1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Isaiah, Part 2
Theme: Hope

Overview: Isaiah looked beyond the judgment of his day to the coming of the Messiah. In this unit, students will let the Suffering Servant heal them, welcome Immanuel—"God with us"—into their lives and homes, let the One who was born for us bring light into their lives, and live in the sure hope of God's promise of new life.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The book identifies its author as "Isaiah son of Amoz" (Isaiah 1:1). Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem and is often called "the gospel prophet" because of his many prophecies about the coming Messiah. Jesus and the New Testament writers quote Isaiah more than any other prophet.

Audience

Isaiah spoke primarily to the people of Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:1), though his messages also addressed the northern kingdom of Israel and the surrounding nations. He called God's people to repent and trust the Lord rather than foreign powers.

Date

Isaiah prophesied "during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Isaiah 1:1), roughly 740–700 BC. He received his call "in the year that King Uzziah died" (6:1), about 740 BC.

Setting

Isaiah spoke into a world darkened by sin and threatened by powerful enemies. Judah's kings, such as Ahaz, trusted foreign alliances instead of the Lord (Isaiah 7:1-12), and the Assyrian invasion loomed. Yet in the middle of these warnings, God gave his prophet some of the clearest promises of the coming Messiah found anywhere in the Old Testament.

Theme

Hope. Isaiah foretold a child who would be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), a great light shining on those walking in darkness (9:2), a Suffering Servant by whose wounds we are healed (53:5), and a new heavens and a new earth (65:17). These promises find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Why Study Isaiah?

These prophecies give believers sure hope. This study invites Christians to receive the healing that comes through Christ's sacrifice, to trust "God with us" in difficult circumstances, to walk in and reflect the light of Christ, and to look forward with confidence to the new life God has promised.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Isaiah 53:4-12

WEEK 2: Isaiah 7:10-18

WEEK 3: Isaiah 8:19–9:7

WEEK 4: Isaiah 65:17-25

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Let the Suffering Servant heal you.**

STUDY: Isaiah, Part 2

THEME: Hope

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 53:4-12

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 52:13–53:3; 1 Peter 2:24

WE ARE HEALED

BY MARK SCOTT

Jesus' question to the lame man in John 5 seemed odd. "Do you want to be healed?" (*English Standard Version*). Of course he did—that is why he was at the Pool of Bethesda. But while many people might say they want to be healed, many really do not. Sheep (a metaphor for people in our text) rather like going astray (i.e., remaining sick). But if the second Sunday of Christmas tells us anything, it tells us that the Lamb of God can heal us. In fact, Jesus came to heal all of creation. His method of healing? Sacrifice!

We continue our study from Isaiah during the Christmas season. The passage is one of the most quoted and powerful passages in the Old Testament. The parallelisms alone give the text a poetic beauty. The Servant of God (not Israel or Cyrus) is the Messiah who will act wisely but not have a beauty that he would be desired (Isaiah 52:13–53:2). This Messiah would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (53:3).

We Are Like Sheep and Guilty as Can Be

Isaiah 53:4-6

The need for healing was obvious. We had gone astray (wandered away) and turned to our own way. Paul said that we sinned and were continuing to lack the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Peter used the very language of our text by saying that we had strayed like sheep (1 Peter 2:25). We deserved pain, suffering, punishment, affliction, and wounds. We were the ones with transgressions and iniquities.

But God's Servant took up (lifted up—one of the Hebrew words for forgiveness) our pain and bore (carried) our suffering (pain or grief). He ended up being punished (chastised or corrected), stricken, afflicted (browbeaten), pierced, crushed (broken or destroyed), and wounded for us. God laid our sins on him, and his wounds became the source of our healing. In addition to being healed we can experience genuine peace.

He Was Like a Lamb and as Innocent as Can Be

Isaiah 53:7-9

The Messiah did not deserve what he received. He had done no violence (damage or cruelty). He had no deceit in his mouth. Despite that, Jesus endured his trials (of which there were six—Annas, Caiaphas, Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again) like a lamb led to the slaughter. He was silent (put to silence or made mute). There was nothing to be gained by Jesus answering a fool according to his folly or retaliating (Proverbs 26:4; Luke 23:9; 1 Peter 2:22, 23).

