expensive ones. They beat their chests at God and said, You cannot stop us.

What an arrogant thing to say.

It is like knowing your phone has been pulling you away from God. You cannot pray for two minutes without reaching for it. You know God is telling you to put it down, and then the thing breaks. Instead of stopping and asking whether God is getting your attention, you say, Fine, I will buy a newer one. A bigger one. The old bricks fell, so I will build with better stone.

That response can show up anywhere, because God may remove a relationship that has become an idol, expose a habit you have hidden, allow a plan to fall apart, or simply make you miserable in a life of compromise, and instead of listening you work twice as hard to rebuild the thing He is tearing down.

That is not strength. That is pride pretending to be strength.

And God answers it. Syria would come from one side and the Philistines from the other. They would devour Israel with an open mouth. Then comes that line: "**His hand is stretched out still.**" Picture God's hand raised over the nation, ready to come down in judgment. Why has it not come down yet? Could God do it? Of course He could. Why wait?

Mercy.

He is giving them time. Every second that hand remains raised is another second to repent. The delay does not mean God has forgotten, and it does not mean He approves. It means He is patient. Some people look around, see that nothing terrible happened today, and decide they must be getting away with their sin. No. You may be living inside a window of mercy. Do not confuse God's patience with God's permission.

Then Isaiah tells us the saddest part: "**The people do not turn to Him who strikes them, nor do they seek the Lord of hosts.**" God was trying to wake them up, but they refused to turn around.

Sometimes God takes things away because He wants us close to Him. If He gave me everything I wanted, it would destroy me. It would destroy you too. A loving parent does not watch a child run into traffic and say, I just want him to express himself. Love steps in. Love corrects. Love may hurt for a moment because it is trying to keep that child alive.

We have all seen the kid screaming through the grocery store, throwing things off the shelf while the parent acts like nothing is happening. The whole store hears it. How does a child learn to live like that? Nobody corrected him. I am not talking about abuse. That is wrong. I am talking about a parent lovingly showing a child where he should go. God loves His children too much to leave them in rebellion.

But discipline only helps when we respond to it. Israel felt the pain and still would not seek the Lord. They wanted relief without repentance. They wanted the consequences gone while keeping the sin that caused them. We do the same thing. God, fix my life. Fix my relationships. Give me peace. Just do not touch the thing I refuse to surrender.

It does not work that way.

"Therefore the Lord will cut off head and tail from Israel, palm branch and bulrush in one day."

The tall branch and the little weed rolling around in the Tucson dirt. The important person and the person nobody notices. Nobody escapes merely because of a title, a position, or a bank account. God is not impressed by any of it.

Isaiah explains the picture: **"The elder and honorable, he is the head; the prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail."** Then he puts his finger on a major cause of the nation's ruin: **"The leaders of this people cause them to err."**

Leaders matter. Parents matter. Pastors matter. Teachers matter. Principals matter. Presidents matter. People copy what leaders do, sometimes more than leaders realize, and James says teachers will receive a stricter judgment. That scares me. It should. If somebody trusts you enough to follow you, do not use that trust to lead them away from God.

A leader can stand up front and say all the right words while quietly teaching everybody around him that prayer is optional, purity is old fashioned, pride is strength, money is safety, and success excuses bad character, because the lesson people remember most clearly is usually the life they watched after the speech ended.

Pray for your leaders. Pray that they tell the truth when the truth is unpopular. Pray that they live clean lives when nobody is watching. And if you are a leader, whether your crowd is a church, a classroom, a family, or three friends who always copy your bad ideas, take it seriously. You are pointing somewhere. Make sure it is toward Jesus.

The leaders were guilty, but the people could not blame everything on them. Verse seventeen says, **"Everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly."** Everybody had joined in. The leaders taught lies, the people loved the lies, and the whole nation became corrupt.

That is why one faithful life matters so much.

Think about Abraham pleading for Sodom. He asked God whether He would spare the city for fifty righteous people, then forty five, then fewer and fewer. God showed how willing He was to spare. And when judgment came, He pulled Lot out first. Think about Noah. The whole world ran after wickedness, but one man walked with God.

The point is not that you can earn salvation for your city or make yourself the hero of the story, the point is that faithfulness is never wasted, God sees the student who refuses to laugh at the filthy joke, the employee who will not lie for the boss, and the parent who keeps opening the Bible at the dinner table.

Do not copy everybody at school because everybody at school is doing it. Do not follow the whole office into sin because you are afraid of being the strange one. One person living for God makes a difference. Your life can be a preserving influence in your family, your church, your city. You may feel like one little light in a very dark place, but turn off every light in your house tonight and strike one match. Nobody has to ask where it is.

Light shows up in darkness.

Israel refused that calling. They became hypocrites, evildoers, and fools. So Isaiah repeats it: "**His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.**" Another warning. Another chance. Still no repentance.

Then the picture changes from a raised hand to a spreading fire. "**For wickedness burns as the fire.**" It devours the briars and thorns, catches in the thickets, and sends smoke rolling upward. Anyone who has watched a fire on Mount Lemmon understands the picture. One spark gets into the dry brush, the wind grabs it, and soon an entire mountainside is burning. The flames keep consuming whatever is put in front of them.

That is what sin does.

We like to imagine we can keep one private little sin in a safe corner. Feed it only on weekends. Visit it when nobody is around. Keep it small. But fire does not stay where you ask it to stay. It grows because it is fed, and Israel had fed the fire until wickedness moved through the nation like flames through dry grass.

At first the flame may look almost harmless, something you could stamp out whenever you decide you are ready, but then it reaches the brush, the brush reaches the trees, the wind changes, and suddenly the sin you promised would never control you is deciding how you spend your money, treat your family, use your time, and think about God.

That is why repentance cannot be scheduled for some comfortable day in the future when temptation has become boring and obedience has become easy, because sin hardens the heart that keeps welcoming it, and every time you hear God's warning and push it away you train yourself to push it away again.

How do you stop a fire? Water works. A fire extinguisher works. But if you cannot reach either one, at least stop feeding it. Clear away what it consumes. Yet Israel kept throwing fuel on the flames, and eventually the people themselves became fuel. "**The people shall be as fuel for the fire.**" Their sin consumed them.

Look honestly at your own life. What are you feeding? Every click feeds something. Every private conversation feeds something. Every thought you choose to sit with, every grudge you rehearse, every lie you protect. You are either starving that fire or carrying it another armful of dry wood.

By the end of the chapter the nation turns on itself. People grab to the right and remain hungry. They devour on the left and are still not satisfied. Manasseh attacks Ephraim, Ephraim attacks Manasseh, and together they turn against Judah. Sin promises satisfaction and produces hunger. Then it takes people who should love one another and makes them consume one another.

This was not poetic exaggeration with no real consequence. Enemy armies would surround their cities and cut off the food supply. The siege would become so severe that people would do unthinkable things

to survive. Assyria was brutal. When the city fell, captives were dragged away with hooks. God had warned them, waited for them, disciplined them, and called them back. They ignored every chance.

For the final time in this chapter Isaiah says, "**His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.**"

We need to understand both sides of God. Jesus is the most loving person there is. He receives sinners. He forgives completely. But Jesus is also a just Judge, and a just Judge must deal with sin. Love does not require God to pretend evil is harmless. His holiness will not let Him do that.

Romans says the wrath of God is against our sin. Isaiah pictures that wrath as fire. So what hope do we have? The answer was shining at the beginning of this passage. The Child who was born, the Son who was given, came to be our substitute.

The cross was not an accident. Psalm 22 pointed to it. Isaiah 53 pointed to it. When Jesus went to Calvary, the judgment our sin deserved was poured upon Him so it would not be poured upon us. God the Son took the place of sinners. His blood was spilled, He was buried, and on the third day He rose again.

That fire can be quenched, but not by church attendance, Christian parents, or knowing the right words. You must turn to Jesus. Israel's great tragedy is right there in verse thirteen: they were struck, but they did not turn. Do not repeat it. Say, God, I am done defending my sin. I believe Jesus died and rose for me. I want to live for You.

You will not become perfect overnight. That is not the promise. The call is to repent, believe, and follow Him. There are two sides here, and I have to be honest about both. If you refuse Christ, judgment will come. If you come to Christ, He loves you and wants to forgive you of everything.

God's hand is stretched out still. Do not waste the mercy in that word *still*.

God, show us what we have been feeding and give us courage to turn from it. Help our lives point others toward Jesus. Thank You that Christ took our judgment and rose again. Make us faithful lights in our homes, our churches, and our city. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 14: God Gives Hope When Times Are Hopeless

Isaiah 10

There is still hope. As long as God is on the throne, there is still hope. Even when judgment comes, even when a nation is shaking, even when your own life looks like it has fallen apart, there is hope as long as you have breath in your lungs and can turn to Jesus.

That is my first point and my only point in this chapter: **there is hope even when things look hopeless.**

Before we get there, you need to understand something about Bible prophecy. Isaiah will often give us a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. Something happens in the prophet's own time, proving that he spoke from God, but the prophecy also looks ahead to something greater. God's standard for a prophet was one hundred percent accuracy. Not most of the time. All of the time. So the people could see part of the prophecy happen in front of them, then trust what God said about events still far ahead.

It is like a scene change in a play. The curtain closes, everything gets quiet, and behind it you can hear people moving furniture and putting the next scene in place. You cannot see the whole picture yet, but the stage is being set. Then the curtain opens, and what was hidden becomes clear.

Isaiah begins this chapter on the dark side of that curtain.

"Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune which they have prescribed, to rob the needy of justice."

That word *woe* is not God saying, *That is not very nice, please knock it off.* This is a serious indictment. It carries the idea of being cursed. God knows their hearts, their minds, and exactly what they are doing, so He can pronounce that judgment. We cannot point at another person and decide they have crossed some final line. A pastor cannot do that. A church leader cannot do that. Only God knows enough to make that judgment.

And He begins with leaders.

No matter what kind of authority you have, God holds leaders responsible. James warns that not many should become teachers because teachers receive a stricter judgment. Here is my commentary on that verse: I do not know everything that stricter judgment includes, but I do not want to find out by treating leadership like a game.

Leadership in the church must be a calling from God, not just a job somebody thinks would be fun. But bring it closer to home. Do you have authority at work? In your family? Does anybody watch you? God holds you responsible too.

If you take the name Christian, you lead in some capacity. You are either leading people toward Christ or making Him harder for them to see. Some people around you will never open a Bible or listen to a sermon, but they will watch your life after they find out you are a Christian. You may be the only Bible they read. And trust me, people who do not want God will look for any excuse to stay away from Him.

Do not hand them one.

These leaders were writing "**unrighteous decrees.**" Not merely silly laws. Every place has some old law that makes you wonder what happened for somebody to write it. Somewhere, somebody apparently had such a problem with a donkey and a bathtub that the government needed to get involved. That is strange. Isaiah is talking about something worse.

These laws stood against God Himself. The word Isaiah uses gives us a picture of engraving, something cut into stone. Picture God's law written there, settled and clear, while people take a hammer and chisel, hack it away, and carve their own words over it. They are not confused. They are defiant. *We do not want what God says. We will put our rule in its place.*

But voting against God's truth does not change it. If every person on earth agreed that God was wrong, Romans still says, "**Let God be true and every man a liar.**" Truth does not bend because we dislike it. You can chisel at the stone until your arms ache. God is still God.

And when leaders cut away what is right, ordinary people carry the weight. Isaiah says they write misfortune, placing a heavy burden on the people, then they "**rob the needy of justice**" and make widows and fatherless children their prey.

That is disgusting. Picture a homeless man in Tucson pushing a shopping cart with a tarp, a bag of chips, and maybe a dog inside, then somebody pulls up in a luxury car and robs him. Takes the cart. Takes the food. Takes the dog. Who does that? Yet this is what Judah's leaders were doing. They used their power to steal from people who had no power to fight back.

God saw it.

"What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help?"

That question matters. Where will you go when the things you trusted cannot save you? Money cannot. Government cannot. A strong military cannot. Influence cannot. Without God, Isaiah says, they would bow among the prisoners and fall among the slain.

Then comes the phrase we have already heard: "**For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.**"

That stretched out hand is not a pleasant picture here. It is God's discipline. But listen to His heart in it. *Israel, I love you. I want this discipline to end, but you have to turn and cry out to Me.*

A good parent does not enjoy correcting a child. The parent wants the child to stop, admit what happened, and turn around. But the child folds those little arms, locks the knees, and says, *No*. Then correction comes, because if nobody ever corrects that child, you get the kid screaming in the middle of Walmart while everybody else changes aisles.

God disciplines His children because He loves them. If you belong to Him and live in compromise, His hand may make your road hard to wake you up. The way of the backslider is hard. His purpose is not to destroy you. He is calling you home.

Judah refused to listen, so God raised up Assyria.

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation." God calls this brutal empire a rod in His hand. He would send Assyria against an ungodly nation to seize spoil and tread the people down like mud in the street.

Do not misunderstand that. Assyria was wicked, its rulers were not praying about God's will or trying to serve Him, they wanted land and wealth and power and destruction, and while verse seven says, **"It is in his heart to destroy,"** Assyria intended to wipe Judah out while God intended to discipline His people and preserve a remnant, so the empire marched along without even knowing it was being used.

That is a declaration of God's sovereignty. Nations make plans. Kings boast. Armies move. Presidents enter office and leave it. None of that knocks God off His throne.

That is why I can be heartbroken over the condition of my city and nation without giving up hope. We should grieve sin and injustice. We should pray for our leaders and speak truth. But we do not panic as if God lost control of the world while He was looking the other way. He is God over every nation, including the ones that do not acknowledge Him.

Assyria certainly did not acknowledge Him. Listen to its pride: **"By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent."** My strength. My wisdom. My hand. The king says he has gathered the riches of nations as easily as a person gathers eggs from an abandoned nest. Nobody even flapped a wing or made a peep.

God heard every word.

"Shall the ax boast against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?"

Picture an ax finishing a tree, growing cartoon eyes, hopping out of the woods, and announcing, *Look at the tree I chopped down.* That would be funny in an old cartoon. In real life it would be ridiculous. The ax did not choose the tree. It did not lift itself. It did not supply the strength. Somebody held it.

God says Assyria is the ax. *I am the One who wielded you, and now you are boasting against Me.* So the same God who used Assyria to discipline Judah promised to judge Assyria for its violence and pride. The instrument was never in charge.

Remember Nebuchadnezzar. He looked over Babylon and said, in effect, *Is this not the great kingdom I have built?* He was the most powerful king of the most powerful empire around. God warned him about his pride, then humbled him until he lived like a wild animal in the field, with his hair and fingernails grown out. If God can humble Nebuchadnezzar, He can humble anybody.

