

Isaiah - Study 2

Teacher Guide

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This study is part of a full college-level course on the Book of Isaiah taught by Dr. Ian Bond. The complete Teacher's Guide, Student Notes, illustrative Power Point, the lectures in MP3 format, and Dr. Bond's book *Insights into Isaiah*, Revised 2nd Edition, are available for purchase and download from Teach the Nations, Inc. For more information go to www.free-online-bible-study.org

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“Those Who Wait upon the Lord.”

But those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.
Isaiah 40:31

I. A NEW REVELATION OF YAHWEH

- A. Dr. Harold Wilmington identifies 8 attributes of Yahweh described in Isaiah chapter 40:
1. His *mercy* (40:1–2), because he comforts—he wants his people to be comforted; and he forgives—Jerusalem has been pardoned and punished in full for her sins.
 2. His *glory* (40:3–5), as demonstrate in prophecy concerning the *messenger*, in which Isaiah predicts the ministry of John the Baptist; and the *message*, in which John calls Israel to repentance in preparation for the glorious appearance of the Messiah.
 3. His *eternity* (40:6–9): Yahweh’s word stands forever, unlike people, and his people are called to proclaim the his coming.
 4. His *gentleness* (40:11): Yahweh will treat his own with the same tenderness a shepherd displays for his flock.
 5. His *omnipotence* (40:10, 12, 26): Yahweh is lord over all nature.
 6. His *omniscience* (40:13–14): Yahweh knows and understands all things and needs no one to counsel or advise him.
 7. His *sovereignty*: All nations are as a drop in the bucket, as dust on the scales to Yahweh (40:15–17); and he is enthroned above the circle of the earth (40:21–22). Yahweh spreads out the heavens like a curtain and makes his tent from them. Yahweh rules over all people (40:23–24).
 8. His *uniqueness* (40:18–20, 25): Yahweh cannot be compared to anyone or anything.
- B. Yahweh asks, “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?”
1. The prophet replies, “Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing” (40:25-26).
 - a. The Milky Way, which is the galaxy in which Earth’s planetary solar system exists, is believed to be 100,000 light years wide.
 - b. The Milky Way galaxy is 6 trillion x 100,000 miles wide.
 - c. The entire cosmic universe is believed to be 13 billion light years across, that is, about 6 trillion x 13 billion miles across.

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- d. Yahweh measures this all with the span of his hand, and with that same hand he presses the believer to his very own heart!
 - i. Dr. John F. A. Sawyer writes: “Faced with such spectacular evidence of God’s wisdom and power (vv. 28–29), how can you doubt? Verse 27 is drawn from the psalms of lamentation (eg Ps. 88:14), and poignantly expresses Israel’s doubts, dispelled at once by reference to the arguments from creation just presented.”
- C. So why do believers say, “God doesn’t know what I’m going through. He’s so far out there that he doesn’t see the struggle that I am having.”
- 1. The Jews in their exile asked the same question: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’?” (40:27).
 - 2. Isaiah responds with a question and a declaration: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom” (40:28).
 - a. Man runs out of strength, man gets weary and faints, but Yahweh never does.
 - b. Isaiah declares that one cannot exhaust the Yahweh’s patience.
 - 3. Isaiah identifies three classes of people: the weary, the weak and the fallen.
 - a. “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall” (40:29-30).
 - b. These are the unaware, the unable and the unavailable.

II. THREE CLASSES OF PEOPLE

A. The Unaware

- 1. People who are weary and faint are unaware.
 - a. Isaiah uses the word *ya'aph*, to be or grow weary, be fatigued, be faint.
 - i. According to Brown-Driver-Briggs it means to exhaust oneself fruitlessly; to be faint from lack of water or from hunger.
 - b. A person who has fainted is totally cut off from his or her environment with no idea of what is going on around him or her.
- 2. There are many believers who have spiritually fainted.
 - a. Some have looked at some of the historic denominations and concluded that they were dead.
 - i. It may not be so much that they are dead, but they just fainted and therefore are not responding to spiritual life.

B. The Unable

1. The weak are “unable.”
 - a. The Hebrew word used is *yaga*.
 - i. According to Harris, Archer, and Waltke the primary meaning is “to work until one is tired and exhausted.”
 - b. These people are aware but they are unable to do anything about what they are aware of, because they are exhausted.
 - i. The weak are people who have been broken or deeply hurt.
 - ii. They may be alert to the needs of others, but they are unable to do anything about them.
2. Believers must learn how to move from being the unable to becoming the able, because those who wait upon their God shall renew their strength and shall mount up on eagles wings.
 - a. Paul was confident that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

C. The Unavailable

1. This is the young men that have fallen.
 - a. Isaiah uses the noun *bachur*, which means youth or young man, which is derived from a verb meaning to choose.
 - i. Harris, Archer, and Waltke explain that the picked or chosen men in a military context are usually the young men.
 - ii. James Swanson adds the word is not necessarily speaking about age and gender; rather it is referring to strength, virility and the ability to function.
 - a) It refers to “an adult human male youth as a class of persons, at an age of maximum strength and some kinds of ability.”
 - b. There are times when even those who are strong, even the ones with ability, are apt on occasion to fall.
 - i. The verb is *hashal*, meaning to stumble, stagger, totter.
2. Isaiah warns that it is the strong and virile who can be those that fall.
 - a. Paul admonishes: “if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12).
 - i. Sometimes the ones that are most mightily used of God care the ones who fall.
 - ii. Dr. Judson Cornwall observed, “the army of God is the only army that seems to kick its own wounded.”
 - iii. When one sees a man of God who falls, remember that a man of God is first of all a man!
 - b. Yahweh’s response to the fallen:
 - i. “Though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand” (Psa. 37:24).
 - ii. “The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down” (Psa. 145:14).

