

ISAIAH BIBLE STUDIES

TERM 4

2014



2700 years ago a young man in a relatively small, unimportant nation walked into the temple and saw the true and living God who rules over the nations. This God was not like the idols that filled every corner of the city and nation where the man lived. Unlike the idols, this God speaks. Unlike the idols He has the power to save and to judge. Unlike the idols His glory fills the whole earth.

The man, of course, was Isaiah. He came from the nation that God had chosen to be his very own. They were meant to be a people who were a shining light to the rest of the world, displaying the wisdom and goodness of the true and living God and drawing people in to meet him. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem – a city where God had chosen to have his name dwell and where he'd caused his temple to be built.

Things had gone horribly wrong. Rather than worshipping the true and living God the people worshipped idols. Rather than trusting the God who saved them out of Egypt they now put their trust in alliances with other, apparently stronger nations. Rather than being a distinctive people for God they had become just like everyone else.

God had a message for his people. It was a message of judgement but also a message of hope. Through this message God would prove that he truly is the Lord of all the earth – he controls history, he moves mighty empires like pawns on a chess board, he destroys his enemies and saves who he wants to save.

The events and message of Isaiah are set very firmly in the historical context of the 8th Century BC (Remember, when it was BC the numbers went backwards! The 8th Century was 799BC-700 BC). At the end of these studies you'll find an appendix with 6 maps with some explanatory notes. These maps will give you a basic understanding of what was happening at the time and save you from getting lost.

As you study Isaiah remember that this isn't just a message for an ancient people. It's the living word of God. It tells the promises that find their 'yes' in Jesus Christ and so is far more a Christian book than a Jewish one. Trust God's word, submit to him, and rejoice at the good news he has to tell.

Isaiah Reading Plan

Here is a plan to help you read through Isaiah during the course of our bible talk series. It has five readings per week, so it's very realistic and gives you a couple of days a week to 'catch-up' on missed readings!

Week 1

October 20th – Isaiah 1-2
October 21st – Isaiah 3-5
October 22nd – Isaiah 6-8
October 23rd – Isaiah 9–10
October 24th – Isaiah 11-13

Week 2

October 27th – Isaiah 14–15
October 28th – Isaiah 16–17
October 29th – Isaiah 18–19
October 30th – Isaiah 20–21
October 31st – Isaiah 22

Week 3

November 3rd – Isaiah 23–24
November 4th – Isaiah 25–26
November 5th – Isaiah 27
November 6th – Isaiah 28
November 7th – Isaiah 29

Week 4

November 10th – Isaiah 30
November 11th – Isaiah 31–32
November 12th – Isaiah 33
November 13th – Isaiah 34–35
November 14th – Isaiah 36

Week 5

November 17th – Isaiah 37
November 18th – Isaiah 38–39
November 19th – Isaiah 40
November 20th – Isaiah 41
November 21st – Isaiah 42

Week 6

November 24th – Isaiah 43
November 25th – Isaiah 44
November 26th – Isaiah 45–46
November 27th – Isaiah 47
November 28th – Isaiah 48

Week 7

December 1st – Isaiah 49–50
December 2nd – Isaiah 51
December 3rd – Isaiah 52–53
December 4th – Isaiah 54–56
December 5th – Isaiah 57–58

Week 8

December 8th – Isaiah 59
December 9th – Isaiah 60–61
December 10th – Isaiah 62–63
December 11th – Isaiah 64–65
December 12th – Isaiah 66

1: Isaiah 1-2 – Knowing God

Getting Started

Think about people you know who don't know God. What difference does not knowing God make to their life, do you think?