The end result of this non-violent posture was that the Messiah was oppressed (ruled over) and afflicted (mentioned earlier in 53:4). By oppression (restrained—Luke 22:54) and judgment he was taken away (lay hold of; seized). The really sad thing was that no one stood up for this innocent Lamb. No one even protested (complained) in this kangaroo court (Matthew 26:59, 60). The Lamb ended up being cut off from the land of the living (a phrase that indicates being an outsider—not part of the covenant family and/or being cut down in the prime of his life). This Lamb was assigned a place with the wicked even though he was placed in a rich man's tomb (27:57-60). God's method of healing the world was realized through seeming injustice.

We Are Healed Because of the Sacrifice of the Lamb

Isaiah 53:10, 11

Reconciliation is best accomplished through sacrifice. Yes, the Messiah would have to suffer and be crushed. Yes, the Messiah would have to make his life an offering for sin. Yes, the Messiah would have to bear the iniquities of the people and the sin of many. Yes, the Messiah would have to pour out his life unto death. Yes, the Messiah would have to be numbered with the transgressors (emphasis beyond our text in verse 12).

But do not despair. In the Bible sacrifice leads to victory and death gives way to life. Besides healing the very sinners who brought the Lord such pain, Isaiah traced several good results of the Lamb's sacrifice. The Messiah would get to see his offspring (a promise from Genesis 17:5-8). The Messiah would get to prolong his days and make the will of God prosper. The Messiah would see the light of life and be satisfied. The Messiah would justify many and inherit a portion among the great. Finally, as a metaphor of victory, the Messiah would divide the spoils with the strong.

When the "Jews for Jesus" read Isaiah 53 to people of their own ethnicity and ask who the person thinks is being described in the text, the answer is always Yeshua (Jesus). He is the Lamb of God who heals all of creation.

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THE BUMMER LAMB

BY DAVID FAUST

We use the word *bummer* to express frustration and disappointment. Maybe you say things like, "It was a bummer that our team lost the game," or "You lost your cell phone? What a bummer!"

Have you heard of an animal called a bummer lamb? Shepherds use that phrase to describe a lamb raised away from its mother—a lamb rejected because of its small size or some other weakness. The mother sheep (a ewe) can provide enough milk to feed one or two lambs, but if she gives birth to a set of triplets or quadruplets, she cannot feed them all, so one of the lambs (the bummer) goes hungry. The only way a bummer lamb can survive is through the care of the shepherd who protects it and bottle feeds it by hand.

The Lamb-Shepherd

Profound strands of prophetic symbolism find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Isaiah portrayed the Messiah as a suffering servant who "was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). John the Baptist saw Jesus walking toward him and exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). What does it mean to say Christ is the Lamb of God?

He is our freedom bringer. The lamb slaughtered and consumed every year during the Passover feast reminded the Hebrews of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Likewise, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). A sign in a veterans' hospital says, "The cost of freedom is visible here," and the same is true of the cross of Christ.

He is our sin bearer. Employing imagery reminiscent of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, the prophet says about the Messiah, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

He is our understanding leader. Are you enduring emotional or physical suffering? Do you know the pain of rejection? Like a bummer lamb, Christ "was despised and rejected" (v. 3). "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

He is our triumphant Savior. Thankfully, the suffering servant's story didn't end with death. According to prophecy, after suffering for our sins the Messiah would "see the light of life and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11). Yes, Jesus "'bore our sins' in his body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24), but afterward he rose victoriously from the dead.

Revelation 7:17 pulls it all together by declaring, "The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd." Christ is the Lamb-Shepherd! Fully human and fully God, the Good Shepherd leads the flock, but he also knows how it feels to be a sheep. As the Lamb of God, he takes away our sins; as the Good Shepherd, he feeds his sheep, protects us, and calls us by name (John 10:14).

Christ was rejected like a bummer lamb, but after moving successfully through the valley of the shadow of death, he has the power to restore our souls. That's good news if you ever feel like a bummer lamb yourself.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- How would you feel if your testimony convicted a person and sentenced them to death only to discover later that they were completely innocent?
- What kind of physical, emotional, or spiritual healing would you like to receive right now?

Read Isaiah 53:4-6

1. Picture in your mind what the suffering in verses 4 and 5 looked like and imagine the agony experienced by this innocent man. Worse, consider this betrayal: Those who once followed and worshiped him turned their backs on him as he hung on the cross. Could we endure this kind of shame—even though we're the ones who deserved the punishment?