There is nothing for us to be proud about. Every breath, every ability, every opportunity, every bit of strength came from God. The saw does not brag to the carpenter.

Then, after judgment on Judah and judgment on Assyria, the light breaks through.

"It shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth."

There is the hope. A remnant will return. God says, *Yes, I will judge you, but I will bring you back. You will stop leaning on the thing that hurt you and lean on Me.*

That promise had a near fulfillment as God preserved His people from Assyria. It also looks ahead. Israel was scattered among the nations for centuries, yet the Jewish people endured and returned to their land. God has not forgotten them. Isaiah looks farther still to the day when a remnant turns to the Mighty God in truth.

So the Lord tells Zion, **"Do not be afraid of the Assyrian."** The rod would strike, but only for a little while. Assyria looked like a forest of towering trees, high, thick, impossible to move. Yet by the end of the chapter the Lord of hosts walks into that forest with an ax. **"Those of high stature will be hewn down, and the haughty will be humbled."** Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One.

What looks like an endless forest to you is kindling to God.

Maybe you put yourself in a terrible circumstance. You knew what was right, resisted God, kept going, and now His hand feels heavy. Turn to Him. I am not promising everything becomes easy the second you pray. Consequences can remain. Healing can take time. But you can stop running today. The God who disciplines you is the God calling you back.

Or maybe you are following God and life is simply hard. Do not assume every trial means He is judging you. James says trials can strengthen your faith. Discipline and testing are not the same thing, but God can use both to draw you close and purify you. So whether you wandered into the trouble or walked faithfully and found trouble waiting, the direction is the same.

Turn to Him.

You do not have to understand every nation, every leader, every prophecy, or every painful thing happening around you before you can trust God. Assyria was not in control. Judah's corrupt leaders were not in control. The proud king was not in control. God was, and God still is.

There is hope when things look hopeless. The throne is not empty. The Mighty One still cuts down the proud, preserves His people, corrects His children, and welcomes back those who cry out to Him.

God, thank You that You are still God over nations and over our lives. Show us where we have resisted You, and help us turn from our sin instead of growing harder. When trials come, draw us closer and purify our faith. Keep us from pride, teach us to depend on You in truth, and give us hope when everything looks hopeless. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 15: The Fall of the Proud

Isaiah 10

Judah was in trouble, and most of it was Judah's own fault.

Ahaz was a wicked king. God had offered to protect him when Israel and Syria came against Judah, but Ahaz would not trust God. Instead, he went to Assyria for help. Notice the names because they are easy to mix up. Syria was one enemy at the border. Assyria was the enormous empire Ahaz invited into the situation.

And his plan worked.

Assyria came down and crushed Israel and Syria, the most powerful army in that part of the world solved Ahaz's immediate problem, but Assyria did not stop, and the flood Ahaz invited in swept over Israel, crossed into Judah, and rose all the way to Jerusalem.

There is a price to pay when we refuse to trust God and run to sinful things instead. The thing you think will rescue you can become the thing that rules you.

The first four verses of Isaiah 10 finish the thought from chapter 9. The original scroll did not have our chapter numbers, so Isaiah is still warning Judah's corrupt leaders: **"Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees."** They robbed needy people of justice, preyed on widows, and stole from fatherless children. God asks what they will do when punishment comes. Where will they run? Who will protect them then?

Ahaz had chosen his answer. Assyria.

Starting in verse 5, God tells us what Assyria really was.

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation."

That is an amazing statement. The strongest empire on earth was a stick in God's hand. Assyria thought it was building its own glory, choosing its own battles, and trampling nations through its own strength. God says, *You are a rod. I am using you to discipline My people.*

That is sovereignty. God is in complete control. He is all powerful. Kings move armies and empires redraw maps, but nobody pushes God off His throne. Every nation, no matter how frightening it looks, is still under His authority.

Picture the Assyrian army like one of those endless armies in a giant battle movie. Thousands coming over the hill, armor flashing, weapons raised, row after row until you cannot see the end. Cities knew what these soldiers did to the people they conquered, and some were so terrified that they gave up before the battle began. Assyria looked unstoppable.

But from heaven, that whole terrifying empire was a tool.

That should help us when we worry, when the questions start piling up and we wonder what we are going to do with our lives, where we are going, who we will marry, what happens if the world changes, the nation falls apart, or the thing we planned does not work. Those questions can feel enormous from where we stand.

Not to God.

He has not lost control of your future.

God can also use evil for good. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold. Daniel was carried into captivity. David was hunted by Saul. Those were real evils, and the people who committed them were responsible, yet God used every one of those circumstances for good.

So if you are walking through something hard, ask honestly what is happening. You may be following God faithfully and still suffering. Bad things happen to people who are doing right, and in that case you trust that God knows what He is doing. Or you may be disobeying Him, and the hardship may be discipline.

The Bible says God disciplines those He loves. Sometimes He lets an Assyria into our lives, figuratively speaking, because He loves us too much to let us live comfortably while we destroy ourselves. It is better to be corrected and brought home than to be left alone on the road to death.

But there is another side to this. The fact that God used Assyria did not make Assyria innocent.

Verse 7 says, "**Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so.**" Assyria was not trying to serve God. Its heart was set on destruction. God intended discipline, but Assyria intended to devour nations and leave nothing behind.

This brings us to something hard but important. God knows what we will do, yet we are responsible for our choices.

God knew Assyria would march and had already spoken about what would happen, but the Assyrians acted from their own proud and violent hearts, so God judged them. Scripture foretold that Jesus would be betrayed, but Judas was still responsible for betraying Him, and God told Jeremiah that He knew him before he was born and had appointed him as a prophet, but Jeremiah still had to obey.

First Peter speaks of God's foreknowledge. God can tell the future because He already knows it. You do not. You do not know what choice you will make ten years from now, so do not sit down, fold your arms, and say, *Whatever will happen will happen*. Follow God today. Make the right choice in front of you. Seek Him with your whole heart.

God's sovereignty does not erase human responsibility. Isaiah puts both truths on the same page.

Then the king of Assyria starts talking, and you can hear the pride dripping from every word. "**Are not my princes altogether kings?**" In plain English, he is saying, *My officials are greater than the kings of other nations*. Then he begins listing cities: Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Samaria, Damascus.

These were not vacation stops. They were trophies. Cities Assyria had conquered.

The king looks at the wreckage behind him and turns toward Jerusalem. **"As I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?"**

Do you hear the mistake?

Every other nation had its carved images. Those gods could not speak, see, move, or rescue anybody. Later Isaiah makes fun of the whole process. A man cuts down a tree. He burns part of it to cook dinner, uses part of it for furniture, then carves the leftover chunk into a god, gives it eyes and feet, sets it on a shelf, and asks it for help.

Assyria had beaten nations whose gods were wood and stone, so the king assumed Judah's God was one more idol.

He forgot that Judah's God is real.

There are not many roads to heaven. Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life."** Nice people following a false god are still following a false god. A carved image cannot save you. Religion cannot save you. There is one God who came to earth, died on the cross for your sin, was buried, and rose again on the third day. Assyria had never faced anyone like Him.

God answers the king in verse 12: **"I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks."**

Listen to the king brag. *By the strength of my hand I have done it. By my wisdom. I am prudent. I removed boundaries. I robbed treasuries. I brought down the people. I, I, I.* He says conquering the earth was as easy as reaching into abandoned birds' nests and gathering eggs. Nobody moved a wing. Nobody even made a peep.

Do not ever start sounding like that. *Look what I built. Look what I earned. Look how smart I am.* Who gave you your mind? Who gave you strength? Who put air in your lungs this morning?

God replies with a picture that is almost funny: **"Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?"**

Picture a huge lumberjack in a flannel shirt, arms like tree trunks, swinging an ax. Chips fly. The tree cracks and crashes to the ground. Then the ax suddenly starts talking.

Wow. Did you see what I did to that tree? I am incredible.

The lumberjack looks down at it: *You did what?*

The ax did not pick the tree, lift itself, or create the force behind the blow, because the man holding it did all of that, and an ax bragging to the lumberjack is ridiculous, but that is exactly how Assyria sounded to God.

God had handed this empire its power. God had allowed its victories. Assyria was nothing more than a sharp ax in His hand, but the ax looked at the fallen trees and worshiped itself.

Nebuchadnezzar made the same mistake years later. He walked through Babylon and said, in effect, *Is this not the great Babylon I have built?* At that moment he was the most powerful king in the world. Then God humbled him. He lost his sanity, lived like an animal, ate grass, and stayed that way until he learned who truly rules.

Pride makes a person stare at God's gifts and congratulate himself. Humility looks at the same gifts and says, *God gave me everything I have.*

Nations need that humility too, because no country becomes strong by its own hand, and a nation can have wealth, weapons, schools, and influence, but if it turns from God, none of those things can hold it up. Assyria went from the mightiest empire around to a shadow, Egypt had ruled like a giant and shrank, Babylon rose and fell, and God does not need any nation because no nation is too large for Him to humble.

So pray for your country. Honor God where you live. Do not trust a flag, an army, a political leader, or an economy to do what only God can do. Nations are tools. God is the One holding history.

Isaiah then gives a prophecy so specific that you can follow the Assyrian army down the road, because verses 28 through 32 name the cities in order, each name bringing the army closer like marks moving across a map, one city falling after another, until Assyria reaches Nob.

Aiath. Migron. Michmash. Geba. Ramah. Gibeah.

Nob was right outside Jerusalem.

The king stands there and shakes his fist at Mount Zion. The flood has reached the capital. Humanly speaking, Jerusalem is finished. Assyria has crushed greater cities than this one. Its army surrounds the walls, and its king boasts that Judah's God will fall like every idol before Him.

Then the march stops.

Second Kings tells us what happened: Hezekiah, a godly king, cried out to God, and during the night the angel of the Lord struck 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Jerusalem did not win because its army was stronger or its plan was smarter, God rescued it, Sennacherib went home, and later, just as Isaiah foretold, his own sons killed him while he was worshiping in the temple of his god.

Think about that ending. The man who said the living God could not rescue Jerusalem died in the house of an idol that could not rescue him.

God named the route before the army arrived. He named the stopping point. He described the fall. History moved exactly where His Word said it would move. Prophecy is one reason we know the Bible is not a book of human guesses. God tells us what will happen because He is already there.

Assyria looked like a forest of enormous trees, towering over everybody. But the Lord of hosts walked into that forest with an ax. **"The high ones of stature will be hewn down, and the haughty will be humbled."**

That is the fall of the proud.

Maybe you are frightened by something that seems unstoppable. Remember who holds the ax. Maybe you are suffering because you have refused to trust God. Stop running to Assyria and turn back to Him. Or maybe life is going well and you are tempted to believe you built it all yourself. Remember what you are. A tool in the hand of a good and sovereign God.

Do not boast against the One who holds you. Trust Him. Obey Him. Give Him the glory before you have to learn humility the hard way.

God, teach us to trust Your sovereignty and obey You with the choices in front of us. Keep pride out of our hearts. When we are afraid, remind us that You rule over every power, and when You bless us, help us give all the glory back to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 16: The Spirit of God at Work

Isaiah 11

Chapter ten ended with a forest coming down.

"The Lord of hosts will lop off the bough with terror." The high trees are cut down, the proud are humbled, and Lebanon falls before the Mighty One. Picture a beautiful forest, huge trees everywhere, and then the Acme Corporation rolls in with all its ridiculous machinery and buzz saws. Everything starts falling. One giant tree goes into the chipper and one toothpick comes out. Way to go, Acme.

Then the noise stops. Nothing is left but stumps.

That is the picture of God's people after judgment. The green is gone. The shade is gone. Their sin has left them barren, which is what sin does when we refuse to turn around, because it promises life and leaves a stump.

But Isaiah looks at one of those stumps and sees a tiny bit of green.

"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Life in the middle of devastation. Not a mighty cedar yet, just a shoot coming out of what looked dead. This is a prophecy of the Messiah.

God had promised David that a King would come from his family, a ruler whose kingdom would last forever, and then the royal line went quiet for centuries. No throne. No visible kingdom. Just a stump. Anybody looking at it could have said, *That promise is finished*, but God said it was not.

Has God given you something to do, has He started a work in you that now seems buried under years, failure, or disappointment? Be faithful. Do not decide that God forgot because you cannot see anything growing, because Philippians says, **"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it."** When God gives a promise, He keeps it. A stump is not a problem for Him.

And I love that Isaiah says Jesse, not King David. Jesse was David's father, the quieter name, the man standing behind the famous king who killed Goliath, and God could have said the Messiah would come from mighty David, but instead He reaches back to humble Jesse. That fits Jesus perfectly. Born in a manger. Raised in Nazareth, the kind of place that made people ask whether anything good could come from there. The all powerful God is not embarrassed to associate Himself with what the world overlooks.

This Branch is not barely alive. He is full of life.

"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him." Then Isaiah describes the Spirit in seven ways: the Spirit of the Lord, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. Seven gives us a picture of fullness. This King will not be moved by deception or powered by human ambition. The Spirit of God rests on Him.

Start there. The Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit of truth, and we live in a world where everybody gives us a version of the story, where every version seems filtered before it reaches us, and where we keep asking which report is true, which leader is telling the truth, and which voice we should trust. You can get lost in that confusion. But God has given us His Word as an anchor, so we do not have to drift with every new claim. What Jesus says is true.

Then He has the Spirit of wisdom. First Corinthians says Christ "**became for us wisdom from God**," which means Jesus does not merely possess a lot of wise information, He is wisdom. So if you want wisdom for your life, seek Jesus and listen to His Word, because it is amazing how differently you think after time with God than you do after hours of letting a screen think for you.

He has the Spirit of understanding. Jesus understands all things, and He understands you perfectly, including why you did the strange thing you cannot explain to anybody else, your weakness, your laziness, your fear, your mixed motives, and every part of your story that another person cannot see. Hebrews says that makes Him the compassionate High Priest we need. He does not guess at what is happening inside you.

The word Isaiah uses carries the idea of a sharp sense of smell. Jesus can smell out hypocrisy. We may be fooled by somebody who looks spiritual, and people may misunderstand somebody whose faith is sincere, but He knows the difference. That is frightening if you are pretending. It is comforting if you are honestly trying to follow Him and nobody else seems to believe you. God knows.

He has the Spirit of counsel. Some people understand your pain but have no idea what you should do. Other people have an answer for everything but no compassion at all. You walk away thinking, *Thank you for that technically correct brick you just threw at my head*. Jesus has wisdom and understanding together. His counsel is right, and He knows the person receiving it.

He also has the Spirit of might. He not only knows what should be done, He has the power to do it, and while plenty of people may want to help you and simply cannot, Jesus is not limited that way. He holds nations in His hand, and no military, economy, ruler, or human plan can stand against Him.