III. WAIT UPON THE LORD

- A. The question of Israel in crisis echos the lament of the Psalmist: “Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?” (44:240).
1. Prof. Walter Brueggemann suggests that this dread complaint creates alienation between suffering Israel and silent Yahweh.
 - a. It implies the judgment of Israel against Yahweh: “They judged that Yahweh did not care or did not notice or was not able.”
 - b. Brueggemann insists that Isaiah cites the complaint only as a launching pad for the gospel assertion that follows, “The poet...delights to state a complaint in order to provide an overwhelming answer.”
- B. One does not have to be unaware (faint), unable (weak) or unavailable (fallen), because even if one’s strength is gone, Isaiah declares that it is renewable.
1. “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (40:31).
 - a. The Hebrew word translated “renew” is *chalaph*, the basic meaning of which is to pass on or away, pass through.
 - i. Swanson says it also means to change, i.e., “put on another set of clothing after removing a prior set”; and to exchange, i.e. “substitute one thing for another.”
 - ii. Edward J. Young favors rendering *chalaph* *they shall change* or *exchange*: “In this context the thought is of changing the strength one has for a better strength.”
 - b. Therefore, those who hope in the Lord shall exchange their strength.
 - i. You will exchange your waning, dying strength for Yahweh’s great power.
 2. The key verb translated “hope” or “wait” *qavah*, the root meaning is “to wait or to look for with eager expectation.”
 - a. According to Swanson, to hope is to “look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial, often with a focus of anticipation in a future event.”
 - b. Dr. John Walvoord and Dr. Roy Zuck define “those who hope in the LORD” as “believers who remained faithful to God.”
 - c. Strong adds the notion to bind or to twist together.
 3. Dr. Cornwall argues that the truth in this text for believers is that when they bind together by twisting themselves around the Lord Jesus Christ they shall exchange their weakness for his strength.
 - a. This aspect of *qavah* may be understood by thinking of the way that a vine or ivy twists its way around a tree. Jesus—one has not learned to wrap one’s self around him.
 - i. Just as the vine gradually wraps itself around a tree so one should progressively grow in one’s relationship with Christ.

- C. Summary statement
1. “*Either* folk will be faint, weary, and exhausted—indeed, even youths, even high-energy young people with seemingly inexhaustible supplies of energy! *Or* those who hope and wait and expect Yahweh will have strength to fly, to run, to walk—with no weariness or fainting (v. 31). Yahweh is the single variable—either weakness or Yahweh. There is no third alternative, no chance for strength apart from Yahweh—not from the gods who are nothing, not from the princes and rulers who are nothing, and certainly nor from the exiles themselves.” (Walter Brueggemann)

IV. THE DIVINE EXCHANGE

- A. The exchange of man’s weakness for his strength is described more fully by Isaiah 61:1-2 and applied by Jesus in Luke 4:18-21 directly to his Messianic ministry.
1. Most scholars agree that the evidence indicates the Servant of Yahweh depicted in the earlier Servant Songs.
 - a. Regardless of what the actual historical application might have been for the prophet, or the remnant, or the compiler, the ultimate and fullest meaning is that the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus to declare the Good News.
 2. Isaiah enumerates the several purposes for declaring the Good News.
 - a. It will be Good News to the poor—the message of deliverance from bondage.
 - i. The “poor” are those who are destitute, in a distressed condition, poor in every way.
 - ii. Contemporary examples include refugees driven from their homes, hungry, destitute, and confused.
 - iii. Sawyer correctly points out that this passage has been “an inspiration and a challenge to Christians living under dictatorships in Latin America and elsewhere, and is a fundamental text in Liberation Theology.”
 - b. To “bind up the broken hearted.”
 - i. Those crushed in spirit by the exile will be strengthened and encouraged.
 - c. “To proclaim liberty for the captives” is an idea drawn from the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25).
 - d. To “release for the prisoners.”
 - i. The Hebrew expression used is *peqach-qoach*.
 - a) It simply means “opening” and is used most often for opening eyes and ears, hence the Septuagint renders it has it “open eyes to the blind.”
 - b) Luke would most likely have cited from the Greek Septuagint, and hence the notion of “recovery of sight.”
 - c) The idea is of people as if in a dark dungeon, who when released would see the light of day.