2. Read verse 6. Sheep tend to stray. What did the Lamb of God suffer because of our tendency to wander from our Shepherd?

3. Read Isaiah 52:13-15. What does it mean to say that Jesus would be raised and lifted up? In what way would he sprinkle many nations? How do these images speak to Jesus' death and resurrection?

Read Isaiah 53:7-9

4. Sheep led to slaughter are silent because they don't know what's ahead. Jesus knew about the suffering he would endure for our sins and yet he continued to submit to the Father's will. In what ways did Jesus suffer for your transgressions?

Read Isaiah 53:10-12

5. Is it difficult to read these words that Isaiah penned about our Savior's suffering? Why was this punishment of Jesus necessary for our salvation and how does our knowledge of this change our eternity?

6. Discuss what you think the last sentence of verse 12 means.

7. Read 1 Peter 2:24. Peter quotes Isaiah (53:4, 5): he "bore our suffering" and "by his wounds we are healed." What healing do you need? What are you willing to do to allow Jesus to bear your suffering and offer him space to move you forward—to "die to sins and live for righteousness"? Discuss practical ways we can help others encounter his healing to find newness of life.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, as we consider your Son's suffering, affliction, and punishment to pay for our sins, help us to continually praise Jesus in this season for his sacrifice. By the Messiah's wounds we are healed; help us look to you for complete healing.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Welcome "God with us" into your life and home.**

STUDY: Isaiah, Part 2

THEME: Hope

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 7:10-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 1:18-25

IMMANUEL

BY MARK SCOTT

The first Christmas was scary. It troubled Mary (Luke 1:29). It took a dream from God to convince Joseph that God was behind it (Matthew 1:20). And the shepherds were all but undone by it (Luke 2:8, 9). Somewhere deep down in ourselves we realize that we do not deserve this divine visitation. King Ahaz was also scared. He was scared of his enemy's armies, but evidently he was even more scared of the possibility of divine intervention in his life.

Good kings were hard to come by in Isaiah's time. Four kings were in power during Isaiah's days of prophetic service (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah). Hezekiah was the best of the four, but even he crashed and burned toward the end of his life (2 Kings 20:12-21). King Ahaz was not anything to write home about, but after King Uzziah's death (Isaiah 6:1) he was the one with the power.

Plastic Piety

Isaiah 7:10-13

Following the record of Isaiah's call to service (Isaiah 6:1-13), we read about political unrest and governmental alliances (7:1, 2). Syria aligned itself with Israel (the 10 northern tribes) to go to war against the house of David (two southern tribes). King Ahaz and his people shook in fear like a leaf. God commanded Isaiah to go encourage the king to place his faith in God and not worry about these "two smoldering stumps of firebrands" (7:4, *English Standard Version*).

But instead of leaning into God, King Ahaz put his faith in other countries such as Egypt and Assyria. To strengthen his faith in God, King Ahaz was challenged to ask God for a sign (a token or maybe even a miracle). The sign could be as deep as Sheol or as high as the Heavens. [Sidebar: Testing or trying the Lord is not recommended (Psalm 95:7-11). But on a few occasions, when God wanted to stretch the faith of his people, he actually invited testing his character and promises (Malachi 3:10; here).] But with presumptuous pride and plastic piety King Ahaz refused the challenge. We would have had to be there to hear the inflection of his voice. But, in light of God's response, Ahaz tried the patience of God (i.e., made him weary or grieved him) with his pretended faith.

Prophetic Promise

Isaiah 7:14-18

God did not allow the king's plastic piety to derail his plans to preserve the remnant of God's people so that ultimately the Messiah could come. No doubt Isaiah squared his shoulders and spoke in strong voice, "The Lord himself will give you a sign." King Ahaz might not have wanted a sign, but he would get one anyway.

The promise was that within the king's court there was a young woman of marital age (virgin) who would marry, conceive a child, and give birth to a son. And, before the son would enter the "terrible twos" and learn the difference between wrong (evil) and right (good) God would intervene and take care of the Syrians and the ten northern tribes. In fact, the nations would be laid waste (left off; abandoned; forsaken). God did fulfill this promise through the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:7-10). King Ahaz made an alliance with the Assyrians, but it later backfired in his face (2 Chronicles 28:20, 21). Kings like their power and get nervous when God comes near. They would rather do things their way.