That should make every nation humble, because God used hardship to wake Israel up, and no country should imagine it is too powerful to receive the same warning. If I lived somewhere else, I would say this to Christians there, but I live in America, so I will say it to American Christians: we need to take God's warnings seriously, we need to turn back to Him, and we need to remember that our protection has never finally rested in our strength. It rests in God.

Then comes the Spirit of knowledge. Jesus knows the facts we do not know. Sometimes God calls you to do something that makes no sense to the people watching. Think about Paul going toward Jerusalem even while believers warned him that prison waited there. One prophet took Paul's belt, wrapped himself up with it, and announced that the owner of the belt would be bound. I can imagine Paul looking at him like, *Dude, I am right here. You could just tell me*. But Paul already knew suffering was ahead. He also knew God had called him to go.

There will be moments when nobody understands why you are where you are or why you believe you must obey in a certain way, and sometimes hardship is the result of disobedience while sometimes it is the exact place where God told you to stand. I cannot tell you which one applies in every situation, but I can tell you this: God has not lost control of your life, He has not stopped caring about you, and He possesses the knowledge you lack.

Last, the Messiah has the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. Jesus lived in submission, honor, and obedience to the Father. In His humanity He was tired, hungry, weak, and tempted, yet He relied on the Holy Spirit. That matters because we like to look at His obedience and say, *Of course Jesus could do that. He is Jesus.* But Jesus gives us the pattern of a life yielded to the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is available to every believer today.

I know how badly I need that, because I am inconsistent, I make promises and forget them, and I start things I do not finish. Human beings are often promise makers more than promise keepers. *I will be there.* Then what happened? I fell asleep. *I will take care of it.* Then what happened? I forgot.

But when I look back at the places where I have been faithful, I see the same explanation: God put the burden there, and God supplied the strength. I taught youth for years, showed up early, set up, studied, and kept coming back, even though plenty of other projects in my life sat unfinished. Why? God told me to do it, and God empowered me to do it. That is the Spirit of God at work. Not me suddenly becoming impressive. God giving life to what He called me to do.

Now look at the heart of this King. **"His delight is in the fear of the Lord."** Nothing pleased Jesus more than doing the Father's will. He said, **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me."** Obedience was His food.

That turns the question toward us. Is your Christian life alive? Do you hear God guiding you, correcting you, and moving you to do things you would not naturally choose? The Word of God is living and active. By the Spirit it cuts into the heart and performs the surgery we need. Sometimes it tells you to apologize when every part of you wants to defend yourself. Sometimes it tells you to serve when you would rather disappear. Sometimes it says stop, and you know exactly what needs to stop.

If your life with God feels dead, ask whether you ignored the last thing He told you. God is patient. He can wait until you are ready to obey. I do not want to spend years asking for fresh direction while refusing the direction He already gave me. Jesus delighted to do the Father's will. Life grows there.

This Spirit filled King will also judge rightly. **"He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears."** Human judges see appearances and hear testimony. Both can fool them. Jesus sees the truth. He will defend the poor and decide with fairness for the meek, while the wicked will not talk their way out of His judgment. **"Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist."** Everything He does will be right.

Then Isaiah shows us the world under His reign.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb." Notice that it says wolf, not lion. We have repeated the lion lying down with the lamb so many times that people think it is the verse, but Isaiah says the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the young goat, the calf and the young lion, all at peace. A little child leads them. The cow and bear graze together. The lion eats straw like an ox. A child can play near a cobra and not be hurt.

This is not the world we know. Creation hurts. Animals devour each other. Bodies weaken and die. Romans says the whole creation groans, waiting to be delivered from corruption. Everything around us keeps reminding us that this is not how it was supposed to be. Sin brought death into the world, but death will not get the final word. When the Messiah reigns, creation itself will be changed. **"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain."** Why? Because **"the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."**

You cannot find a dry corner of the ocean. That is the picture. The knowledge of God everywhere.

Then the Root of Jesse stands **"as a banner to the people."** Earlier in Isaiah, God raised a banner to summon nations for judgment. Now the banner calls the nations to the Messiah. Judgment is not His final word. Salvation is coming.

And notice who comes. Gentiles seek Him. That means most of us were not born into the family that first received these promises, but God invited us anyway. We had rebelled against Him and had no right to demand a place at His table, yet because He loved the world He gave His Son. The cross still stands like a banner, calling people from every nation to Jesus. When He is lifted up, He draws people to Himself.

Isaiah also sees the Lord gathering the scattered people of Israel. It will be like another exodus, not only out of Egypt but from every direction. Old jealousy between Ephraim and Judah will end. Obstacles will be removed. God will make a highway for His remnant because He has not forgotten one promise He made to them.

The kingdom Isaiah describes is still coming in its fullness. Wolves do not live peacefully with lambs yet. Nations are not united under the righteous rule of Jesus yet. Creation still groans. But you do not have to wait to know the Spirit of this King. The Spirit of truth, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord is at work in believers now.

So what looks like a stump in your life? Where have you become tired, cold, or convinced that nothing good can grow? Bring that place to Jesus. Listen to His Word. Obey what He tells you. Ask the Holy Spirit for power, because without Him we spin our wheels and accomplish nothing worth doing, but when He moves, life can rise from ground that looked completely dead.

Just a little shoot at first. A flash of green in a ruined forest. Do not despise it. That is how Isaiah introduces the King who will make everything right.

God, without You we can do nothing. Give us wisdom, understanding, courage, and a heart that delights to obey You. Bring life into the places in us that have gone dry, and keep our eyes on Jesus, the

promised King. Fill us with Your Spirit and make us faithful to what You have called us to do. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 17: The Branch of the Lord

Isaiah 11:1-5

If we were watching a movie, chapter 10 ended at a very dark part. Picture black clouds, thunder, lightning, nighttime, everything eerie. God had just described judgment coming against His people. Not because He hated them. He was disciplining them because He loved them and would not let them keep running into disobedience without warning them where that road ended.

God painted the picture of a forest, not a few skinny trees but a huge forest, the kind with trunks so wide you cannot get your arms around them, and then a crew comes through with heavy equipment and cuts down every tree, one after another, cut down, cut down, cut down, until the whole place is nothing but stumps and sawdust.

That forest was Israel and Judah. **“He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron.”** The Assyrian Empire came against them. Later the Babylonian Empire came and finished what Assyria had not. Jerusalem fell. The temple was destroyed. The people were carried away as slaves. When you read about Daniel serving under Nebuchadnezzar, that is where you are in the story. The nation looked ruined.

Nothing but stumps.

Then the scene changes. Light begins to shine in the background. The clouds start to break, and out of one of those dead looking stumps comes a little green shoot.

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”

Have you ever seen that happen? Somebody cuts a tree down, and you think it is finished. Then a little branch pushes out from the side. Life was hiding in the roots the whole time. That is God's picture. Israel may look cut down. David's kingdom may look finished. But God is not finished.

And this is not just any branch. This Branch comes from the stem of Jesse.

Who is Jesse? Jesse was David's father. That matters because God made King David a promise. David had built himself a beautiful house, and one day he looked out and realized that he lived in a palace while the people worshiped God in a tent. David said, in effect, This is not right. I want to build God a temple.

So David called Nathan the prophet and told him the plan, Nathan thought it sounded wonderful and told David to go for it, then Nathan walked away and God told him, I did not tell you to say that, go back, because a plan can sound wonderful, honor God, make perfect sense to everybody in the room, and still not be what God has asked that person to do.

That had to be an awkward walk back up the courtyard.

Nathan returned and told David that he would not be the one to build the temple. David had been a man of war and had shed much blood. His son would build it. But then God gave David something better than the privilege David had asked for. David wanted to build God a house. God promised to build David a house, a royal line, and said that a descendant of David would rule upon his throne forever.

Forever is a long time.

Human kings die. Dynasties end. Nations change their governments. Today Israel does not have a king sitting on David's throne. So did God's promise fail? No. Isaiah points to the answer seven hundred fifty years before Jesus walked this earth. A Branch would rise from Jesse's family. The Messiah would come through David's line, and His kingdom would have no end.

That is why the genealogies in Matthew and Luke matter. You know those lists of names we are tempted to skip because they look like the boring part? They are evidence. They trace the line and show that Jesus came from the family God promised. Before the temple and its records were destroyed, Jesus had already come, and His family line had been written into Scripture where we can still read it. God made a promise to David. Then God kept it.

Prophecy is not there so we can make fancy charts and argue about dates, it gives hope, because when everything looks like a field of stumps, prophecy reminds you that God already knows what is coming, He is almighty, He will be there when you need Him, and the thing that looks like the end to you may be the very place where He has decided to show that His promises are still alive. The people in Isaiah's day could look around and think, We are finished. God said, No, you are looking at the stump. I am looking at the Branch.

Maybe that is where you are. All you can see is what got cut down. A plan died. A relationship fell apart. You failed badly, and now the future looks like a bulldozed forest. Do not mistake what you can see for everything God is doing. Our God brings life out of places that look dead.

He did it with Israel. He did it when Jesus walked out of the tomb. And He can do it in you.

Understanding prophecy also gives direction. First Chronicles describes the sons of Issachar as men who **“had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.”** They understood the times, so they knew what to do. That is something we need. You can watch the news for an hour and come away asking, Who is right? Who is wrong? What is even happening? Noise does not give direction. God's Word does.

If you want hope, look at what God has promised. If you want direction, learn your Bible. The same God who knew the kingdoms that would rise and fall knows the moment you are living in right now.

Then Isaiah tells us what this Branch would be like. **“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him.”** This is Jesus. The Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism like a dove, and Jesus carried out His earthly ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes people hear that they should become more like Jesus and think, Of course Jesus lived that way. He is God. I cannot do that. But Jesus did not come merely to show off power you could never know. If you have given your life to Christ, the same Holy Spirit lives in you and gives you power to do what God has called you to do. Not to make you Jesus. Not to make you impressive. To make obedience possible.

Isaiah describes the Spirit as **“the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”** Look at those words one at a time.

Understanding means you grasp what God's Word says. Wisdom means you know what to do with it. There is a difference. You can memorize a verse and still make a foolish choice. Wisdom takes the truth off the page and puts it into your Tuesday afternoon, into the argument, the temptation, the decision, the moment when nobody is around to tell you what to do.

Counsel gives direction. Might is the power to do what God calls you to do after He gives that direction. Knowledge means knowing God and His truth. And the fear of the Lord means respect for God. Not hiding under a table because you think He might strike you, but recognizing who He is and treating the things of God as holy.

Our generation is casual about everything. People joke about what is holy, play with sin, and use God's name like it means nothing. Jesus never treated His Father that way. The Father and Son are equal, yet Jesus honored the Father. Proverbs says **“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** You will not live wisely while treating God as common.

All of this was perfectly present in Jesus. Nothing missing. Complete. He had wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. He did not have some weak portion of the Spirit. **“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him.”**

Now turn that question toward yourself. How do you know the Holy Spirit is working in your life? Is it because church is exciting? Is it because the music is good or the preacher is funny? I hope that is not the qualification, because some of us are in trouble.

Look for what Isaiah names. Are you growing in understanding of God's Word? Are you learning how to apply it? Is there power to obey where you used to be powerless? Do you respect God? When something belongs to Him, do you treat it differently? Do you want His counsel before you make a decision, or do you make the decision first and ask Him to approve it afterward?

Do not answer out loud. Check your heart.

And if you want the Holy Spirit to work in you, ask. Jesus said that if sinful human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, **“how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”** Ask God for understanding. Ask Him for wisdom, counsel, might, knowledge, and a right fear of the Lord. This is how the Christian life is meant to be lived. You were never supposed to grind it out by yourself.

Verse 3 says of Jesus, **“His delight is in the fear of the Lord.”** Then Isaiah says He will not judge by what His eyes see or decide by what His ears hear. We have to judge that way because that is all we have. We see what somebody does. We hear what somebody says. We can be fooled.

Jesus cannot.

He sees what the heart is actually doing. Imagine somebody could plug a cord into the back of your neck and play every thought you have on two giant screens. Every thought. Who would volunteer for that? Nobody. Here is the news: God sees it already.

That truth can be wonderful or terrifying.

If your heart is saying, God, I want You. I want to understand Your Word. I know I am weak, but I want to follow You, then you can be glad that He sees past your clumsy words and your failures. Other people may misunderstand you. Jesus sees the heart.

But if you are pretending, His sight is terrifying. You may fool a church. You may fool your family. You can sit in the right place, carry a Bible, say the right words, and keep your heart a thousand miles away. Jesus does not judge by the cover. He sees every page.

He also judges rightly. **“With righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”** Human judges can be bribed, deceived, pressured, or simply mistaken. Jesus never will be. He knows the whole truth. He cares for people the world overlooks, and when He rules, every decision will be righteous.

But do not turn that into a soft picture of Jesus who never confronts evil. Isaiah says **“He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,”** and slay the wicked with the breath of His lips. The Branch is a Savior, and He is also a King. **“Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.”** Everything He does is held together by righteousness and faithfulness. He will keep every promise. He will judge every wrong. He will rule as no human king ever has.

That means you need to be ready for Him.

If the fact that Jesus sees your heart scares you, you can make it right today. You do not clean yourself up first and then come to Him. Come honestly. Lord Jesus, I am sorry for my sin. I believe You died for me. Please forgive me.

He was mocked, spit upon, stripped, and crucified. His blood was spilled so yours would not have to be. He took your shame so you do not have to keep hiding in it. The One who knows the worst thought you have ever had is the same One who went to the cross to save you. But you must come to Him. Not tomorrow. Today.

Look again at the forest. Judgment cut it down. Human strength could not bring it back. Then God caused a Branch to grow from a stump that looked dead. Jesus came exactly as God promised, full of the Spirit, righteous and faithful. And He is coming again to rule.

The question is not whether God will keep His Word. The Branch proves He will. The question is whether you are ready when the King comes.

Lord, help us understand Your Word and give us wisdom to obey it. Fill us with Your Spirit, teach us to fear You rightly, and make our hearts honest before You. Thank You for sending Jesus, the promised Branch and faithful King. Keep us ready for His coming. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 18: Are You Going to Be With Him?

Isaiah 12

Isaiah has spent chapter after chapter warning Israel. God's hand is stretched out over the nation in judgment, and He keeps saying, *I want to pull My hand back, I want to forgive you, I want to restore you, but you have to turn from your sin.* And they will not listen. They hear the Word of God, refuse to apply it, and walk away as if nothing happened.

That is the lesson we have to learn from Israel. Do not become the kind of Christian who hears God's Word but never does anything with it. Until we start applying this book to our lives, we are not going to see change in our lives.