Understanding the passage

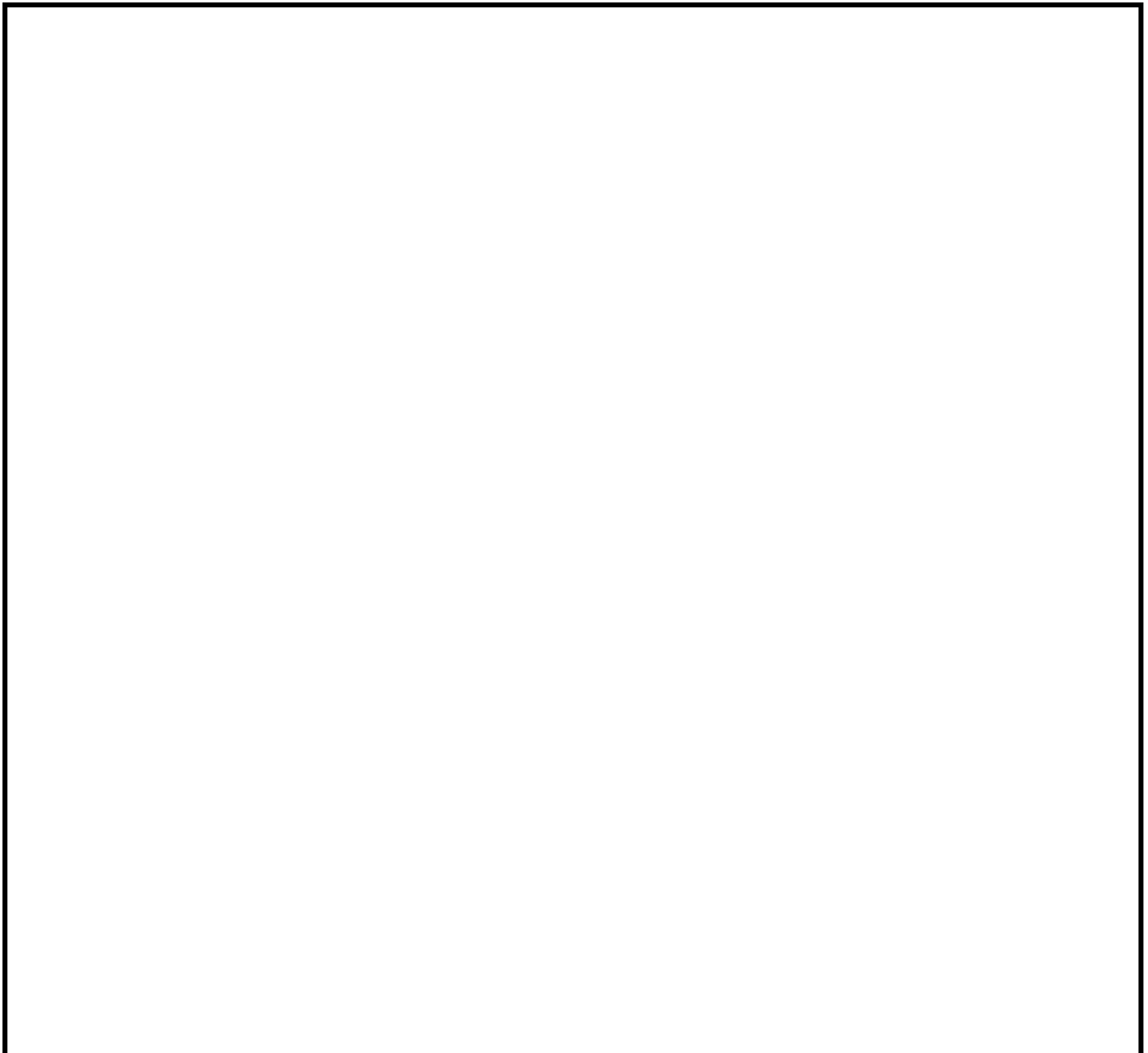
Read Isaiah 1:1-2:22

What is Israel's problem? (See 1:2-4; 2:6-8)

What is the effect on their behavior? (See 1:10-17)

How has/will God deal with them? (See 1:5-9, 2:17-21). How will God be treated differently in the future? (2:17)

2:1-4 offers a very different (though not incompatible) picture of the future. In the box below draw a picture of these verses. Explain what you've drawn to the group:

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing and explanation of the biblical passage. The box is currently blank.

Thinking it through

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. How does this fulfill the picture in Isaiah 2:1-4?

What has made the difference for Christians that we now know God when Israel didn't?
(See John 1;10-13)

How should knowing God make a difference to our lives (Hint: it's the opposite of what Israel did when they didn't know God!)

2: Isaiah 6:1-13 – The Glory of the Lord

Getting Started

How do people show in their lives that they think God is unimportant?

Last week we saw how, even though Israel were meant to be the people of God, they had ignored him and worshipped idols. When they did bother to worship him by bringing sacrifices to the temple, it was empty worship. They did not worship him with their lives by loving justice and mercy.

Understanding the passage

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

How would you describe this picture of God? How extensive is his rule?

In verse 5, what is the essence of Isaiah's problem? (See Luke 5:8 to see how Simon Peter had a similar problem).

In verses 6-7, how is Isaiah's sin taken away? (See Romans 3:23-25)

How does God say he will punish his people?

Given Israel's past treatment of God, how is this an appropriate punishment?

What is the tiny bit of hope that Isaiah is given in verse 13?

How is both this punishment and hope fulfilled in Jesus (See Mark 4:10-12)

Thinking it through

What are the consequences of ignoring the holy God?

What is the right attitude to this God (1 Peter 5b-6)

In what ways are you tempted to think of yourself as great instead of thinking God is great?

(HOMEWORK: Read 2 Kings 16:1-20, 2 Chronicles 28:1-27 and the appendix)

3: Isaiah 7:1-9:7 – Children of Prophecy

Getting Started

In what or whom do people often put their hope?