The prophetic promise that interests us in this passage is how Matthew used this text in the New Testament concerning the virgin birth of the Christ child (Matthew 1:21-23). Matthew saw in this Old Testament text a "type." A type is a person, thing, or event in the Old Testament that prophetically prefigures something in the New Testament. The boy born from Ahaz's court (probably not one of Isaiah's own sons, 7:3; 8:1) would be quite young when God would act on behalf of his remnant. Likewise, Jesus would not be very old (maybe two) before God would act in strong salvific ways (Matthew 2:1-12). The only way God can save people is to get very close to them and thus the significance of the name, Immanuel, which means "God with us."

The Bible does not say much about the virgin birth of Jesus in comparison to other Christological doctrines. But for over 2,000 years the church has fought tooth and nail to hold on to this doctrine. The church felt that something of the deity of Jesus would be lost if it surrendered this doctrine. The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* says it this way, "It is difficult if not impossible to explain why Christians would create so many problems for themselves and invite the charge of Jesus' illegitimate birth by promulgating such an idea if it had no historical basis" (page 70).

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DOWN IN THE WEEDS

BY DAVID FAUST

Years ago I heard the CEO of a well-known restaurant chain speak to a group of Christian college students. He inspired the crowd with his speech and his answers during the Q&A session that followed. I was more impressed, though, after the event ended when our guest speaker got down on his knees to help the cleaning crew pick up trash. Leaders who demonstrate humble, Christlike service inspire me to follow them.

However, there's a popular stream of thought in leadership circles today that would disagree. Busy executives, we're told, must always take the macro view, not the micro view. If you want to be an effective leader, it is said, don't get down in the weeds. Don't waste time on minor issues that bog you down. Your job is to lead, not to weed.

As a general rule, it's true that a leader should focus on the big picture. In the early church, the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and teaching God's Word instead of waiting on tables (Acts 6:1-4), a task that others could perform. When every part of the body does its job, church members experience the joy of serving and their leaders won't burn out.

There's another side to this coin, though. Even a high-level leader needs to know what's going on down in the trenches. A general must know the conditions his troops face on the ground. A hospital administrator needs to understand how her policies impact the nurses who work hands-on with patients. A head coach doesn't personally mow the grass on the football field or wash the team's uniforms, but he should appreciate the workers who handle those tasks.

Leaders gain credibility when they roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty, and dive into the work at the ground level. Ineffective leaders remain up in the clouds, detached from the problems and frustrations their followers face. Paul taught all members of the church to use their gifts, but when necessary, he was willing to do a menial task like picking up sticks for a campfire (Acts 28:3). When necessary, wise leaders get down in the weeds.

Upside-Down Leadership

If you're a church leader, you can't do it all—nor should you. As the church grows, you can't visit everyone's home, disciple everyone, and personally visit all of the sick. But you can visit some and disciple some. By engaging in the life of the flock, a shepherd better understands the heartbeat of the people, their hurts and hopes, questions and concerns. The more you know about the everyday lives of your congregation and empathize with their real-world struggles, the better you can connect God's Word to their hearts and minds.

If you visit England, you don't expect the queen to prepare your meals and wash your clothes. In Washington, D.C., you don't expect the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to stoop down and tie your shoes. But in the little town of Bethlehem, the Word became flesh and began to dwell among us. Thirty-three years later, on a dark night in Jerusalem, the King of kings knelt down, took a towel, and washed his disciples' feet. Jesus turned the leadership pyramid upside down. He demonstrated greatness by his willingness to serve. He is Immanuel, the God who gets down in the weeds with us.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- Historically, have there been nations or people who sought the protection of a stronger power only later to be swallowed up and taken over by the power protecting them? Explain your answer.
- Have you ever wondered if God was big enough to take care of the most challenging circumstances in your life?

Read Isaiah 7:9b-14

1. **The Ahaz/Judah Back Story:** Through God's help, King Ahaz triumphed over enemies from the south but later turned to the powerful Assyrians from the north to save the day. How did God reassure Ahaz that he would win by faith rather than by trusting in an earthly army?

2. Why did King Ahaz refuse to comply when God told him to ask for a sign? What can we learn from Isaiah's response to the king's refusal?