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- ii. Jesus made the blind to see, but that by his own explanation was also a symptom of release from the bondage of sin, for there were many who saw but were blind spiritually and still imprisoned by sin (John 9).
 - e. “To proclaim the year of the LORD’s of favor.”
 - i. Jesus stopped his reading from Isaiah at this point and declared it was fulfilled.
 - a) By doing this Jesus was showing that his work would be divided into two advents.
 - i) In his First Advent he did the things mentioned in Isaiah 61:1-2a.
 - ii) In his Second Advent he will do the things in verses 2b-3.
 - ii. The “Year of Favor” generally refers to divine intervention; but it is also a Jubilee.
 - a) The idea of “favor” or “grace” is the word *ratson*, which denotes pleasure, delight, favor, goodwill, acceptance.
 - b) Swanson defines it as “a state or condition of approval, implying pleasure in the event.”
 - iii. Keil and Delitzsch point out that Yahweh’s Servant is sent to promise with a loud proclamation a *year* of good pleasure and a *day* of vengeance, which Jehovah has appointed:
 - a) “A promise which assigns the length of a year for the thorough accomplishment of the work of grace, and only the length of a day for the work of vengeance.”
 - b) The Holy Spirit anoints believers to preach the acceptable *year* of the Lord as well as the *day* of Yahweh’s vengeance.
 - c) Perhaps for every one sermon preached on hell-fire and judgment the minister needs to preach 365 messages on the grace of God.
- B. The Exchange (Isa. 61:3-4)
- 1. “Ashes” refers to the Ancient Near Eastern practice of people putting ashes on their foreheads while mourning.
 - a. God gives them beauty for ashes.
 - b. What may ashes represent?
 - i. They could be dreams, ambitions, plans, ministries that have failed.
 - ii. Things that one hope to do, but have failed to achieve. What most of people do is keep these ashes in an urn on the living room table as a memorial to better days.

- iii. Ashes indicate extreme grief—Yahweh says, “Hand me your ashes and I give you a crown of beauty.”
 - 2. The “crown of beauty” is possibly drawing upon some festive clothing that replaced the ashes (cf. Zech. 3) and implies the change of estates.
 - 3. The “oil of gladness” would refer to oil used to welcome guests to festive occasions
 - 4. The “garment of praise” would be the natural clothing worn to such affairs, in contrast to funeral clothing.
 - a. Keil and Delitzsch describe this as “a wrapper (cloak) of renown” instead of a faint and almost extinguished spirit.
 - b. Yahweh will not give the garment of praise as an overcoat to cover up one’s mourning and heaviness.
 - i. One must first off the spirit of heaviness; it must be given to God.
 - ii. Trade it in and he will give the garment of praise.
 - 5. This is the divine exchange implied in the word *chalaph*.
- C. In verse 4, those who *will rebuild* are *those who grieve in Zion*.
 - 1. Having exchanged the condition of grief and bondage, Yahweh’s people engage in positive activity—the building up of *the ancient ruins* and *the ruined cities*.
 - a. Young argues that this is not merely a reference to the post-exilic rebuilding of Jerusalem, because the language is not applicable to this.
 - b. Rather it is applicable “to the building up of the Church from the ravages sin has made throughout the ages.”

V. APPLICATION

- A. Sparrows, Pigeons or Eagles
 - 1. “But those who hope in the LORD...will soar on wings like eagles.” (Isa. 40:31).
 - a. The rabbis applied this verse to their own experience:
 - i. “They will soar on wings like eagles” refers to the Exodus from Egypt (cf. Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:11).
 - ii. “They will run and not grow weary” refers to the wanderings in the wilderness; and “they will walk and not be faint” refers to life in the Promised Land.
 - iii. Sawyer remarks, “This is the kind of interpretation which reminds us of the need to remove these texts from sixth century B.C. Babylon and make them our own.

2. Believers are likened eagles.
 - a. Do not be like a sparrow pecking about in the dirt, neither be like a pigeon sitting on the crest of a roof just cooing and preening itself as it sit on a roof line.
 - b. Eagles soar with effortless flight.
 - c. They do not flap their wings madly trying to take off, but simply spread their wings and catch the upward thermal currents.
 - d. The eagle flies at higher altitudes than most other birds.
 - i. When one twists one's life around the Lord Jesus Christ and exchanges one's weakness for his strength, one's ashes for his beauty, one's mourning for his oil of joy and one's heaviness for his garment of praise one is going to soar like an eagle.
- B. Soar, Run, Walk
1. Having soared like an eagle believers "will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (40:31).
 - a. Sometimes you are going to soar or you are going to have to run, because the business of the kingdom of God is urgent; but having soared and having run you are then going to walk and one is not going to faint.
 2. The New Testament describes the Christian life as a walk 36 times.
 - a. Most Christians live and minister not in the soaring, nor even in the running, but in the walking.
 - i. Most believers serve God in the walk and they need to recognize that God will use them just as they are walking through life.
 - b. Jesus' greatest ministry occurred in the slow, common place experiences.
 - i. Walking through Jericho, he transformed Zacchaeus' life.
 - ii. Walking out of Jericho, he healed blind Bartimaeus.
 - iii. Resting by the well in Samaria He changed a woman's life that precipitated a city-wide revival.