Last week we saw Isaiah's vision of the God whose glory fills the earth. In today's passage we see Judah caught up in the power play of small nations trying to defend themselves against the aggressive Assyrian empire (See the Appendix maps to understand the historical context). Judah, Israel, Aram and Assyria put their hope in alliances and/or their own strength. Isaiah preaches a radically different approach to Ahaz – trust God!

Understanding the passage

Read 7:1-9

Shear-Jashub means 'A remnant will return'. Why do you think God told Isaiah to take his Son along with him to the meeting with the king?

What hope does Isaiah give Ahaz?

What does Ahaz have to do?

Read 7:10-25

Ahaz tries to sound pious but is actually faithless (bad news considering what we read in verse 9!). The sign of the birth of Immanuel, which means 'God with us'. How will this be a sign of both hope and despair?

Read 8:1-10

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz means 'Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil'. In what way is the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz a sign of both hope and despair?

Read 8:11-17

Given the political situation, what do you think the people might fear that verse 12 is referring to?

What should Isaiah do instead of fearing what they fear?

Read 8:18-9:7¹

What are the things this child will bring?

Thinking it through

In Matthew 1:23 Jesus is identified as Immanuel. Read Matthew 4:12-17. In what ways does Jesus fulfill the prophecies regarding all four children that we've read about?

What are you tempted to fear other than God?

How ill fearing/trusting God/Jesus give you a much better hope?

¹ Historical note – Zebulun and Naphtali were on the northern tip of Israel near the sea of Galilee. If you look at the maps in the Appendix you'll see that the invasions of both Assyria and Babylon always hit this area first!

4: Isaiah 13:1-14:23, 21:1-10 – Righteous Judgement

Getting Started

In what ways do you see arrogance and pride in the nations of the world?

Last week we focused on Judah and how they were called to trust the God who rules the world, not human power or alliances. Today's passage begins a section in Isaiah that speaks of God's judgement on various nations around Israel and Judah. It's appropriate that the first nation spoken about is Babylon. At key points throughout the Bible Babylon represents the whole world in its rebellion against God, beginning with the tower of Babel (Babylon) and finishing with its destruction in Revelation 18.

Understanding the passage

Read Isaiah 13

Historically it was the Persian empire (the Medes and the Persians) who toppled the Babylonian empire. Who does this passage say was ultimately responsible?

What are the clues that 'the day of the Lord' will involve much more than Babylon?

Verses 9-10 speak of the cosmic effects of God's judgement. Although the Babylonian empire really was destroyed, Isaiah's prophecy looked forward to an even bigger 'day of the Lord'. What does Matthew 24:26-31 tell us we should expect on that day?

In what way has 'the day of the Lord' already happened (see Matthew 27:45-46). In what way is it still to come (see Revelation 18:21-19:3)?

Read Isaiah 14:1-23

Why is Babylon being punished by God (v3-7; 13-15)?

How is this like ancient Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)?

What hope is given to Israel in verses 1-2? How is this hope fulfilled in Christians (Matthew 5:5; Revelation 5:9-10)

Thinking it through

What hope does this passage give us regarding all the nations that seem to blatantly defy God? How might this passage be an encouragement to Christians facing persecution?

Judah was tempted to put their trust in Babylon to help them against Assyria. How might this passage be a warning against that? In what way are we tempted to trust human structures rather than God?

What should be the attitude of Christians as we wait for 'the day of the Lord' (Revelation 14:9-12)?

HOMEWORK: Read 2 Kings 18:1-16

5: Isaiah 36-37 – You alone are God

Getting Started

In what ways do people mock God and his people?

Hezekiah was one of the godliest kings of the Old Testament. He destroyed the idols in Judah, called people to follow God and rebelled against Assyria (See 1 Kings 18:1-8). In 701 BC Sennacherib of Assyria attacked and defeated every fortified town in Judah. (Google siege of Lachish to see some Assyrian artefacts and account of their siege of Judah's second strongest city). Jerusalem was the only stronghold left. Hezekiah had a crisis of faith. He sought forgiveness from Assyria by buying them off, but thankfully they just took the gold and silver and kept on attacking (1 Kings 18:13-16). Now an Assyrian commander stands in the same place that Isaiah had taken his son to meet Ahaz (7:3, 36:2)

Understanding the passage

Read 36:1-10

Why had Assyria been able to conquer all the cities in Judah? (See Isaiah 8:6-8)

In what ways does this commander mock the people of Jerusalem?

In verse 7, what has the commander completely misunderstood? (See 2 Kings 18:9-12)

Read 36:11-22

In v16-17, who is the commander attempting to be like?

In v18-20, what has the commander not understood?

Read 37:1-18

What does Hezekiah understand about God that Sennacherib doesn't?

According to Hezekiah, what would be the purpose of God saving Jerusalem?

Read 37:19-38

What do we learn about God from these verses?