Then chapter 11 gives us this beautiful promise of the coming Messiah. I picture a jewelry store. What does a jeweler put behind a diamond? A black background. Why? Because the darkness makes that diamond shine. That is what God does in the middle of all this judgment. Against the dark background of Israel's rebellion, He holds up Christ. *Even though you will not listen, even though judgment is coming, I am going to restore you. I am going to bring you back. I am going to love you despite your rebellion.*

Some of us need to hear that. God knows you are stubborn. He knows you do not always listen. He knows exactly how badly you have tangled things up, and He still loves you.

Now Isaiah reaches chapter 12, and it is as if the reality of everything God has shown him finally hits. Isaiah looks ahead, far beyond his own lifetime and beyond ours, and he sees the kingdom promised in chapter 11. He sees the Messiah reigning. He sees God's people gathered around their Savior. And he hears them sing.

This is a real, future kingdom. Jesus will rule, the governments and rulers and people of this world will be subject to Him, and some people avoid prophecy because it scares them, but prophecy was written to encourage the believer. Your God controls tomorrow, He is going to bring everything under His rule, and you do not have to sit here chewing your fingernails as if history might slip out of His hands.

Isaiah 12 is only six verses. It is a song of salvation, and it begins with the words **“in that day.”** The question is simple: when that day comes, are you going to be with Him?

Not, do you attend church, own a Christian shirt, or even sing worship songs? Salvation only comes through trusting Jesus Christ, and Romans says it is those who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead. So can you say this with Isaiah? **“God is my salvation.”**

You do not have to guess about eternal life, because John says these things were written so that you may know, and you can know tonight. And if God is your salvation, then no matter what is happening in the world, you have every reason to celebrate. Your salvation is not a political party, your bank account, your career, your education, your house, or even your family, because those things can all shake. Christ does not.

Look at the song.

“O Lord, I will praise You; though You were angry with me.”

The first thing Isaiah understands is that God is the One we have offended. Sin is not a joke. David learned that the hard way. He stayed home when he should have been at war, saw Bathsheba, stared when he should have looked away, slept with her, and then arranged for her husband Uriah to die so he could cover the whole thing. Adultery, deception, murder. Yet when David finally confessed, he said to God, **“Against You, You only, have I sinned.”**

You might read that and say, David, what do you mean? You sinned against Uriah, against Bathsheba, against your army and your whole nation. Yes, he did, but underneath every one of those sins was rebellion against God, and that is the deepest reality of sin. We have offended the God who made us.

And hidden sin kills you inside. David said his bones grew old while he kept silent. If you belong to Christ and you are hiding sin, you know that feeling. There is no life in covering it. Confess it to God. Turn away from it. Restoration begins when you quit pretending.

Here is what amazes me. Though I have offended God, I am still allowed to praise Him. I am still allowed to fellowship with Him. Somehow, and this one blows my mind, He still lets me be used by Him. I can preach His Word and share His love, not because I am a good person, but because the blood of Jesus is able to wash sinners clean. **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”**

So if God uses you, give Him the glory. Do not take credit. We have all sinned. The gospel is not adding Jesus to the top of an already crowded life so you can feel religious once in a while. It is turning from sin and making Jesus everything.

What does God say when a sinner comes to Him? Does He say, *Sorry, you messed up one time too many. I tried forgiving you, but you kept ruining it, and now I am done?* That is what He would have every right to say. But He says that if you turn to Him, He will set you free. He will lift the burden you put on your own back. He will forgive the sin that condemned you and bring you into salvation.

The problem is not that God refuses to save. The problem is that we are stubborn. We say, *I will fix myself first, then I will come.* How is that working out? You cannot fix the problem without Him. Come to Him.

Maybe you are sad and you do not even know why. One moment you are fine, then your brain says, *No, you are not*, and suddenly you are down again. That does not mean you are the only broken Christian in history. Read the Psalms. Charles Spurgeon preached sermons that are still pointing people to Christ, yet he struggled with depression through much of his life. God does not cast you away because you are sad. He does not throw you out because you are weak.

Or maybe you say, *I never struggle like that. I am always fine.* All right. Does your pride offend the Lord? Does your confidence in your own goodness offend Him? Self righteousness is sin too. Whether

you are sad, angry, proud, afraid, or ashamed, thank God that He does not cast away the person who comes to Christ.

Isaiah continues: **“Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.”**

Yes, God is angry with sin. People love to say God loves everybody, and that is true, but His love does not mean He will let wickedness continue forever. He sees sin. He judges sin. The fact that His anger can be turned away means a sacrifice has been made.

Isaiah spoke centuries before the cross, but he declared salvation through the coming Messiah. The believers of the Old Testament and believers today are saved the same way: they looked forward to Christ, and we look back to Him. The law did not save them, the tabernacle did not save them, and when they brought a lamb or an ox, that sacrifice pointed ahead to the One who would take away sin completely.

Do not let the cross become boring to you. The moment the cross sounds bland and dead is the moment something is wrong in your Christian life, because the cross is the center. Jesus took the judgment. Jesus made forgiveness possible. Jesus is why God's anger is turned away and His compassion comes near.

Then Isaiah says, **“I will trust and not be afraid.”**

God desires rest for your heart and soul. The fear Isaiah describes is the kind that makes you flinch and shake. Think of an abused dog. You reach down to pet it, and it cowers because it expects another blow. Or think of an abused child who flinches when someone reaches out for a hug. Fear has trained the body to expect pain.

There are plenty of things to fear. What if the phone quits working, the internet goes out, the car will not start, the bank account disappears, the hospital loses power, and the GPS dies? I am a delivery driver, and without GPS I can look at a map and realize I have no idea what I am doing. Take the fear as far as you want. What will the Christian do?

Worship.

Sing to God. Worship reaches the soul. Here is something I have learned about myself: when I am not a worshiper, I become a worrier. I worry about everything, usually things made worse by my own dumb decisions, but then I start praising God, praying, and focusing on Him, and the memories come back: I remember the times He helped me, I remember the promises in His Word, life enters those truths again, and I say, *Oh yes, God, You can even help me when I have been stupid, thank You.*

Worship does not mean pretending the trouble is gone. It means remembering who God is while the trouble is still there.

We were made to worship Him. Yet what do we do when we are alone? We watch ten hours of entertainment and then wonder why we feel anxious, angry, and empty. I am preaching to myself. God offers us His presence, and we keep reaching for another episode. Humanity was made for God, and we

will stay unfulfilled until we worship Him.

Isaiah says, **“The Lord is my strength and song.”** When people feel safe, they sing. Have you ever walked through a dark place and started humming or whistling? You make up some little tune as if to say, *I am not scared. Everything is fine.* There is something planted in us that connects song with safety.

So learn to sing to God. A. W. Tozer used to begin his time with God by singing from an Isaac Watts hymnal. Those hymns were packed with Scripture. I tried it, and I had one of the best times alone with God I had experienced in a long while. Worship slowed me down. It put my attention on God so I could hear Him. Then, because I am me, I stopped doing it and wondered why I was worried again. Funny how we are. God says, *I told you.* And we say, *Oh yes. You did.*

But notice that Isaiah does not merely say God gives salvation. **“He also has become my salvation.”** This is personal. God comes close. You do not have to reach Him through a church leader. Scripture says there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. The cross is the bridge. Because of Jesus, you can come into the presence of God right now. At home. On the couch. Alone in your room. You can have fellowship with Him.

We ask why God is not moving in our lives, then admit that the last prayer we prayed was, *Thank You for this food, bless it, amen.* We say we want revival, but when did we last enter His presence and stay there? Twelve people turned the world upside down. What could God do with people who truly know Him?

Finally, Isaiah says, **“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”**

Picture a well that never runs dry, pure water flowing from God. Not Tucson tap water. Fresh water. Life, joy, peace, satisfaction, strength, and the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's work, all of it pouring from a source that never runs out, never turns stale, and never leaves you thirsty again. God says, *I want to give you all of this.*

And what do people do? Jeremiah says they leave the fountain of living water and carve out broken cisterns. A cistern is a hole cut into rock to catch rainwater. The water just sits there. What happens to a swimming pool if you leave it alone? It gets stale, green, and gross. God offers a flowing fountain, and we say, *No thanks. We have entertainment. We have money. We have figured things out without You.* Then we bend down and drink from the nasty hole we made.

Why?

The wells of salvation are open now, and Isaiah sees a day when God's people will draw from them together in the Messiah's kingdom. You will not be dead and gone. Every person will live forever, but not every person will be with Christ. So I have to ask you plainly: are you going to be with Him?

Isaiah finishes the song: **“Praise the Lord, call upon His name.”** Declare what He has done. **“Sing to the Lord, for He has done excellent things.”** Cry out and shout, because **“great is the Holy One of**

Israel in your midst.”

That is the heart of heaven. Jesus in the midst of His people, and His people singing because He saved them. Make sure you are one of them. Turn from your sin. Trust Christ. Then worship Him now, because the Savior we will praise in that kingdom is already worthy today.

Lord Jesus, thank You for becoming our salvation. Turn our hearts from sin, quiet our fear, and teach us to worship You. Let us drink deeply from the life You give, and keep the cross precious to us until the day we stand with You in Your kingdom. Amen.

Chapter 19: The God Who Holds the Future (Part 1)

Isaiah 13

The first twelve chapters of Isaiah have mostly been aimed at Judah. God warned His people that judgment was coming, but He was not judging them just to show who was boss. Hebrews says God chastens those He loves. A loving father does not watch his child run toward destruction and shrug. He steps in. Sometimes that loving hand hurts, because rebellion has to be stopped, but the purpose is to purify.

Have you ever been there? You know you are being rebellious, and God begins pressing on the exact place you wanted Him to leave alone, taking away the false comfort, disturbing the compromise, refusing to let you call darkness light, all because He cares too much to watch you keep walking down a road that will destroy you.

That is what God was doing with Judah. He said the nation would be cut down like the great forest of Lebanon until nothing remained but stumps. Then, right in the middle of that sad picture, He promised a little green shoot would rise from one of those stumps, the Branch from the roots of Jesse. The Messiah would still come. Israel might be faithless, but God would remain faithful. Jesus would come through that broken nation exactly as God promised.

Now Isaiah turns from Judah to the nations around her, and chapters 13 through 23 contain a series of judgments against them. God begins with Babylon.

That would have sounded strange when Isaiah said it. Assyria was the dominant power. Babylon was dependent on Assyria, hardly the nation anyone expected to rule the world. Yet Isaiah announced that Babylon would rise, conquer Judah, and then be conquered itself. God named its future while everybody else could only see its present.

This is the God we worship. The God who holds the future.

I will be honest with you, I still doubt Him sometimes, and it is annoying. God tells me to speak to somebody and immediately I start inventing reasons not to. *That guy looks scary. He has tattoos. What if he has a knife?* Sometimes the guy is tiny and completely harmless, and I can still turn him into a threat in my mind. Meanwhile, the God who controls time, kings, nations, and empires is the One who told me to go.

We worry as if history were loose in His hands, as if God woke up this morning, looked at the world, and said, *Well, I did not see that coming*, but He has never been surprised by an election, an army, a collapsing government, a rising dictator, or one frightened Christian trying to obey Him. Not once.

Prophecy is one of the great marks God has placed on His Word. When He challenged false gods, He pointed out that their little statues could not see, move, speak, or tell anyone what would happen next. God does not say, *Cover your eyes and follow Me blindly*. He declares what will happen and then history walks into the place He already named.

That is what makes Babylon so important.

Babylon became one of the greatest cities of the ancient world, a center of trade, culture, and learning, built to make people feel untouchable, with a deep moat around it, enormous double walls stretching for miles, room on top for chariots to race, and watchtowers rising above the walls while armed soldiers scanned the horizon for any army foolish enough to try getting in. If you lived inside Babylon, you did not spend much time wondering whether some little army would break in, because the city preached its own sermon every time you looked up: *We are safe. We are powerful. We are not going anywhere.*

And God pronounced its doom before it had even reached the height of its power.

That should get our attention. We look at a powerful country, a giant business, a famous leader, or even our own comfortable little world and think it will remain because it was here yesterday. Babylon had better walls than you do. It had wealth, weapons, soldiers, influence, and every reason human beings could name for confidence. None of that made it permanent.

Only God is permanent.

Isaiah gets very specific in verse 17. **"I will stir up the Medes against them."** Against whom? Babylon. The Medes were not the frightening power in Isaiah's day. Babylon was not even the frightening power yet. God was saying that the smaller nation would rise, then another people who seemed even less significant would bring it down.

Imagine someone telling the strongest country on earth that a nation it barely notices will conquer it, and after that another little nation will conquer the conqueror. That is how wild Isaiah's prophecy would have sounded. But sounding wild does not make God's Word uncertain.

Years later, after Isaiah was dead, Daniel was living in the empire Isaiah had predicted. Babylon had conquered Jerusalem and carried Daniel there as a captive. King Nebuchadnezzar woke from a dream that terrified him, and he demanded that his wise men tell him both the dream and its meaning. That was his way of exposing the charlatans. Anybody can invent an interpretation after hearing the dream. Tell me what I saw first.

The wise men knew they could not do it. Daniel knew he could not do it either, but he knew God could. He prayed, God revealed the mystery, and Daniel walked before the most powerful king on earth with an answer.

The king had seen a massive statue with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet made from a mixture of iron and clay, and then a stone **"cut out without hands"** struck those feet, shattered the whole image, blew it away like chaff, and grew into a mountain that filled the earth.

Can you imagine Nebuchadnezzar listening? He had not told Daniel what he saw. With every detail, the hair on his neck must have stood a little higher.

Then Daniel gave the meaning. **"You are this head of gold."** Babylon was the first kingdom. After Babylon another kingdom would arise, represented by silver. Then a third, represented by bronze. Then a fourth, strong as iron. History followed the order God gave: Babylon, the Medes and Persians, Greece, and Rome.

Isaiah had already named the Medes before Babylon became the great empire. Daniel, living under Babylon, saw the kingdoms that would follow it. God was not making a good guess. He was reading history before history happened, because to Him tomorrow is not hidden.

Babylon still looked invincible when its end came.

Nebuchadnezzar's descendant Belshazzar held a drunken feast while an enemy army waited outside the city. He was so confident in Babylon's defenses that he brought out the sacred vessels stolen from the temple in Jerusalem and used them at the party. Then a hand appeared and began writing on the wall.

I always picture that giant white glove from a video game. I know that is probably not what it looked like, but that is where my mind goes. Whatever it looked like, it wiped the arrogance right out of the room. The king was terrified. The old King James says his knees smote one against another. Put that into plain English: the most powerful man in the city was shaking so badly he could not control himself.

Daniel was an old man by then. They brought him in to read the message, and the king offered him wealth and position. Daniel basically said, *Keep it. It is not going to matter.* The message was that Belshazzar had been **"weighed in the balances, and found wanting."** His kingdom had reached its end.