3. Where do you place your trust when difficult things happen? What does it mean to stand firm in faith and not be hindered by circumstances?

Read Isaiah 7:14, 15

4. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled hundreds of years later. Read Matthew 1:18-25. What was Joseph's dilemma? Discuss why Isaiah 7:14 is quoted here and what Joseph's response was to the angel's dream message.

5. How were Joseph's and Ahaz's circumstances similar? How were their responses different?

Read Isaiah 7:16-18

6. **The Ahaz/Judah End Game:** Ahaz hired Assyria to help him defeat his enemies. (For further study, you can read Ahaz's wickedness afterward in 2 Kings 16!) Soon after the Assyrians attacked the kingdom of Judah, resettling and scattering most of her people across the empire and leaving the land barren. What practical lessons can we draw from this ancient king and his fate?

7. What hardships or trials are you or someone you know facing now or in the coming week? Who or what are you trusting in to save the day? Immanuel means "God with us" and Jesus means "the Lord saves." Reread Matthew 1:21 aloud. How can we be reassured that in our lives and our homes, "God's got this"?

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, why do we trust in anything other than you? Be with us, Immanuel; come save us, Jesus! This Advent season, we welcome the Savior into our lives and our homes.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Let the One who was born for us bring light into your life.**

STUDY: Isaiah, Part 2

THEME: Hope

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 8:19–9:7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 2:8-14; Matthew 2:1-11

LIGHT HAS DAWNED

BY MARK SCOTT

People speak unscientifically about sunrise—technically the sun does not rise. But the sun does "rise" at first very incrementally. Then, almost before it can be observed totally, the sun is "up" and light floods the landscape. Maybe Isaiah thought about a sunrise as he predicted the coming of the Messiah in our text today.

Predictive prophecy is usually piecemeal, partial, and fragmentary in the context of the prophet's historical situation. Predictive prophecy is easiest to understand once its fulfillment takes place as hindsight is 20/20. In the darkness of the coming Assyrian invasion, Isaiah predicted how God was going to act on behalf of his people. But what he predicted would find its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of the light of the world (John 8:12). On this Christmas Sunday we can appreciate the prologue of John's Gospel, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4, 5).

Light Has Dawned So Darkness Is Defeated

Isaiah 8:19–9:2

The darkness for Israel was due to sin. God's people chose to consult (seek; implore) the dark side (mediums and spiritists—necromancers, those who speak to the dead, wizards, and soothsayers) instead of the God who is Spirit (John 4:24). The mediums and spiritists can only whisper (chirp; peep) and mutter (mourn; growl). Some of God's people were essentially playing for the other team (the devil and his minions).

They should have been consulting God's instruction (*Torah* or law) and his testimony. Instead there was distress, extreme hunger, anger, and cursing (despising) God—signs that they were not obeying Deuteronomy. When they looked around and saw distress and darkness and fearful gloom it should have caused them to repent (see Revelation 9:20, 21). No wonder all they had was utter darkness.

But the slightest light dispels the darkness. From the strangest and most vulnerable places, such as the northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, there would be no more gloom (darkness). These two tribes were on the northern side of the land of Israel. The armies usually invaded Israel from the north. Those tribes were right in the path of the invaders. But God's light would honor (glorify) Galilee. The day would come when the people walking in darkness (sin) would see God's light of deliverance. This would be realized most when Jesus worked his miracles in this area (Matthew 4:12-16).

Light Has Dawned So Joy Is Increased

Isaiah 9:3-5

Where there is light there is joy. In the previous section Isaiah spoke to the people on behalf of God. In this section he spoke to God about what his light had done. The *you* in verses 3 and 4 is God. In many ways Isaiah was a gospel prophet. He prophesied the good news, so why should we be surprised that Isaiah mentioned joy 24 times in his book?

This joy is likened to two things—harvest and victory in war. The first metaphor of harvest is touched on briefly. The people of Israel welcomed harvest with great joy. Farming was challenging in the ancient world, and it was a ton of work. When harvest came there was much joy. In fact, at least two major Jewish faith festivals (Pentecost and Tabernacles) were matched with harvest. The second metaphor, of victory in war, is extended. When soldiers divvy up the spoils from war, they rejoice. When Gideon led Israel against the Midianites and won, there was joy. When Israel was able to throw off the yoke, bar, and rod of their oppressors, there was joy. When Israel used the bloody battle gear for fueling her fires, there was joy.