Many years before Isaiah had taken his son, Shear-Jashub (a remnant will return) to meet Ahaz to comfort him that God would defeat his enemies. Now, God has saved a remnant out of Judah (though there's a lot more to come on the remnant theme!). Hezekiah had humbled himself in the temple of the Lord, acknowledged the one true God and was given life. Sennacherib returned to the temple of his god and was put to death.

Thinking it through

In what ways does Christianity look weak and worthy of mockery?

How should what we've learned about God in these chapters help us as we seek to live for him in this world? See also 2 Peter 3:3-13.

HOMEWORK: Read Isaiah 39

6: Isaiah 40 – Comfort my People

Getting Started

Where do people look for comfort?

Judah was a tiny nation amidst mighty empires. They were tempted to think that they needed to survive by worshipping the gods of other nations and making alliances with the powerful. As Hezekiah learned, all they needed to do was trust God. They usually didn't, though, and God had warned them through Isaiah that he was going to punish them for their sin (See for example 39:5-7). Chapter 40 marks a turning point in the book however as there is less focus on judgement and more on future hope!

Understanding the passage

Read Isaiah 40:1-5

What comfort does God give his people?

What is going to happen in the time of comfort (v3-5)?

Read Matthew 3:1-6. If John is the voice of the one calling in the dessert, why would people want to confess their sins? If that's who John is, what does that say about who Jesus is?

Read Isaiah 40:6-31

What do we learn about...

Humans/The Nations	
v6-8	
v15-17	
Idols	
v18-20	
God	
v9-11	
v12-15	
v21-22, 26	
v23-24	
v25	
V27-29	
Those who trust God	
V30-31	

Thinking it through

Given Israel's political situation, why would this passage be a comfort to them?

Given Israel's sin, why would this passage be a comfort for them?

How can what we've learned about God be a comfort to us and give us hope?

7: Isaiah 42:18-47:15 – God and Saviour of Israel

Getting Started

Why do people not like the idea of fate?

In chapter 40 Judah had been warned that God will send Babylon to take them out of their land. This happened in 586 BC (See map 6). In this section of Isaiah God reminds them of this but also says he'll bring them back by the hand of Cyrus the Persian/Mede. That's exactly what happened. What's strange is that God's telling them this through Isaiah who lived well over 100 years before it all happened!

Understanding the passage

Read 42:18-25. Who is making Israel suffer?

Why are they being made to suffer?

Read 43:1-8. What will God do for his people?

Read 44:13-17. What's so foolish about idolatry? How is God different to the idols?

Read 44:25-45:7. What do these verses tell us about God's power?

Who controls Cyrus? How much say does Cyrus have in the events? Why does that happen (v3, 4, 6)?

Read 45:21-25. Why is it good that God's in control?

What's the right response to this God?

Thinking it through

Read Ephesians 1:3-10. How has God used his power and control over history?

How can we be sure that God's plans will succeed?

Why is it comforting that God's in complete control?

8: Isaiah 52:13-53:12 – He bore the sin of many

Getting Started

What do people think are the biggest problems in their lives and the world?

Throughout Isaiah Israel and Judah's biggest problem has been their sin. God isn't picking on them. He's actually dealing with them as they deserve. For Judah, the final blow seemed to come when it was announced that they would be exiled to Babylon. In the passage last week though hope was restored as God promised to raise up his 'annointed' (a.k.a messiah/Christ) to rescue his people from Babylon. This Christ was none other than the pagan king Cyrus the Persian who, after conquering Babylon, sent the people of Judah back home (See Ezra:1-4). This seemed to put an end to the punishment for their sin. The only problem was, they still kept on sinning, and so things once again looked bleak for their future. If only there was someone who could deal fully and finally with the problem of sin!

Understanding the passage

Read 52:13-15. What hope does this servant bring that hasn't been seen before in Isaiah (see 6:8-10)?

Read 53:1-12

In v2-3, How is this servant different to what you'd expect from a great leader?

In v4-6, In what way do God's people benefit from this servant?

Why is he stricken by God?

We saw last week how God shaped history to save his people. He did that in an even more dramatic way through his suffering servant. Follow up these New Testament references. In what way do they match the description of the suffering servant in v7-9 and show us who Isaiah is talking about?

Luke 22:63-64

John 19:6-11

Luke 22:37

Luke 23:41

Matthew 27:38

Mark 15:43-46

In v10-11, why is the innocent one being treated like this?

What will happen after the Lord has crushed him?

In v11-12, how will God reward his suffering servant?

Thinking it through

How does Philippians 2:6-11 show the fulfilment of Isaiah 53?

How can this passage give us confidence in Jesus/God (See Isaiah 41:26-27)?

How can this passage give us confidence when we consider our sin/guilt?

HHISTORICAL NOTE: The first ever recorded one-to-one evangelistic Bible study was done on this passage between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39. More on Ethiopian eunuchs next week!

9: Isaiah 55:1-56:8; 60:1-62:12 – The year of the Lord’s Favour

Getting started

In 3 minutes, think of as many ways as you can that people suffer in this world (depressing start, I know, but it gets better!)