While the feast continued, the Medes and Persians diverted the Euphrates River, which ran through Babylon, and as the water level dropped, soldiers entered through the river gates and moved into the city while the people inside were still drinking, laughing, trusting their walls, and congratulating themselves on being impossible to conquer. The king had no idea the enemy was already coming in.

Isaiah said the Medes would rise against Babylon. They did.

Daniel said another kingdom would replace Babylon. It did.

Then Greece came, just as Daniel had said. After Greece came Rome. Kingdom after kingdom walked across the earth in the order God had revealed. People sometimes answer that Daniel must have been written later because the prophecy is too accurate. Think about that argument. The prediction fits history so well that the only way to reject it is to move the date. But the whole point is that God knows what we do not. Accuracy is not a problem for prophecy. It is the evidence.

The statue also looks beyond the kingdoms that have already risen and fallen. Its final form has feet of iron mixed with clay, and ten toes connected to that last kingdom. Then the stone not made by human hands strikes it and fills the earth. Isaiah has already shown us that coming kingdom, the thousand year reign of Christ when the Messiah rules and makes things right. Daniel sees the same ending from a

different angle. Human kingdoms collapse. God's kingdom remains.

There are details about the end that faithful Christians sort out differently, and I am not going to pretend I can put a date on everything, draw you a perfect chart, identify every ruler, and answer every question somebody can pull from Daniel and Revelation. I do not know when every piece will happen. But I know where history ends. Jesus wins. The kingdom comes. The stone fills the whole earth.

That is why prophecy is not given merely to scare you. It is meant to steady you. If God could name the rise and fall of empires, He can handle your life. If Babylon could build walls hundreds of feet high and still fall on the night God appointed, then no power threatening God's people is beyond His reach. If God kept His promise to bring the Messiah through a nation reduced to stumps, He will not lose track of His promises to you.

But prophecy also warns us. Belshazzar had God's sacred vessels in his hands and God's enemy outside his walls, yet he kept partying. He confused delay with safety. He thought strong walls meant judgment could never reach him. Then the Word of God appeared in the room, and suddenly all his gold was worthless.

Do not make that mistake, because hearing God's Word without intending to obey it is dangerous, and every time truth reaches you, every time God exposes something, corrects something, or calls you away from something you love, you either soften toward Him and respond or you practice resisting Him until a hard heart begins to feel normal. Judah heard Isaiah and hardened its heart. Belshazzar knew what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar and still lifted himself up. Knowledge alone did not save either of them.

Bring the hidden things into the light. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, he saw his own uncleanness and cried, "**Woe is me!**" God did not expose him to leave him hopeless. The coal from the altar touched his lips, his sin was cleansed, and then God sent him to serve. That altar points us to the cross. Jesus cleanses us, then calls us forward. We cannot keep saying, *I am too unworthy to obey*. Yes, you are unworthy. So am I. That is why we came to Jesus.

Build your life on Him. Know His Word. Know why you believe it. Lies do not always walk in looking ugly, and Scripture warns that deceptive teaching will come dressed to fool people who are not grounded in truth. So do not be lazy with your Bible. Let it shape your worship, your service, your family, your choices, and the way you think about the future.

The future can look frightening when you imagine it outside God's hands. It looks different when you remember whose hands hold it.

Babylon rises. Babylon falls. Kings shake, walls fail, armies enter, and statues turn to dust. Jesus remains. And one day His kingdom will fill the earth.

God, thank You that nothing ahead is hidden from You. Help us trust Your Word, bring our sin into Your light, and build every part of our lives on Jesus. Keep us from fear and deception. Make us people who know the truth, obey it, and rest in the God who holds the future. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 20: The God Who Holds the Future (Part 2)

Isaiah 13

Isaiah will speak judgment to Judah, then to the nations around Judah, and suddenly he is way out in the future talking about the kingdom of God. He does this all through the book. One minute you are looking at something near enough for Isaiah's generation to see. The next minute you are looking at something still future for us. Bam. Isaiah has jumped hundreds or thousands of years, sometimes in the same paragraph.

If you do not understand that, Isaiah will confuse you. And if you do not read the whole Bible, you will miss half of what he is saying. It takes the whole Bible to make a complete Christian. The Old Testament contains what the New Testament explains, and the New Testament opens up what the Old Testament promised. You cannot understand one completely while ignoring the other.

There are teachers who say Christians do not need the Old Testament anymore, but that cannot be right when Jesus quoted it, Paul built his teaching on it, the prophets tell us where history is going, and God gave us the whole book because we need the whole book.

The Bible begins with God creating everything good, then sin enters, and now we live in a fallen world where Scripture calls Satan the prince of this world and the prince of the power of the air. That does not mean Satan is greater than God, not even close; it means evil is running its course for a time, and Satan is creating havoc in this world, but a day is coming when God steps in and makes everything right.

That is Isaiah 13. God making everything right.

And that should excite the Christian. I know we hear these things so often that they can start to sound ordinary. Jesus is coming. God will judge evil. Christ will reign. We nod, turn the page, and go make lunch. But if we actually believe what the Bible says, it changes our hearts, our attitudes, the way we carry ourselves through a world that looks out of control.

It is not out of control.

Paul says, "**How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**" God's ways are beyond us. People say God works in mysterious ways, and I will be honest, I do not love the saying because it has become a cliché. But there is truth in it. We cannot explain everything God does. Somebody once asked me, "How can God hear everybody praying at once?" I explained that God is all knowing and all powerful, that He is not limited like we are. The person still did not understand.

Of course not. Neither do I. At some point faith means admitting that the God who created your mind is bigger than your mind.

But God has not left us with nothing. Amos says, "**Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.**" God tells His people what He is doing. He tells the future. That is one of the ways He proves that He alone is God.

Later in Isaiah, God mocks the idols: a man cuts down a tree, makes a table or a chair with part of it, burns another part to warm himself, then carves what is left into a god, gives it eyes that cannot see and hands that cannot move, puts it in a wagon, and pulls it around. Some god. Then the living God says, in effect, test Me, because I am the One who tells you what will happen before it happens.

Isaiah 13 is one of those tests.

"The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw."

Babylon was a real place whose ruins still stand in Iraq near the Euphrates River, but through the Bible it also becomes a picture of a whole spiritual system opposed to God, representing human pride, false worship, rebellion, and man's attempt to build a world without the living God from Genesis to Revelation.

At this point in Isaiah's life, Babylon was not the great empire everybody feared. Assyria was the giant on the map. Yet Isaiah said Babylon would rise, attack Judah, and carry God's people away. He said it about a hundred years before it happened. Babylon was not even the dominant power yet.

Then it happened.

God had already warned His people. They had forgotten Him, so He would discipline them. Not because He enjoyed hurting them. Not because He needed to show everybody who was boss. He did it in love to bring them back. Hebrews tells us God chastens those He loves.

That is still true. If you belong to God, you cannot settle comfortably into sin. You can rebel. Christians can do sinful things. But the Holy Spirit will not leave you at peace there. God will convict you. He will chase you down. He will press on that thing until you bring it into the light and get right with Him.

And that is love.

The frightening thing is not God's discipline. The frightening thing is being able to live in sin and hear nothing, feel nothing, care about nothing. A father corrects his children. So if God is hounding you about something right now, thank Him. Then obey Him.

Isaiah had already predicted the Assyrian invasion. He pictured Assyria flooding over the northern kingdom and coming all the way to the gates of Jerusalem. That happened too. The army reached Jerusalem, and God stopped it there. One angel struck thousands of Assyrian soldiers in one night. The flood came exactly as far as God said it would come. No farther.

Now Isaiah looks beyond Assyria and Babylon. He sees every kingdom of man finally coming down.

"The Lord of hosts musters the army for battle."

Notice the scale in verses 4 and 5. Isaiah hears **"the kingdoms of nations gathered together."** They come to destroy the whole land. This has grown beyond one army attacking one country. God is showing Isaiah a world event. Historical Babylon is in view, but behind it stands something larger: the final collapse of man's rule and the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

Daniel later saw the same plan in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, where a huge statue stood before the king with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, middle of bronze, legs of iron, and feet made from a mixture of iron and clay. Each section pictured a kingdom, the materials became less valuable as you moved down, and the final mixture was partly strong and partly weak because iron and clay do not hold together very well. Try gluing a lump of desert dirt to a steel post and see how that goes.

Then Daniel saw a stone cut without human hands. It struck the statue at its feet, the entire thing collapsed, and the stone became a great mountain that filled the earth. That stone is Christ. His kingdom does not come from human hands, human elections, human armies, or human genius. He will bring down man's final attempt to rule this world, and **"the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."**

Here is the first great truth of Isaiah 13: God will ultimately rule over all the nations.

Every empire believes it will last, and every ruler thinks he is the exception: Babylon had its gold, Persia had its armies, Greece had Alexander, and Rome had its iron strength. All gone. God gave each one its boundary and its hour, and when that hour ended, down it came.

The final world ruler will be no different. We usually call him the Antichrist, the one who comes against Christ and presents himself instead of Christ. Scripture also calls him the man of sin and the son of perdition. He will be brilliant, powerful, persuasive, and deceptive. Revelation says he will control buying and selling through his number, 666. I do not pretend to know every mechanical detail of how that will work. The point is plain enough. The world will accept his system, praise his answers, and follow a counterfeit savior.

Then the stone will strike.

There is also a distinction we need to keep clear. The rapture is when Christ catches up His church. His second coming is when He returns to earth in judgment and establishes His rule. One takes His people to be with Him. The other brings Him back to reign. Jesus must sit on David's throne in Jerusalem. God promised it, and God does not forget His promises.

Isaiah moves into that final judgment in verse 6: **"Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand!"** Hands go limp. Hearts melt. People are seized with pain like a woman in labor. The heavens shake, the earth moves, and sinners face the fierce anger of God.

This did not happen when Babylon invaded Judah. Nebuchadnezzar did not shake the heavens. The earth did not move out of its place. Isaiah has jumped forward to what Scripture calls the day of the Lord, the time of Jacob's trouble, the Tribulation.

And here is the second great truth: God will ultimately punish His enemies.

We do not enjoy talking about judgment, but if God never judged evil, He would not be good, so think about the cruelty people commit, the children harmed, the weak crushed, the lies that destroy families, the bloodshed hidden from courts, and the proud men who seem to get away with everything. Does God

see it?

Yes.

Why does He wait? Because He is giving people time to repent. Scripture says there is a measure of sin that has not yet become full. God's patience is not approval, and His silence is not blindness. Judgment has an appointed day.

The Tribulation will include terrible violence, but do not miss the deception. Jesus warned in Matthew 24, "**Take heed that no one deceives you.**" Many will come in His name. Many will deceive. Before He talked about wars, earthquakes, and famines, He warned about false christs.

That warning is for us. The obvious darkness is easy to spot. If somebody walks in waving a wand and announces that he is a sorcerer, most Christians know there is a problem. The harder danger is a preacher with a Bible, a polished smile, a powerful personality, maybe even signs that amaze people, whose doctrine is just a little off.

Just a little poison still poisons you.

Do not decide that a teacher is from God because you got goosebumps, and do not build your faith on charisma, a glow, a feeling, or the size of a crowd, because Pharaoh's magicians copied signs through demonic power, Jesus said false teachers would deceive many, and Paul said people would gather teachers who tickle their ears, teachers who say pleasant things and make sin comfortable.

If you do not know your Bible, you will fall for it. I guarantee it. That is why you need the Old Testament and the New Testament. That is why prophecy matters. God did not give these chapters to scare His children away from Scripture. He gave them to warn us, steady us, and prove that He holds the future.

Isaiah comes back from the end of the age to Babylon's historical fall. God says, "**I will stir up the Medes against them.**" That is astonishing. Isaiah named the people who would conquer Babylon long before Babylon had reached its glory, when the Medes themselves looked smaller still. Yet the Medes and Persians came. Babylon fell.

Then Isaiah describes the city emptied out. "**It will never be inhabited.**" Shepherds will not settle there. Desert animals will fill its abandoned places. Hyenas and jackals will cry through what used to be palaces. Babylon's glory would become ruins.

Again, the prophecy looks near and far. Ancient Babylon fell, and its ruins can be seen. Yet people still live in that region, so the complete devastation Isaiah describes appears to reach forward to a final judgment still to come. I do not know every detail, and I will not pretend I do. But God knows. That is the point.

We have the luxury of looking backward at prophecies Isaiah's first hearers had to accept by faith: Assyria came, Babylon rose, Judah went into captivity, the Medes conquered Babylon, and Israel, scattered for centuries, became a nation again. God said these things before they happened.

So when He tells us Christ will return, why would we doubt Him now?

Physical Babylon lies in ruins. But spiritual Babylon, the system that worships everything except God, is alive and well. So let me ask you the question that matters. Do you worship the true and living God, or have you made a god out of your own imagination? A god built from emotions. A Jesus who always agrees with you, never confronts your sin, never judges, and never asks you to repent.

That little Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible.

The real Jesus died for sinners, rose from the grave, warns us against deception, disciplines the people He loves, will judge evil, and will reign over every nation; He is patient now because He is merciful, but He will not wait forever.

Know your Bible. Know your Savior. The future does not belong to Babylon, the Antichrist, the nations, or the devil. It belongs to Jesus Christ.

God, thank You for Your Word and for telling us what is coming. Give us a hunger to study the whole Bible. Guard us from deception, lead us out of sin, and help us worship Jesus as He truly is. Thank You that You see everything, You hold the future, and You will make all things right. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 21: In the End

Isaiah 14

We live in a crazy time of technology. That phone in your pocket has more computing power than machines that once filled entire rooms, and you can record something, put it online, and let millions of people see it before dinner, then turn around and find another update waiting, with three more stacked on top of it if you ignore it for a day.

Technology keeps moving. But let me humble us a little bit, because with all our measurements, equipment, cranes, computers, and engineering, we still look at things built in the ancient world and wonder how they made them so precise, and everything we have now grew out of discoveries somebody made before us. We are not as smart as we think we are.

And because we are so impressed with what we can see and touch, we forget there is a spiritual world beyond our sight. You cannot photograph it with the best camera. You cannot touch it with a missile. But it is real, it affects what happens here, and Isaiah 14 pulls the curtain back so we can see behind the kingdoms of men.

Before he does that, Isaiah begins with mercy.

"For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land."

I love that. God's people had been rebellious and stubborn, they knew what they were doing was wrong, refused to listen, and were carried away just as God warned, with Jerusalem leveled, families taken captive, and Daniel and his friends dragged into Babylon while they were still young men.

Was God's heart toward them, *That is it. No forgiveness for you?* No. He disciplined them, but He did not throw them away. **"The Lord will have mercy on Jacob."**

Is that God's heart toward you when you are stubborn? Think honestly about what has gone through your heart today. Maybe you drove through Tucson and somebody cut you off. What came out of your mouth? What ugly thought did you enjoy for a little too long? You do not have to tell me. You know, and God knows.