Light Has Dawned So God's Government Is Established

Isaiah 9:6, 7

This is the most well-known part of the passage. Its significance and beauty are unsurpassed. The child who is God's son will be the light bearer. His government (mentioned twice in the text) and kingdom (reign) will be on his shoulders (maybe kingly robe). His names are exceptional (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father—yes, the Messiah is called Father, and Prince of Peace).

The greatness of his government and peace will last forever. He will fulfill the promise made to Israel's greatest governor, King David (2 Samuel 7:16; Luke 1:32, 33). His government will uphold justice and righteousness forever (Daniel 7:14, 27; Revelation 11:15). The Lord of hosts (Almighty) will be the one to bring it about. Let the one who was born for us bring light into your life.

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KILLING TIME

BY DAVID FAUST

Located off the northern shore of Norway, the island village of Sommaroy attracts visitors to its white sand beaches and picturesque scenery. It barely occupies a dot on the map, but approximately 350 residents call Sommaroy home, and tourism and fishing drive its economy. The island is so far north that the months of November to January are shrouded in continual darkness, but constant sunlight fills the sky for 69 days leading up to the summer solstice, from May 18 to July 26.

According to news reports, last summer Sommaroy residents petitioned the Norwegian parliament to allow them to designate the island a time-free zone. Eliminating time would be liberating, they argued. Instead of being a slave to the clock, you could use the extra daylight for recreation or to finish home improvement projects, and sleep whenever your body says to rest. The petition appears to have been an advertising gimmick designed to entice tourists to visit a carefree land where you could throw your watch away and literally kill time. Kjell Ove Hveding, who spearheaded the No Time campaign, quipped, "Here, you don't need to tell the kids to come in before it gets dark, because if you do that, you will not see them before August."

The Time-Free Zone Where No Darkness Dwells

Christians look forward to a time-free zone, not in Norway but in Heaven. "There will be no night there" in our eternal home (Revelation 21:25), and we already taste that heavenly sunlight now. David declared, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1). Isaiah described the messianic age when he wrote, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light," and he predicted, "the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (Isaiah 9:2; 60:19). "God is light; in him is no darkness at all," wrote the beloved disciple (1 John 1:5). Followers of Christ have been called "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). We "live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8), for Christ brings clarity and vision to a gloomy, murky world.

The windows of the temple in Jerusalem were constructed with a unique design. In those days builders normally made windows narrow on the outside and wide on the inside, to allow maximum light to disperse inside the house while keeping intruders from crawling inside. The windows of the temple, however, were built the opposite way. They were narrow on the inside of the wall and wide on the outside, symbolizing how the presence of God emanates from the temple and illuminates the world. It was said that travelers coming to Jerusalem could see the glow of the temple's candles and lanterns shining in the night sky.

But a brighter light was coming—an everlasting light that shone from a baby in Bethlehem who personally embodied the glory of God, and who three decades later would declare, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Even in the frigid darkness of a Norwegian winter, Christ brings light and life unlimited by time and space. He sends his followers to reflect and disperse his light to the world (Matthew 5:14-16). Whatever happens around us, whatever tumult awaits us, whatever challenges the future holds, in the eternal Son of God all is calm, all is bright.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- Have you ever been driving at night when your headlights went out or walking in the dark when your flashlight quit working? How did you feel and how did you respond?
- Were you afraid of the dark when you were a child? If so, what was it like hiding under the covers in your bed, terrified of shadows, and needing someone to turn on the light?

Read Isaiah 8:19–9:1

1. What do Ouija boards, palm readers, tarot cards, séances, and spiritists have in common? They are all rooted in necromancy (consulting the dead), witchcraft, and dark arts—activities that are as dangerous as driving in total darkness. What did Isaiah warn about in this passage thousands of years ago (vv. 21, 22) and how should it inform our behavior as Christians today?

2. Where did the prophet tell God's people they could find light and truth about their lives and the future?

Read Isaiah 9:1-5

3. Search 9:1, 2 for prophetic clues about the Messiah (where he would live and the actual sign of his coming) and discuss what you think they mean.

4. Read Matthew 2:1-11. How does this passage literally "shed light" on Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy?

5. When the wise men found the child and his mother, Mary, how did they respond? Discuss how the wise men worshiped.

Read Isaiah 9:6, 7

6. The prophet described the coming Messiah using four names. What are those names and what significance do they hold for Christians today?