So far in Isaiah we have seen God punish his people and the nations, and announce salvation for his people. There hasn’t been much hope though if you aren’t a descendant of Abraham. These passages listed in the title change all that.

Today’s study is a little different. There’s a lot to read in the passages listed above, though it’s hard to read them without your heart bursting for joy. Today, we’re going to have a quick skim through some of the things these passages mention and then see how God fulfils that in the rest of the Bible.

Understanding the passage

Read 55:1-7. Who is this invitation to? Who else is invited?

Read 55:12-13. What hope is offered?

Read 56:3-8. Why is this passage so special? See Deuteronomy 23:1-3 to see how a eunuch might understand this Isaiah passage.

Where will the people’s worship be centred (v7)?

Read 60:10-12, 18-22. What does God promise about Jerusalem?

Read 61:1-3. What sort of things should be expected in the year of the Lord’s favour?

Thinking it through

Read Luke 4:16-22. What do you think is so shocking to the people of Nazareth?

Read John 2:13-22. How does Jesus radically shift the attention away from the Jerusalem temple?

Read Acts 8:26-39. This man went to the temple of God in Jerusalem to worship God, as suggested in Isaiah. He would have come away disappointed though. As a foreigner and

eunuch he wouldn't have been able to get very close to the heart of the temple at all! Given what we read in John though, how is the Isaiah prophecy about eunuch's fulfilled in this man?

Read Revelation 21:1-4; 22:22-5. What do you see in these verses that show God will finally bring a complete fulfilment to the Isaiah prophecy?

Given the exercise we started with, what message do you think we have for the world that they might appreciate?

10: Isaiah 65-66 – A new heavens and a new earth

Getting started

Why do people get tricked into thinking that this world is all there is?

Virtually everything we've seen in Isaiah so far has been God acting through what might be called the normal course of history. At the end of the prophecy God speaks about something truly cosmic. The beginning of a brand new world beyond history!

Understanding the passage

Read 65:1-10

What charges does God lay at the feet of his people?

What does he promise to do to these evil ones?

What does God also promise to do?

Read 65:17-25

What are the bad things of this world that will be overturned in the new heavens and new earth?

In 66:2, what are the qualities God wants in people?

Read 66:18-24

What will everyone see/Who is at the centre of the new heavens and new earth?

What will happen to those who've rejected God?

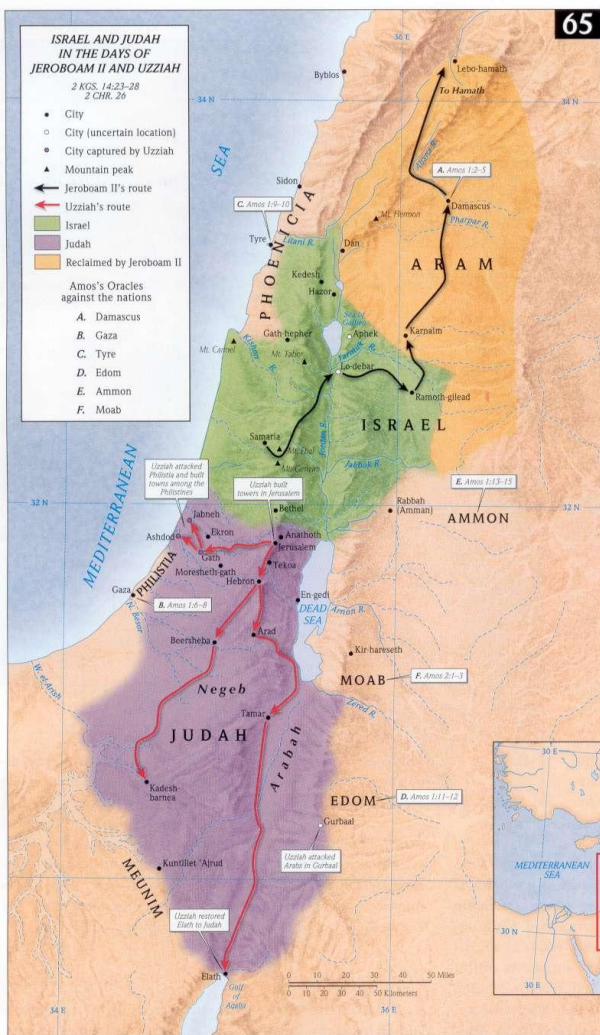
Thinking it through

In what you've learnt throughout Isaiah, what gives you confidence that God will actually establish a new heavens and new earth for his people and cast the evil into the eternal fire?