Jeremiah says, **"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning."** Great is His faithfulness. That is the reason any of us are still here, because we fail, we doubt, we do stupid things, and God keeps calling us back, not approving of the sin but loving us anyway, and it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. Once His mercy sinks in, it makes you want to run toward Him, not away.

God will not give up on Israel. He made promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, and His own truthfulness is tied to those promises. If God can break His word to Israel, why would you trust His word to you? But He will not break it. Armies do not cancel what God has spoken. Governments do

not vote it away. His faithfulness to Israel is evidence that His promises to you will stand too.

Then Isaiah looks ahead to the fall of Babylon. The captives will be released from their fear and hard bondage, and they will sing a proverb over the king who once terrified them: **"How the oppressor has ceased, the golden city ceased!"**

Babylon looked untouchable. Its king had power, wealth, walls, soldiers, and the treasures stolen from God's temple, so Belshazzar threw a party while an army waited outside the city, as if Babylon were too strong to fall, and drank from the holy vessels taken from Jerusalem until a hand appeared and wrote on the wall. Daniel gave the message: you have been weighed and found wanting. That night the Medes and Persians entered the city, and the empire fell.

No kingdom is too big for God to judge.

"The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of the rulers." The one who struck nations without stopping is stopped. The earth becomes quiet. Even the cypress trees and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice because the woodsman is gone. The empire that kept cutting everything down has finally been cut down itself.

Then the picture changes. Isaiah has been describing an earthly king, but suddenly he is allowed to see the power behind that king. This is one of those places in Isaiah where the scene shifts fast. If you miss it, you get lost. One moment we are looking at Babylon. The next we are looking beneath Babylon, at the dark spiritual power working through human pride and violence.

"Hell from beneath is excited about you, to meet you at your coming." The dead kings rise to greet the fallen tyrant. These rulers had once sat on thrones while nations trembled at their names, but now they look at this new arrival and say, **"Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us?"**

That is a brutal welcome. *We thought you were a big deal. We thought you were mighty. Look at you now.* His music is gone, his pomp is brought down, maggots are spread beneath him, worms cover him, and all the influence, money, and armies he commanded could not save him.

Hell is real. Jesus said heaven is real, and He said hell is real. We do not get to keep the place of joy and erase the place of judgment because it makes us uncomfortable. If there is no judgment to be saved from, then Jesus paid an awful price for nothing.

That truth should not make a Christian cold or proud. It should make us desperate for people. I have family members and friends who need Christ, and so do you, which means that if we believe what Jesus said, prayer becomes more important than one more show, one more scroll, one more hour thrown away. This is not legalism. It is priority. Because Christ paid it all, and because His Spirit lives in us, the question changes from *How much can I do and still call myself a Christian?* to *What can I do to get closer to God, and how can I bring somebody else to Him?*

The spiritual world responds to prayer. Do you want to see change in your city, your family, your friends, or your own life? Do you want victory over sin and boldness for God? You will not drift into it. You have to become desperate enough to pray.

I will be honest. I am not there yet, but God is getting me there. I know I am not there because I keep finding less important things to do instead. The day prayer becomes the most important thing is the day I know the burden has really settled on my heart. Maybe God is doing that in you too.

Then Isaiah names the power behind the proud king.

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!"

Lucifer means bright one, morning star. We tend to imagine evil as something obviously ugly, with horns and a pitchfork, so gross that nobody would go near it, but that is not how temptation works, because sin looks good and appeals to something we want. Satan does not walk up holding a sign that says, *I am here to destroy your life*. He offers beauty, influence, pleasure, power, and control.

Ezekiel describes Lucifer as beautiful, covered with precious stones, perfect until sin was found in him, and that matters because the most dangerous evil can be attractive, with false teaching coming through a gifted speaker in expensive clothes with an impressive platform. Now, I am not saying expensive shoes make somebody Satan. Obviously. I am saying appearance and charisma prove nothing, so test the message by the Word of God.

Isaiah shows us the sin that brought Lucifer down. Five times the attitude is the same: *I will*. **"I will ascend into heaven." "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God." "I will also sit on the mount of the congregation." "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds." "I will be like the Most High."**

There it is. Pride. The first sin was not in the garden. It began in the heart of Lucifer, a created angel who wanted the throne of his Creator. I will rise. I will rule. I will be like God.

Do you hear the serpent in that? You can decide good and evil for yourself. You can run your own life. You do not need God telling you what to do. It is the same old lie wearing whatever clothes fit the generation.

But after all five boasts, God answers with one sentence: **"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit."**

Satan is not God's equal, the dark version of God matching Him strength for strength, but a created being, and Colossians says all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, were created through Jesus and for Jesus. Christ made the angels. Christ stands above them. Lucifer can shake kingdoms, deceive nations, and work through rulers, but he cannot climb onto God's throne, and he cannot escape the end God has appointed for him.

Those who see him fallen will stare and ask, **"Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms?"** In the end he will look small. The enemy who frightened nations, ruined cities, and held prisoners will be exposed as a defeated creature under the judgment of God.

That does not mean we act strange and blame the devil every time the car will not start. Not everything is the devil. But the Bible does teach that unseen powers work behind rulers and nations, and when a people reject God they begin doing what is right in their own eyes, feelings become law, appetites become masters, and although human beings still make real choices and carry real guilt, Isaiah shows us that something darker is happy to encourage the rebellion.

You cannot fight that battle with human weapons. Prayer matters. The teaching of God's Word matters. A born again believer praying in the name of Jesus is not performing an empty religious exercise. God hears, and the unseen world is affected by the authority of Christ.

In verse 22, Isaiah comes back to Babylon. **"I will rise up against them," says the Lord of hosts.** God will cut off Babylon's name and remnant, and sweep it with the broom of destruction. Then He speaks of Assyria: **"Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand."**

When we swear an oath, sometimes it is because people know we are capable of lying, so we say, *I promise, seriously, I promise on somebody's name*, trying to make our words sound more solid. But when God swears, how could the thing become more certain? What He has thought will happen, and what He has purposed will stand.

"For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?"

Nobody.

The last prophecy in the chapter turns to Philistia in the year King Ahaz died. The Philistines may have felt relief because an enemy had been broken, but God warns them not to celebrate too early. A worse invader will come from the north. Their cities will cry out, while God establishes Zion and **"the poor of His people shall take refuge in it."** Empires rise, attack, celebrate, and fall. God still keeps His people.

So take two things with you.

First, there is a spiritual battle happening beyond what your eyes can see. If you want change in your life and in the people you love, pray like it is real. Put down the distractions and go to battle in the name of Jesus.

Second, God's promises will stand. Babylon could not overturn them. Assyria could not overturn them. Philistia could not overturn them. Satan himself cannot overturn them. And God has made a promise to you: **"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."** Turn from the world and put your faith in Christ. Call

on His name. In the end, everything proud will fall, every lie will be exposed, and every word of God will still be standing.

Let me pray for you. *God, thank You that Your mercy is new every morning and Your promises cannot fail. Open our eyes to the battle around us. Make us desperate in prayer, humble in heart, and faithful to Your Word. Help us trust Jesus, resist the enemy, and take refuge in You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Chapter 22: Why God Will Judge the Nations

Isaiah 15

Isaiah 15 begins a new section. From chapters 15 through 23, Isaiah gives messages to the nations around Israel. Every one of them had some relationship with Israel. Good, bad, ugly, they were in the neighborhood, and God had something to say about them.

Here is what we need to understand before we get into Moab: God judges nations.

God did not wind up a cosmic clock, set it on a shelf, and walk away while everybody does whatever they want. He is the sovereign God over nations. Every nation has a history. Every nation has an origin. The Bible teaches that God establishes nations, determines their borders, and knows their rise and their fall. Every nation has a beginning, a peak, and eventually an end. That includes the nations we live in.

We grow up hearing that our country is different, that our freedoms and our economy and our ingenuity will keep everything going, but Scripture will not let any nation put itself outside the authority of God, because the One who raises nations also has the right to bring them down.

So the question is not merely, *What happened to Moab?* The question is, *Why did it happen, and what does it say to us?* What is our role when the nation around us drifts from God? What does faithfulness look like in our own city?

There is another truth we need at the front of our minds: **people become like the gods they worship.** That is true of individuals, and it is true of nations.

Human beings worship. God put that desire in us. Even somebody who says there is no God will give his heart to someone or something. A culture will choose its gods, then slowly take on their character. If we worship power, we become harsh. If we worship entertainment, we become shallow. If we worship money, people become numbers and life becomes one long transaction. But if we worship the God of the Bible, we become more like Him. We grow compassionate. We learn to love. We begin to care about people who are lost.

That is why this question reaches much deeper than whether you showed up at church, listened to a Bible study, sang the songs, and said the right words, because all of that can happen while your real affection, your real attention, and your real treasure belong somewhere else.

That should make every one of us stop and check our own heart.

There have been times in my life when I became lukewarm. I lost my passion for the lost. I stopped caring about the things of God because I got caught up in everything else. Do you know why that happens? I start worshiping other things.

Joshua told Israel, **“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”** Then he made his own choice plain: **“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”** Whoever you are, you serve someone or something. Something rules your attention, your choices, and your time.

Jesus said that where your treasure is, your heart will be there too. So look honestly. Where does your money go? Where does your time go? What fills your screen? What do you keep scrolling through when nobody is telling you what to do? I am not saying you cannot enjoy a show, buy a car, read the news, or own a nice house. I am saying we need to quit pretending our worship is proved by what we claim on Sunday. Your habits tell the truth.

You can say you are a firefighter all day. That does not make it true. You can say you are a pink elephant. Same problem.

So what do you worship?

“The burden against Moab.” That word *burden* is heavy. God is announcing that Moab will fall, and Moab had a long history with Israel.

The nation began with Lot and one of his daughters after Sodom was destroyed. It was a terrible beginning. Later, Moab settled southeast of Israel in the area of modern Jordan. At times the Moabites were enemies of Israel. Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse Israel, although God turned the curse into a blessing. Eglon, another Moabite king, oppressed Israel during the days of the judges.

But their history was not all hostility. Moab was related to Israel through Lot, Abraham's nephew. God had told Israel not to destroy Moab or seize its land. Ruth was a Moabite, which means David was part Moabite through his family line. When David ran from Saul, he even trusted the king of Moab to protect his father and mother.

So when Isaiah speaks this burden, he is not pointing at some distant people Israel had never heard about, because Moab was family by blood, an enemy at different points in history, a place of refuge for David's parents, and the homeland of a woman found in the family line of the king.

There was a real relationship here. Moab knew something about Israel's God, yet the nation departed from the living God, followed pagan worship, and repeatedly mistreated His people.

God saw it.

God does not turn His eyes away when nations mistreat Israel. He promised Abraham, **“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.”** History is full of nations that tried to destroy the Jewish people and disappeared themselves. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union. Where are those powers now?

That does not mean Israel does everything right. Israel is made of human beings, and human beings sin. We do not have to approve every decision made by every leader. But we do have to agree with the God of the Bible. God has not broken His promises to Israel, and the church has not replaced Israel. If God can toss out one set of promises, why would we trust Him with any of the others? No. God keeps His word.

And no nation is exempt from His judgment. Not Moab. Not America. Not any nation on the earth.

When God judges a nation, everybody feels it. You may say, *I did not support that. I did not vote for that. I did not take part in it.* I believe you. But when a nation collapses under judgment, the righteous live through the wreckage too. Daniel was carried to Babylon. Joseph suffered while doing right. Isaiah faithfully proclaimed God's Word, and according to tradition his life ended under a wicked king who had him sawn in two. Faithfulness does not guarantee comfort.

The church in a troubled nation cannot sit back and imagine that judgment will neatly pass over every Christian house while touching everybody else, because history shows believers losing homes, freedom, safety, and even their lives while they keep obeying God in the middle of the disaster.

We have been so blessed that we expect everything to work. Lose cell service for an hour and we act like civilization has ended. The microwave quits, the air conditioning goes out in the middle of an Arizona summer, and suddenly our whole life is falling apart. Meanwhile, Christians in other parts of the world meet in basements, hide from governments, and share whatever pieces of Scripture they can get.

We need to wake up.

Isaiah names Moabite city after Moabite city: Ar, Kir, Dibon, Nebo, Medeba, Heshbon, Elealeh. These were real places, not scenery in a fictional story. Dibon was the site where the Moabite Stone was discovered, an ancient inscription that gives us another witness to this people and their world. Moab was established. Educated. Advanced for its time. None of that could save it.

“In the night Ar of Moab is laid waste and destroyed.” The ruin comes suddenly. In the night. People go up to the temple and the high places, but their gods cannot answer. Heads are shaved. Beards are cut off. People wear sackcloth in the streets and on the housetops. Soldiers cry out. Strong men find that strength is not enough.

It is like an air raid siren sounding over the whole country. Every city hears it. Everybody knows something terrible is coming, and there is nowhere safe to run.

Then Isaiah says something beautiful in the middle of all that terror: **“My heart will cry out for Moab.”**

Isaiah is not cheering.

This nation had opposed Israel. Its judgment was deserved. God had pronounced it, and Isaiah believed God was right. Still, his heart broke for the people. That is the heart of a man who knows God. We do not celebrate when the lost are ruined. We warn them, pray for them, comfort the frightened, care for the hurting, and tell people how to be saved.

There is something wrong when a Christian can talk about a city falling, a country being judged, or thousands of people entering eternity without Christ and sound excited about being proved right, because Isaiah could announce the truth of judgment without losing tenderness for the people who would suffer under it.

Is your heart broken for people who are lost? Do you care about the homeless in your city? Who comes to your mind right now who does not know Christ? Are you praying for that person, really praying, or just giving God a sleepy sentence before bed?

God placed you where you are for a reason. You are not in your country, your city, your neighborhood, and your family merely so you can do whatever you want. You have a part in God's work. You are supposed to be salt and light, to speak truth even when truth is unpopular, to pray for your nation and make a difference in the lives around you.

I do not believe our response should be, *It is too late, so why bother?* We are still here. We can pray now. We can live for God now. We can tell the truth now. Scripture shows that judgment may be delayed when God's people intercede, so our job is not to shrug at the darkness. Our job is to stand in it with the light on.

And if judgment does come, I pray the church does more than try to survive. I pray the Spirit of God comes upon us so strongly that we minister to people who are hurting, comfort people who are scared, and reach people who are lost. Isaiah looked at Moab's coming ruin and cried. May God give us that kind of heart.

But why had Moab reached this point? Jeremiah gives us a picture that helps explain it. He says, **“Moab has been at ease from his youth.”** Then he says Moab had **“settled on his dregs”** and had not been poured from vessel to vessel.