7. Read Luke 2:8-14. Angels announced the birth of Christ to a group of lowly shepherds who were at first terrified. The stars in the heavens announced the birth of Christ to a group of wise men and they were overjoyed. Both groups came to worship. One group told everyone they knew about the Messiah and the other group brought gifts. Both responses are appropriate. When it comes to worshiping Christ, do you consider yourself a shepherd or a magi? Why?

8. Jesus came to shine a great light in a dark world. How can we do the same? What will you do to shine the light of Christ throughout this Christmas season to others who might be struggling?

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Jesus, you are the Light of the World! You are truly Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace to us. Thank you for bringing God's light in our lives.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Live in the sure hope of God's promises.**

STUDY: Isaiah, Part 2

THEME: Hope

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 65:17-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Revelation 21:1-7

NEW LIFE

BY MARK SCOTT

Dr. James Strauss from Lincoln Christian University said, "Isaiah 60–66 is the greatest eschatological section of the Old Testament." It would seem so. Isaiah 60 celebrates the future glory of Israel in the coming light of the Messiah. Isaiah 61 announces the year of the Messiah's favor. Isaiah 62–64 expresses the desire for the Messiah to rend the heavens and come down to earth to grant salvation and to punish wrongdoing. Isaiah 65, 66 look forward to a new Heaven and new earth where the Messiah's reign would never be questioned. The God of the Bible is all about making all things new (Revelation 21:5).

On the threshold of a new year it is good to be reminded of the promises of God. In many ways the Scripture is framed up with a theology of promise. Even the curses of Eden contain promises (Genesis 3:15). For sure, the promise made to Abraham finds its ultimate fulfillment in all the nations worshiping God around his throne (Revelation 7:9-12). At the end of the day it probably matters little whether Isaiah was describing a special literal 1,000-year kingdom in the old Jerusalem or whether he was describing the ultimate kingdom that started with Jesus' first coming and flows into the New Jerusalem. Either way, the new life described here is glorious and allows the believers to experience new life in the sure hope of God's promises.

Joyful Life

Isaiah 65:17-19

The God of the Bible lives in perpetual joy. Why should it surprise anyone to learn that as he creates a new Heaven and a new earth that one of the dominant aspects would be that of joy? Some form of joy appears five times in these three verses. When God creates (the same word used for God's creativity in Genesis 1:1) this new world being envisioned, it will be so special that the old world will not be remembered. Gladness, rejoicing, and delight are to be expected in this new world of promise. Weeping and crying are out. Joy, not the absence of conflict but a quiet confidence that God is in control, reigns (Revelation 21:1-7).

Long Life

Isaiah 65:20-22

Life, the very thing forfeited in the Garden of Eden, is restored in gargantuan ways. The promise in the Ten Commandments attached to honoring parents was to live long in the land which God gave them (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). The life being described in these verses is life on steroids.

Infants will not die just a few days after birth. Old men will live long. In fact, living to one hundred years will not be unusual. Such a one will be considered a mere child. If a person does not live to the ripe old age of 100 that person will be considered accursed. People will live long enough to enjoy living in the homes they had built and eating the fruit of their vineyards that they planted. They will enjoy the work of their hands as their lives will be like that of a tree (Psalm 1:3).

Blessed Life

Isaiah 65:23-25

Isaiah made it clear that people who experience what is being described here do not labor in vain. Their lives are filled with "purpose." Their children are not subject to calamity (doomed to misfortune). When they pray to God for help, they receive help through specific answers. In fact, the Lord answers their "prayers" quickly (Luke 18:8).

The blessed life has "peace" written all over it. This is evident even in the animal kingdom. The wolf and the lamb will feed together. That is not normal, but it is affirmed in other texts (Isaiah 11:6-8; Hosea 2:18). (Woody Allen said, "Someday the lamb will lay by the lion . . . but it won't get much sleep.") The phrase, "Dust will be the serpent's food," takes one back to Eden and reminds God's people that his promises—for good or ill—will have the last word. God's holy mountain (a reference to his people) has no place for harm and destruction.