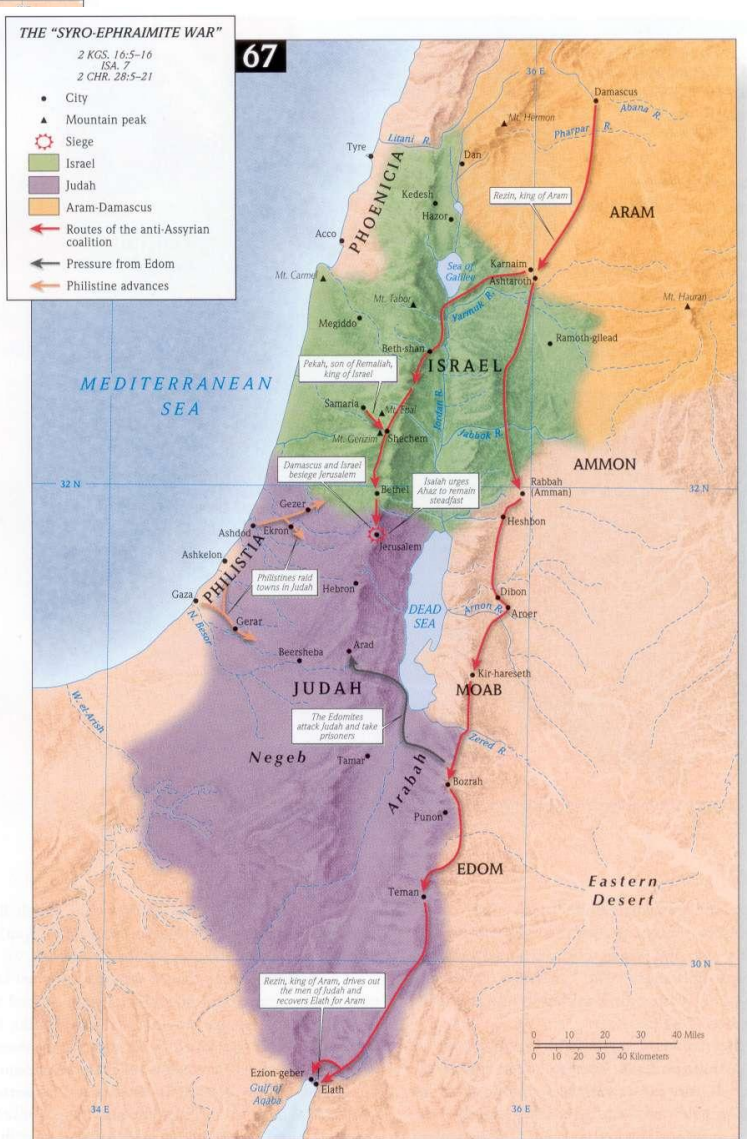
Given that this is what God is going to do in the future, what is most important now? What's unimportant?

What's the biggest thing you've learnt from Isaiah this term?

Appendix Maps



Map 1: After King Solomon's reign the nation of Israel was split into two; Israel in the North and Judah in the south. Judah had some kings who served God but Israel didn't have any. Nevertheless, in the 8th Century, God had mercy on them by giving each a king who would have very long reigns, strengthen their borders and provide peace and stability. Jeroboam II ruled in Israel for 41 years from about 793 BC to 753 BC. Uzziah ruled in Judah for 52 years from about 791 BC. This map shows how Jeroboam also gained some level of control over the kingdom of Aram, also known as Syria, or just Damascus after its capital city.