He is describing how wine was refined. The wine would sit in a vessel while the sediment and impurities sank to the bottom. Then the good wine would be carefully poured into another vessel, leaving the filth behind. After it settled again, it would be poured again. That process continued until the wine was clean.

Picture the worker lifting that heavy jar slowly, holding it steady so the clear wine flows into a clean vessel while the bitter sludge stays behind, then repeating the whole uncomfortable process every time another layer of impurity appears at the bottom.

But if nobody poured it, the impurities stayed. They worked their way through the wine, ruined the flavor, and spoiled the whole vessel. Moab had been comfortable for a long time. The people let sin settle. They did not confess it. They did not turn from it. Eventually the corruption became part of everything.

Comfort can be dangerous.

Do you ever feel like God is pouring you from vessel to vessel? Your life gets shaken. Plans change. Something comfortable disappears, and you ask, *God, do You even care about me?* Maybe the shaking is evidence that He does care. God will disturb what is comfortable to separate you from what is destroying you. The pouring is not pleasant, but it is part of His purifying work.

We want everything quiet. Easy. Settled. Yet if sin is sitting at the bottom and we refuse to deal with it, settled is the last thing we need.

By the end of the chapter, Moab's people are refugees. **“The abundance they have gained, and what they have laid up, they will carry away.”** Imagine families fleeing with whatever they can hold on their backs. Their possessions cannot protect them. Their cities cannot protect them. The cry travels around the borders. The waters are full of blood, and even those who escape face lions.

Brutal. But that is where unrepentant sin goes.

So there are two lessons here. First, if God did not let Moab escape judgment, no modern nation should imagine it can sin forever without answering to Him. Christians need to pray, intercede, speak what is true, and care about the people around us.

We should pray for leaders, pray for families, pray for the lost person God keeps bringing to mind, stand for what is right when standing costs us something, and refuse the lazy excuse that somebody else will take care of the work God has placed directly in front of us.

Second, do not let the dregs settle in your own life. Deal with your sin now. First John says, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** And Romans says, **“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

What is sitting at the bottom today? You know. God knows. Do not let it stay there until it flavors everything. Confess it. Bring it to Jesus. Let Him cleanse you, and when He pours your life from one vessel to another, trust the hands that are doing the pouring.

God, thank You for Your Word. Keep us from living halfway for You or letting sin settle quietly in our hearts. Give us compassion for the lost, courage to stand for truth, and faithfulness to pray for our city and our nation. Use our lives to make a difference, and cleanse us through Jesus. In His name, amen.

Chapter 23: Consider These Things

Isaiah 16

Isaiah 16 takes us from Moab three thousand years ago to events still ahead of us, then brings us right back to the human heart. That is how Isaiah writes. He will be talking about something happening in his own day, suddenly look far into the future, and then return to the people standing in front of him. You have to pay attention or you will wonder how you got there.

But that is also what makes prophecy exciting. The Bible reaches back thousands of years, tells us what God has already done, shows us where the world is headed, and reminds us that none of it is out of His control. Hard times do not mean God lost the steering wheel. Confusing times do not confuse Him.

So consider these things.

Isaiah begins, "**Send the lamb to the ruler of the land.**" This is not a reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God. That is where our minds may go, but the history gives us the picture. The kings of Moab once paid tribute to Israel with lambs and wool. Second Kings tells us that the king of Moab was a sheep breeder who paid one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. That is a lot of sheep.

Then King Ahab died, and Moab rebelled.

God had told Israel how to deal with the nations around them, but Israel thought it had a better idea. Instead of obeying completely, they kept Moab under control and used the nation for profit. They could probably make the plan sound spiritual. *God, look at all these sheep we can use for You. We know You told us what to do, but our plan is going to work out better.*

Have you ever done that? God tells you to get something out of your life, but you decide to keep a manageable amount because maybe you can use it for good. You do not get rid of the relationship, the habit, the secret compromise, or whatever else He put His finger on. You just put a fence around it and tell yourself you are in charge.

You are not.

The thing Israel kept eventually rose up against them. That is what sin does. If you do not deal with it, it will one day overtake you. James says desire gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. Sin is not a pet. It does not sit quietly in the corner waiting for you to give it permission. It grows.

Christianity means giving Jesus your whole heart and fighting the sin that wants to take it. Yes, God loves you when you fail. His love is not the question. But His love is exactly why He tells you to stop playing with what will destroy you. Paul asked, "**Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!**" Jesus did not only come to forgive you while you stay chained. He came to set you free and teach you to live free.

Moab's answer was not in rebellion, its pagan gods, or another clever political arrangement. Its answer was to submit to the God of Jerusalem. Isaiah tells the nation to send the tribute again. Return. Humble yourself.

Without that shelter, the people would become "**a wandering bird thrown out of the nest.**" Picture a little bird flapping around on the ground, confused, exposed, not knowing where to go. That was Moab. Pride tells you that you are independent right up until the branch breaks, and then you discover how helpless you have always been.

Now Isaiah looks ahead.

"Hide the outcasts; do not betray him who escapes. Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab; be a shelter to them." Isaiah sees God's people as fugitives, escaping a terrible oppressor, and Moab is commanded to hide them. The old enemy is told to become a shelter.

I believe this points to the tribulation, when the Jewish people will flee from the Antichrist and find refuge in the territory we know today as Jordan. Many Bible students connect that refuge with Petra, the rock city hidden among the cliffs. Isaiah does not name Petra here, so hold the location with humility, but do not miss the plain command. God has a future purpose for Moab. The nation that once rebelled against Israel will be called to protect Israel's outcasts.

Then comes the reason their oppressor will not last: **"In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness."**

That One is Jesus.

The first time He came, He came humbly, fully God and fully man, and He walked among us, died on the cross for the sin of the world, rose from the grave, and ascended to heaven. But before He left, He promised to return, and the same Jesus who came as a servant will come as King and establish a righteous kingdom on this earth. Human rulers talk about justice, but Jesus will do it. Human governments make promises and break them, but His throne is established in mercy and truth.

Bible prophecy is not supposed to leave Christians terrified and hiding under the bed. It should wake us up, purify us, and comfort us. First John says that everyone who has the hope of seeing Jesus "**purifies himself, just as He is pure.**" If you knew He was coming tonight, what would you want out of your life before then? What apology would you make? What sin would you confess? Who would you tell about Jesus?

Live ready.

Look at the world long enough and you can become anxious. Nations rage, economies shake, violence spreads, and people look for something to numb the fear, so they turn to a bottle, a drug, a screen, or anything that will put a blindfold over their eyes for a few hours. But the problem is still there when the effect wears off.

There is something better. Turn to Jesus. Stop living for yourself and look honestly at where that road has taken you. First John says, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** Every nasty spot on your record can be cleansed because of what Jesus did on the cross. Not because you are a good person. Because He is a great Savior.

And if you already belong to Him but anxiety has you by the throat, ask yourself a simple question: why not trust the God who tells you the future in advance? He knows the end from the beginning. He died for you. He rose again. He is not nervous about tomorrow.

Prophecy tells us that judgment is coming, but it also tells us there is hope, there is a cure, and there is a King. When everybody else is panicking, the Christian can have peace because our God is in charge.

Isaiah then comes back from the future and tells us why judgment was coming upon Moab in his own day. **"We have heard of the pride of Moab. He is very proud, of his haughtiness and his pride and his wrath."**

What was Moab's great sin? Pride.

That is almost funny, because Moab was not a great empire. It was not the strongest, richest, or most impressive nation on the map. Compared with the major powers around it, Moab was a little backwater place. Yet it was consumed with pride.

Pride can fit in the smallest package.

You do not need money, a title, a platform, or a crowd of people applauding you to be proud. A person with nothing can still believe the universe should revolve around him. You can even be proud of being humble, which is an impressive little trick. Pride does not need much room. It will sit in a folding chair and still think it owns the building.

Moab's pride would be brought down. Its fields would fail. The vines of Sibmah that once stretched far and produced abundantly would be broken. **"Gladness is taken away, and joy from the plentiful field."** No singing in the vineyards. No shouting at harvest. No one treading grapes in the presses. Everything the nation celebrated and trusted would go quiet.

And listen to Isaiah's response: **"I will bewail the vine of Sibmah with the weeping of Jazer; I will drench you with my tears."** Again he says, **"My heart shall resound like a harp for Moab."**

Moab was Israel's enemy. Isaiah had just announced its judgment. But he was not celebrating. His heart broke for them.

There should never be rejoicing over the downfall of our enemies. Yes, people have wronged you. Some have hurt you deeply. God sees it, and He will deal with every wrong. It may not happen when you want it to happen, and it may not look the way you imagined, but justice belongs to Him. When it comes, do not dance on the ruins.

The church has to hear this. We cannot mock lost people because of their politics, their foolishness, or the consequences of their sin. There are lost people in every political party and lost people who want nothing to do with politics. They do not need Christians pointing and laughing while their lives burn down. They need the truth, prayer, compassion, and Jesus.

Isaiah watched Moab suffer, then watched the people go to the wrong place for help. **"He will come to his sanctuary to pray; but he will not prevail."** They went to the high place. They prayed to their god. Nothing happened.

You know how painful that is if you have watched someone face the consequences of sin and then reach for the very thing that helped destroy them. More alcohol. More drugs. Another destructive relationship. More empty religion. You want to grab them by the shoulders and say, *That cannot save you. Turn around.*

That should be the Christian heart. Warn them. Pray for them. Cry for them. Jesus looked at Jerusalem, the city that would reject Him and send Him to the cross, and He wanted to gather its people the way a hen gathers her chicks. He wept over the city. If Jesus did not gloat over people who rejected Him, how can we gloat over people who offend us?

Besides, which one of us wants God to judge us according to what we deserve? Not me. I want mercy. And people who have received mercy should be eager to show it.

The chapter ends with a deadline: **"Within three years, as the years of a hired man, the glory of Moab will be despised."** A hired worker counts the days carefully, because if you hire somebody for three years, he is not volunteering for three years and three months. The time is exact. God told Moab that judgment was coming, and He told them when.

Why give them three years? Why not judge them that afternoon?

Mercy. God was giving them time to change.

Do not mistake God's patience for approval. If you are hiding sin and nothing terrible has happened yet, that does not mean God does not see it or does not care. The quiet may be your opportunity to repent. He is giving you room to confess it, cut it off, and come home before He has to discipline you.

God loves you too much to let you keep walking toward destruction without a warning. Isaiah 16 is a warning, but it is filled with mercy. Send the lamb. Come back. Shelter the outcast. Look to the coming King. Weep for the lost. Deal with your pride. Use the time God has given you.

Consider these things. Then turn to Jesus.

God, thank You for warning us because You love us. Show us the pride and hidden compromise we have excused, and help us deal with it now. Give us peace because You hold the future, compassion for people who are lost, and hearts that are ready for Jesus to return. Thank You that the cross is enough to forgive us and set us free. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 24: What Is Our Greatest Problem?

Isaiah 17

What is our greatest problem?

We can make a long list. War. Terrorism. Biological weapons. A collapsing economy. A government making terrible decisions. You can watch the news for ten minutes and come away with enough things to fear for the rest of the week. But Isaiah 17 puts something in front of us that is worse for the Christian than any weapon, any army, or any crisis.

Our greatest problem is forgetting God.

Before we get there, Isaiah begins with a prophecy against Damascus.

"Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap."

Damascus is one of the oldest cities in the world. It has been attacked again and again, and Syria has been a war zone through great stretches of history, but Isaiah describes an utter destruction. The city ceases to be a city. Its authority is cut off, its strongholds are gone, and what once looked permanent becomes a heap.

This prophecy had a fulfillment in Isaiah's time, when Assyria came against Syria and Israel, but many Bible scholars also see a future fulfillment here. Isaiah uses that phrase **"in that day,"** and the destruction he describes reaches beyond what happened in the ancient world. Damascus still exists. It has never become permanently uninhabitable.

Could that happen today? Of course it could. We live in a world with nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, and armies able to erase in minutes what took centuries to build, nations move around each other like chess pieces, and the places named in the Bible are still right there on the board. I am not going to set a date or pretend I know exactly how the prophecy will unfold, because I do not, but we should pay attention. The Word of God is not sleeping, and history is not wandering outside His control.

Isaiah says Israel will suffer too. **"The glory of Jacob will wane, and the fatness of his flesh grow lean."** The nation will look like an olive tree after it has been shaken, with only two or three olives at the top and four or five on the fruitful branches. A remnant survives, but barely.

Then something happens. **"In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel."** Trouble gets their attention. The altars made by their own hands cannot rescue them. The wooden images cannot protect them. When everything shakes, they finally look up.

That is often what judgment does. It exposes whatever we trusted instead of God. The thing looked strong until we needed it, and then we found out it was made of wood.

Still, even a destroyed city is not the greatest danger in this chapter. A nuclear warhead is not the Christian's worst enemy. Neither is persecution, an election, an economic crash, or some disaster we have not thought of yet. Verse 10 names the deeper problem:

"Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold."

Because you have forgotten.

That sounds impossible at first. How could Israel forget the God who rescued them from slavery, split the sea, fed them in the wilderness, and gave them the land? But they did. One generation cried out to God under oppression. They had nothing, so they sought Him, and God sent Moses. He rescued them and led them. Then another generation grew up surrounded by the blessings those people had prayed for, and Judges says they did not know the Lord or remember the work He had done. They did what was right in their own eyes.

We can do the same thing. One generation seeks God because they know they need Him, God moves, people are saved, churches grow, lives change, and then the next generation inherits the buildings, the Bible studies, the songs, and the language, but not necessarily the hunger. Everything was handed to us, so the simple things start to feel old. Prayer feels ordinary. Scripture feels boring. Salvation feels normal.

Be careful. Prosperity can lull the church to sleep.

Peter wrote, **"I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth."** He knew they knew. He reminded them anyway. Peter said that as long as he lived in this tent, meaning his temporary body, he would stir them up by reminding them. We need that. The Holy Spirit brings the words of Jesus to our remembrance because God knows how easily truth can slip out of the center of our minds.

And it does slip. That is the picture behind forgetting here. Imagine pulling a little boat to the dock, climbing out, taking the rope, and instead of tying it down you just toss the rope onto the boards, because the boat does not disappear in one dramatic second. It drifts. Slowly, quietly, almost politely. You look away for a while, and when you turn back it is out in the water.

That is why Hebrews warns us to give earnest attention to what we have heard, **"lest we drift away."** Nobody plans to drift from God. We get busy. We stop making time for His Word. We leave Him out of our thoughts, then our choices, then whole sections of our lives. We may keep doing Christian things while forgetting who they are for. A person can attend church, serve, sing, and look spiritual with a heart that has floated far from the dock.