Parts of this passage sound like our ultimate future reserved for us in Heaven. But parts of this passage seem to imply that the believer experiences life at a new and better level, all the while having to build houses and labor away at one's work. The tension might be resolved by realizing that, for the believer, one enters into eternal life in this life (John 5:24). God's promises of a glorious future have already invaded us in the present in the first coming of Christ.

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FOREVER YOUNG

BY DAVID FAUST

When I was a young minister, occasionally I would ask the congregation to kneel for prayer. A wise worship leader advised, "For some of our older members, kneeling is painful. It's better to say, 'If you're physically able to do so, please kneel with us in prayer.'" I thought my friend was overstating the problem, but I followed his advice. Now, years later, I understand. I wear knee pads when I kneel down to work in the house or garden. Years ago, I didn't realize that our knees tend to lose their natural padding as we age.

Old people know more about being young than young people know about being old. Should we seasoned veterans prepare the younger generation for what lies ahead of them? Should we let them know that their metabolism is going to slow down and their "get up and go" will become "get up but slow"? Should we tell them that in the future they no longer will bounce in and out of cars or bound up flights of stairs? Should we let them know they're likely to repeat some of the behaviors they currently dislike in their parents and grandparents? It's probably better to keep our mouths shut and let them learn the lessons for themselves.

Unhindered

It's likely the apostle Paul lived into his 60s. Along with the normal aches and pains of aging, he endured a frustrating thorn in the flesh and the harsh repercussions of all the beatings, stonings, and other hurts inflicted upon him during his missionary travels. Yet, Paul declared, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (Philippians 4:11). He said this, not just because he was young at heart, but because he had Christ in his heart!

The last word in the book of Acts is the Greek adverb *akolytos*, which means "unhinderedly." The book ends with Paul facing a surprisingly positive form of house arrest. "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" (Acts 28:30, 31). As he aged, Paul's freedom was limited, but his usefulness wasn't diminished. His ministry thrived. He welcomed visitors who came to see him, and he kept teaching about Christ —without hindrance.

If you're frustrated by your limitations and worried about the future, here's a prayer for the new year. (If you're physically able, you might want to kneel as you say it.)

> *Eternal Father, as another year fades into history and a new year begins, let nothing weaken my faith or hinder my witness for the gospel. In every season of life, help me to be faithful and to bear maximum fruit for you. I offer this prayer—and I offer my life to you in the new year—in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Amen.*

Ponce de Leon didn't find the Fountain of Youth in Florida, nor will we find it anywhere else on earth. But by faith we look forward to "new heavens and a new earth" (Isaiah 65:17) where it's always morning, aging is irrelevant, pain is nonexistent, all hindrances are removed, and disappointment is a long-forgotten memory.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- Have you ever gone on a mission trip to a Third World country? If so, what was it like to serve there?
- How do you feel when you hear reports of children dying of malnourishment, of elderly people being marginalized, or of loved ones dealing with diseases?

Read Isaiah 65:17-19

1. God spoke to Isaiah about the new heavens and new earth he's creating. How many times do you see the words "glad," "rejoice," or "delight" in this section? Discuss the theme in this passage.

2. What line of Scripture here means the most to you personally? Discuss why this is so based on what you've experienced in your life.

Read Isaiah 65:20-23

3. Something died long ago in the Garden of Eden—mankind's immortality and uninterrupted fellowship with God. Sin brought death. The lives of people and infants are now cut short, though we were originally made to live with the Father forever. Do you ever think about the tragedy of death and the final endings for nonbelievers? Discuss eternal consequences for those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

4. Read verse 22. What does it say God's chosen ones will long enjoy? In light of question 3, make a list of those you want to be the works of your hands in the next 12 months.

Read Isaiah 65:24, 25

5. This section again hearkens back to the Garden of Eden before the fall in Genesis. What blessings and what kind of fellowship is Isaiah describing?

6. Read Revelation 21:1-7. Close your eyes and imagine how it's all going to happen. What does the one seated on the throne say and how does this tie into Isaiah 65:17-19?

7. Why do you think the translators included an exclamation point in Revelation 21:5?

8. Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21:1-7 contain promises for believers. But what about those who have not believed? What awaits those who refuse to believe? Consider your thoughts from question 3 and your list in 4. What will you do to reach the people on your list in the coming months?

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Sovereign Lord, you rule over the universe and you promise to make all things new. As we close the door on this year, we look forward with eager anticipation to the ministries you have for us in 2020.

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.