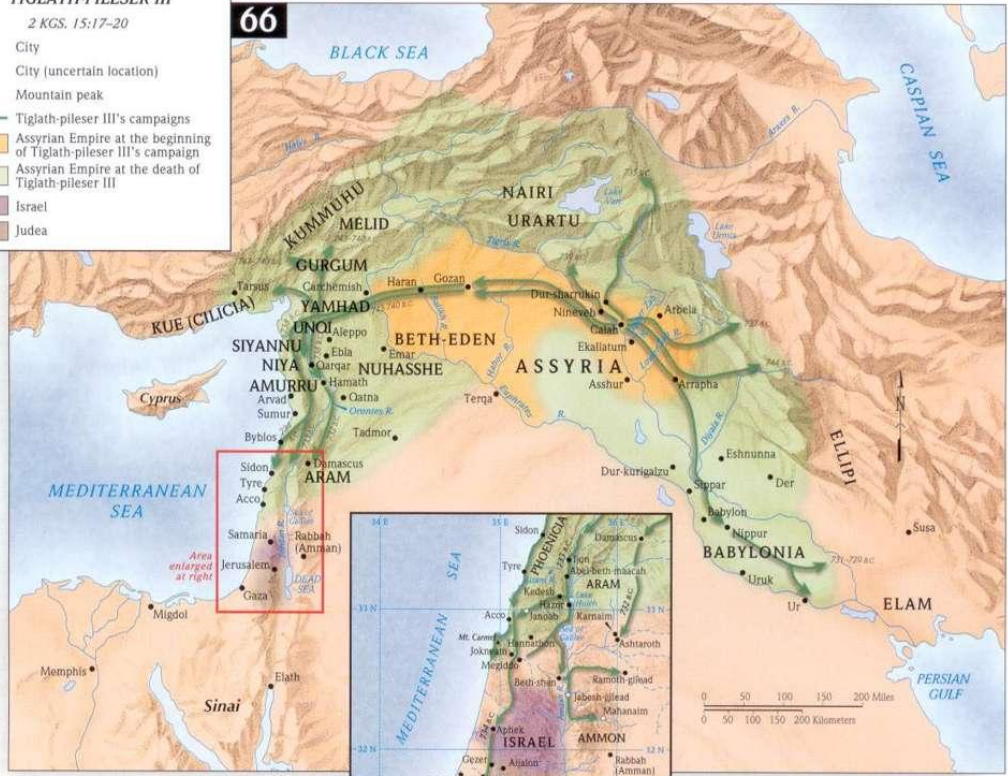


Map 2: By 734 BC Aram (AKA Syria or Damascus) was again independent. All of the relatively small nations in this area were panic stricken by the rising power of the huge Assyrian empire (see maps below). The kings of Aram and Israel formed an anti-Assyrian alliance but Judah refused. Aram and Israel invaded Judah in order to install a puppet king and bring Judah into the alliance. Isaiah encouraged King Ahaz to trust God to look after him and the nation (chapter 7). Instead, Ahaz asked Assyria for help. Assyria obliged but from then on Judah was an Assyrian puppet state, forced to pay homage and tribute to their king. Hezekiah would later rebel against Assyria and put his trust in God for protection. The result is seen in Isaiah 37-38.

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE UNDER TIGLATH-PILESER III

- 2 KGS. 15:17-20
- City
 - City (uncertain location)
 - ▲ Mountain peak
 - ← Tiglath-pileser III's campaigns
 - Assyrian Empire at the beginning of Tiglath-pileser III's campaign
 - Assyrian Empire at the death of Tiglath-pileser III
 - Israel
 - Judea

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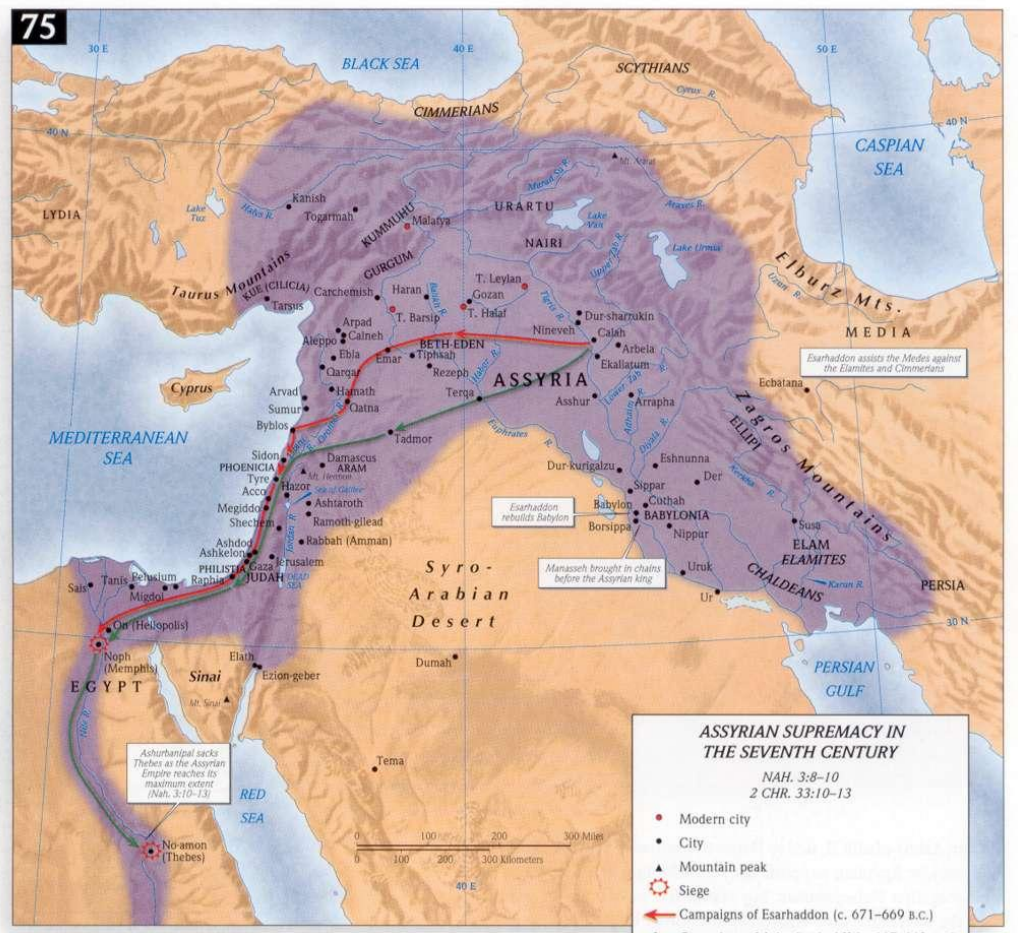


Map 3: This map shows the aggressive expansionism of Tiglath-Pileser III whom Ahaz asked for help against Aram and Israel. In his campaigns he made Israel a vassal state, meaning they had to pay large amounts of tribute.