Here is one test. When trouble shows up, where does your mind go first?

I have been driving for a delivery, following the map on my phone, and suddenly the signal drops. Immediately I am thinking, *Well, that is it. I am lost forever. This delivery will never arrive. My entire*

job is over. It is ridiculous, but worry works like that. For those few minutes, God is nowhere in my thinking. I remember the dead phone signal and forget the living God.

Romans says the things written before were written for our learning, "**that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**" Hope is tied to remembering. If you remember what God has promised and what He has already done, you have somewhere solid to stand. If you forget, the lies come rushing in.

This is why you need to learn to preach to yourself. David did it. "**Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God.**" He grabbed his own soul by the shirt and said, *Listen up. We are not going to live by this feeling. God is still God.* He did not pretend the sadness was fake. His tears had been his food day and night. But he answered his sadness with truth.

We spend too much time listening to ourselves and not enough time talking to ourselves. Your mind says, *There is no hope.* Answer it: *No, soul, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end, and I will not throw out what God said because today hurts.* Your mind says, *God has left me.* Answer it with what He said. Your feelings are real, but they are not always honest.

Of course, you cannot remember Scripture you have never learned. Second Timothy says all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. This book is not another textbook. These are the words God gave us, and we need them inside us before the dark moment comes.

We memorize all kinds of useless stuff. Video game secrets. Movie dialogue. Every character in a series. I could probably explain whole sections of an Avengers movie from beginning to end, and that is fun, but it will not hold my soul together at two in the morning. If we can store all of that, we can put the promises of God in our hearts.

Another sign that we have forgotten is that we stop talking about salvation. Think about it. If you belong to Jesus, He has saved you from hell and given you eternal life. You will see Him. You will be with Him. When was the last time that put a smile on your face? When was the last time you told somebody?

Evangelism should not be a miserable chore you perform to earn a good Christian score. If that is how you see it, you will be impatient and mean. But when you spend time with Jesus, gratitude starts bubbling up and you want to share Him. Moses came away from the presence of God glowing. He did not manufacture it. He had been with God, and it showed.

What do we talk about most? God, or the last thing we ate? The things He has done, or the last show we watched? Jesus said the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. I am not looking down on anybody here. I have forgotten God many times too. We are all in this together, and His forgiveness is one more reason to remember Him and speak about how good He is.

Isaiah calls Him "**the God of your salvation.**" Remember what He saved you from. Hell, yes, but also disasters, foolish choices, and roads that would have wrecked your life. He has helped you more times

than you know. When you forget Him, Jeremiah says you begin trusting lies. When you remember Him, hope returns.

This is one reason Jesus gave us communion: "**Do this in remembrance of Me.**" He knew we would forget. We need to bring ourselves back again and again to His body and His blood, His cross and His love, not as dry facts but as the center of our lives.

Jesus gave the church at Ephesus the same cure. That church worked hard, had patience, tested false teachers, rejected evil, and labored in His name without growing weary, and those were good things, the kind of Christian work that made a church look alive from the outside. Yet Jesus said, "**You have left your first love.**" Behind all that activity were cold hearts.

What was His command? "**Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works.**" Remember. Repent. Return.

Has your heart grown cold? Are the things of God boring to you now? Go back in your mind. Where were you when you last had a real fire for God? When did busyness push Jesus to the edge? Find the spot where you left the rope untied. Repent means change your mind and turn around. Go back to your first love.

Isaiah also calls God "**the Rock of your stronghold.**" Be mindful of what God is by nature. That word carries the idea of marking something, etching it into your memory, mentioning it to yourself over and over. The Lord is my rock. The Lord is my fortress. The Lord is my deliverer, my strength, my shield, my salvation, my stronghold. Carve that into your thinking.

We have more access to biblical teaching than any generation before us, because a phone can play Scripture and sermons all day, but that same phone also carries movies, games, social media, and endless distractions, so the tool that gives us instant access to the Word can help us forget it. We are in a battle for our attention, and the enemy is perfectly happy to push God out one harmless little distraction at a time.

So talk to God. If you feel strange doing it in public, put a little headset in your ear and everybody will assume you are on a call. You do not even have to turn it on. Walk and pray. Drive and remind yourself of Scripture. Turn some of the noise off. This is not a joke. If we are forgetful, we need habits that help us remember.

And remember this: God is still active. He is about to do something. The God of this Bible still moves in people, searches for faithful hearts, saves, restores, corrects, and leads. The more you know what He has done in the past, the more confidence you can have facing tomorrow. I do not want to miss what God is doing because I was staring at something that will be gone next week.

Prosperity is dangerous when it makes us proud. Hosea told Israel that when they had eaten and were satisfied, their hearts were lifted up and they forgot God. We have been given so much. That does not make us safe. It makes this warning especially important.

Pray the scary prayer: *God, strip away whatever keeps me from You. Cut down the idol. Restructure my life if You need to. If I only follow You because life is comfortable, make me true.* Will we follow Him if persecution comes? Will we follow when the blessings disappear? He is worthy because He saved us, because He is our Rock, and because He is God.

Do not forget Him. It is easier than you think, and more dangerous than anything on the news. Tie the rope. Remember His salvation. Preach His promises to your soul. Return to your first love.

God, forgive us for how easily we forget You. Bring Your Word back to our minds, wake up every cold heart, and strip away whatever distracts us from You. Help us remember the salvation You have given us and trust You as the Rock of our stronghold. Make us true, keep us close, and let us be ready for whatever You do next. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 25: A Modern-Day Prophecy (Part 1)

Isaiah 18-19

Isaiah is sometimes called the evangelical prophet because so much of the doctrine of salvation that we lean on in the New Testament has its foundation right here. The Old Testament is not irrelevant to a Christian. Not even close. It lays the foundation for what we believe, and Isaiah keeps pointing us to the Messiah.

But Isaiah can also be hard to follow. He will speak about a nation in his own time, then without much warning he will look hundreds or thousands of years into the future. If you start dozing off, you may wake up two thousand years away from where you started. So we need to read carefully.

We are still in the section where Isaiah gives burdens against the nations surrounding Israel. A burden is a judgment. God is not only the God of Israel. He is God over every nation, and He still judges nations today.

That matters to us. It especially matters when a people have the freedom to choose their leaders, because leaders can take a nation toward righteousness or rebellion. Israel learned that when it demanded a king like all the nations around it. God wanted to lead them, but they looked around and said, *We want what they have*. That is always a dangerous place for God's people to be.

Samuel warned them. A king would tax them, take their sons for war, take their daughters as servants, and take their land and produce. The people heard every word and said they wanted one anyway. So they got Saul. He looked good at first. We know how that ended.

Sometimes bad leadership is itself a form of judgment. Sometimes God gives people what they demand so they can see where that road goes. And the moment we admit where we are is the moment healing can begin. Revival does not start when everybody is doing great. The word itself means the people of God were asleep and needed to wake up.

That brings us to Isaiah 18, and I am going to be honest with you. This is a strange chapter. I studied different scholars and pastors, and there is no agreement about every detail. We know the region is connected to Ethiopia and the lands beyond it, but we do not know exactly what every image means.

"Woe to the land shadowed with buzzing wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia."

What are the buzzing wings? Some say birds. Some say insects because the water in that region produces so many of them. We do not know. Verse two speaks of a people tall and smooth of skin, a nation powerful whose land the rivers divide. The word translated *tall* carries the idea of a developed or independent people, but again, the identity is not certain.

Here is what we should not do. Some people read an advanced nation in the passage and immediately decide it must be America. No. There is no evidence for that. We do not need to squeeze ourselves into every prophecy. When Scripture does not identify something clearly, we should be humble enough to

say, *I do not know*.

Then Isaiah makes one of those great prophetic jumps.

"All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth."

Did you catch that? We went from a region beyond Ethiopia to all the inhabitants of the world. A banner is lifted on the mountains. A trumpet is blown. Everybody sees and hears. The horizon has suddenly opened.

Then the Lord says, **"I will take My rest, and I will look from My dwelling place."** He compares His judgment to clear heat in sunshine and a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.

Clear heat sounds pleasant until you remember Arizona. It is that violent heat that makes the air shimmer and withers whatever sits under it. People always say, *But it is a dry heat*. Sure. Put that under the picture of a skeleton leaning against a cactus. Dry does not make it safe.

The picture here is of God withdrawing His protection. Imagine a giant umbrella over a nation. The rain hits it. Hail pounds it. The sun beats down, but the people beneath it are covered. God is the One holding that umbrella. When He takes His rest, it is as if He folds it up and lets a rebellious people have the life they insisted on living without Him.

God blesses obedience. That does not mean every obedient Christian will be rich, comfortable, healthy, and smiling every minute, because the Bible never promises that, and James and Peter both tell us God uses trials to grow faithful people just as muscle grows when it is worked and torn and our faith grows through the same kind of strain.

But there is also suffering that comes because we are stubborn. I know that from experience. God tells me not to do something, I do it anyway, everything becomes a mess, and then I wonder what happened. Like Proverbs says, a dog returns to its vomit. Gross, but accurate. I say, *I will never do that again*, and there I am.

If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit will tell you when you are being disobedient. You know. God still loves you, and sometimes He protects you when you deserve none of it because He is merciful, but you cannot reject His direction and then demand all the protection that comes with following Him. At times He says, *You do not want My help, so I will let you feel where your way leads*. Even that is love. He wants you to wake up.

The cloud of dew at harvest carries the same warning. A farmer needs rain while the crop is growing, but rain or heavy dew at harvest can ruin the crop. For all our machines and technology, we are fragile people. Food can be growing across fields for miles, and weather arriving at the wrong moment can damage it all. Prices climb. Shelves empty. Suddenly we remember we were dependent on God the entire time.

Before the fruit in Isaiah 18 can ripen, **"He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks."** The growth is cut short, and what remains is left for the birds and beasts. Judgment comes before the nation

reaches the harvest it expected.

Yet the chapter ends by looking toward Mount Zion. A gift is brought to the Lord of hosts by this powerful people whose land the rivers divide. Isaiah has moved toward the future reign of Christ, one of those scenes we have seen throughout the book. I wish I could explain every piece of it. I cannot. Put Isaiah 18 in the file marked *wait and see*. There is nothing wrong with that file. God knows what He meant, and when He fulfills it, it will be clear.

Chapter 19 brings us to Egypt.

"The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt."

Stop and think about the fact that you can still find Egypt on a map. We take that for granted. The Bible speaks of nations that would disappear, and they did. It also speaks of Egypt continuing into future events, and Egypt is still there. God's Word has not misplaced it.

When the Lord comes into Egypt, **"the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence."** An idol is a worthless thing, something people trust that cannot actually help them. Egypt had plenty of them. So do we.

Some people consult horoscopes, the zodiac, mediums, and spiritual sources God has forbidden. They may call it a joke, but Scripture treats it as dangerous. Do not ask darkness to guide your life.

Our idols can look respectable too. We consult politicians, actors, musicians, and famous people as if popularity made somebody wise. Give a person a symbol next to their name and suddenly the culture says, *Tell us what to believe*. Government can become an idol when we expect it to occupy the place of God, provide our identity, and save us from every fear. When God is pushed out, something always rushes in to fill the space.

Isaiah says, **"I will set Egyptians against Egyptians."** Brother fights brother, neighbor fights neighbor, city fights city, and kingdom fights kingdom. Egypt had once been one of the greatest powers on earth, yet God said it would be torn by division and ruled by a cruel master. There are different views about which ruler verse four describes. Some connect it to a future Antichrist. Egypt has also suffered under cruel rulers in its history. I do not know, and I am not afraid to say so.

Then the prophecy turns to the Nile.

"The waters will fail from the sea, and the river will be wasted and dried up." The rivers turn foul. Reeds and rushes wither. Fields beside the river dry up. Fishermen mourn, workers in fine flax are ashamed, wage earners become troubled in soul. An entire economy collapses because the water that sustained it no longer works as it once did.

Some people believe this describes the effects of the Aswan High Dam, and I think the connection is worth considering. The dam was built across the Nile and completed in 1970 to control flooding and provide hydroelectric power. It was counted as an amazing achievement. But controlling the river also brought consequences.

The Nile's yearly floods had spread nutrient rich soil across the land, but when the flooding stopped, those nutrients stopped reaching the fields in the same way, agriculture suffered, streams branching from the river dried up, and the natural cycle that supported animals, crops, and communities changed.

The sermon also described river snails that had once been washed away by the flood, but with the water controlled they remained and damaged flax crops. Isaiah specifically mentions the workers in fine flax. The dam also kept microorganisms from flowing downstream into the Mediterranean, hurting a fishing industry that had provided food and wages. Less fishing meant less work. Less work meant more poverty and trouble.

Is the Aswan Dam the fulfillment of Isaiah 19:5-10? I believe it may be, but I want to hold that conclusion with an open hand. The point is not to pretend certainty where Scripture does not give us every date and name. The point is that an ancient prophecy describes the river, the fields, the flax workers, the fishermen, and the wage earners suffering together, and events in modern Egypt give us a striking picture of exactly that chain.

Then Isaiah turns to the leaders. **"Surely the princes of Zoan are fools; Pharaoh's wise counselors give foolish counsel."** These men bragged about ancient wisdom, but they could not tell Pharaoh what the Lord had purposed. The leaders who were supposed to guide Egypt had become confused.

Verse 14 says the Lord allowed a perverse spirit in her midst, and Egypt staggered in its work **"as a drunken man staggers in his vomit."** That is vivid. Disgusting too. A man stumbling around in his own vomit does not know where he is going, and that is Isaiah's picture of a nation whose counselors have rejected God.

Could a nation make foolish decision after foolish decision because God's protection is being withdrawn and demonic influence is increasing? I believe it can. That should not make us smug about leaders or eager to mock them. It should make us pray. A confused nation needs more than a new program. It needs God.

This is the pattern that keeps showing up in history. A culture becomes godless, its idols fail, its leaders lose wisdom, the people turn against one another, work disappears, and everybody feels the pain. Nothing is new under the sun.

But neither is God's mercy. Every great awakening begins with people realizing they are not where they should be, turning from sin, and praying. Not performing. Not complaining about everybody else. Praying. People become desperate enough to say, *God, we have wandered, and we need You*. Then they keep seeking Him.

So realize the times you are living in, but do not surrender to despair. Isaiah is full of rebuke because God wants people to turn, and it is full of hope because He receives those who do. Judgment is real. So is mercy. The umbrella is His, the nations are His, the future is His, and there is still time to call upon Him.

God, thank You for Your Word. Show us where we have trusted worthless things and followed our own way. Give wisdom to our leaders, wake up Your people, and teach us to pray until revival comes. Help us see the times clearly without losing hope, because You are still on the throne. In Jesus' name, amen.