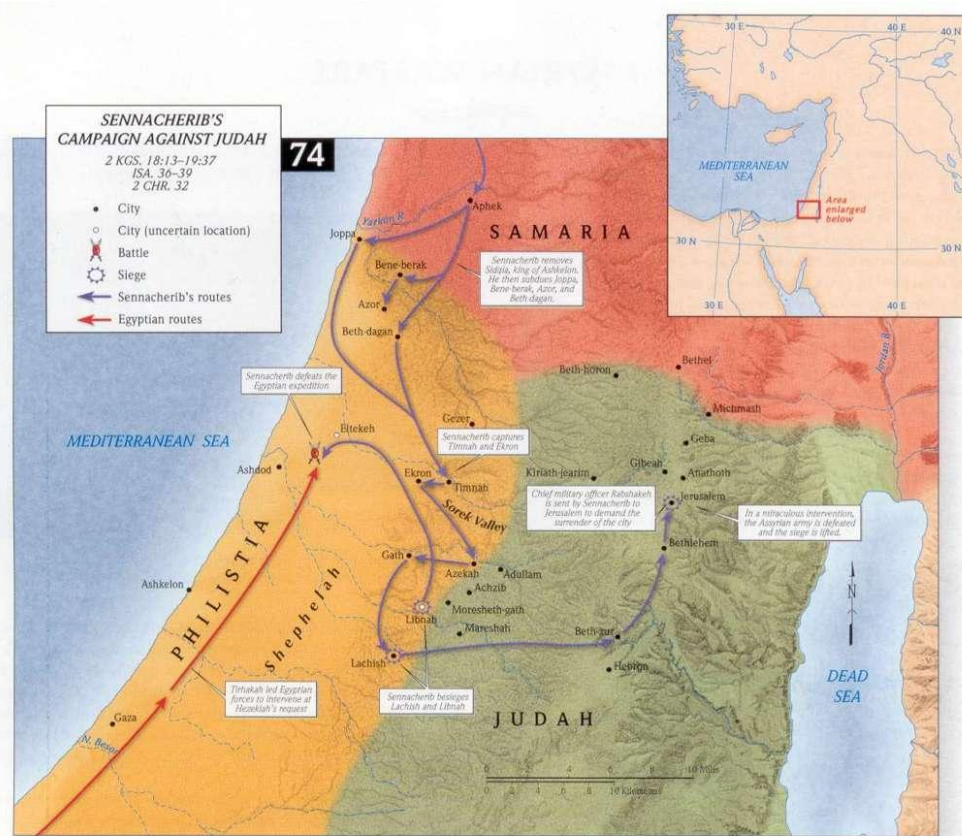
Map 4: Hoshea, king of Israel decided to rebel against Assyria. He stopped paying tribute and asked Egypt for protection (instead of God!!) In 722 BC Shalmanessar of Assyria invaded and dispersed the Israelites throughout the Assyrian empire. He also brought other conquered people and settled them in Israel. They married the remaining Israelites and this mixed race became known as the Samaritans. 2 Kings 17 makes it clear that this all happened because the Israelites had worshipped idols, not God.



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- ASSYRIAN SUPREMACY IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY**
 NAH. 3:8-10
 2 CHR. 33:10-13
- Modern city
 - City
 - ▲ Mountain peak
 - ⊙ Siege
 - ← Campaigns of Esarhaddon (c. 671-669 B.C.)
 - ← Campaigns of Ashurbanipal II (c. 667-663 B.C.)
 - Assyrian Empire at its zenith



Map 5: King Hezekiah of Judah also revolted against Assyria. The Assyrians conquered the entire land and laid siege to Jerusalem, fulfilling Isaiah 8:7-8. The key difference though was that Hezekiah put his trust in God, and the results are seen in Isaiah 37-38.

Map 6: Eventually (after the time of Isaiah) the Babylonian empire overcame Assyria and became the new world power. Judah made the same mistake as Israel of worshipping foreign gods, not the one true God. They rebelled against Babylon. In 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, tore down the walls and temple of Jerusalem and deported all but the poorest people back to Babylon. Unlike the people of Israel they did not intermarry (well, the godly ones didn't!). Later, God raised up the Persian empire (the Medes and the Persians) which conquered Babylon almost overnight. King Cyrus of Persia sent the Jews back to their homeland in fulfillment of Isaiah 44:28-45:5.

