

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH – CHAPTERS FIFTY-SEVEN TO SIXTY-ONE

After declaring the climax of his message in chapter 53 of the Suffering Servant Saviour, Isaiah deals with a series of questions about how this good news will work for us in practice.

Each of the chapters which follow builds on the fact of the cross. As you go through chapter by chapter, I urge you follow this scheme.

1. Having read the chapter, what is a main theme or title which sums it up?
2. How does it draw on another Old Testament story? Why?
3. Where is this chapter quoted or referred to in the New Testament?
4. How does its New Testament use help to explain Isaiah?
5. What now is the main message of this chapter?
6. What does it tell us about Jesus?
7. How do all the chapters 54-66 fit together to tell a story?
8. What will the effect of these chapters be on my life?

First Isaiah uses an image common in the Bible of the woman who was desperate because she felt unfulfilled as a wife having had no children. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's wife and Elizabeth all come to mind. The story however which best fits in 54:1 is that of Hannah, the much loved but childless wife of Elkanah whose other wife had produced many children.(I Sam.1) She is encouraged in 54:2 to plan an extension to the tent for the children who were coming. Mary would be inspired by her response in Lk.1 to magnify God for the amazing news she had received of the Son who would be born. Israel in the Old Testament and the church of Jesus Christ in the New Testament would be the larger fulfilment of this promise if they were faithful to their husband, the Lord Himself. When Isaiah speaks of the husband who would also be the Maker and Redeemer the picture which comes to mind is that of Ruth who would be redeemed by Boaz to become her husband and ultimately the means of producing Jesus.(Ruth 4) We were separated from our 'husband' because of unfaithfulness like Gomer, the wife of Hosea, but ultimately re-united with him through forgiveness and redemption.(Hos.1-3) The one motive for our redemption is the love of God.(Jn.3:16) We will never be separated from Him again.(Heb.13:5) Just like God's promise to Noah of no more flood, the Lord promises us we shall never again be judged. Having come back to Him as His bride again we will be established and valued for ever like the heavenly city in Rev.21. We will be taught by God, no longer reliant on human 'experts'.(Jn.6:45; I Jn.2:27) We are now invincible. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.(Rom.8:39)

Using now a different picture Isaiah goes on,(55:1) to describe his message of the Saviour as the one which will alone satisfy the inner thirst and hunger which all men have for the truth.(Jn.4:14; 7:37-39) He warns us however of the need to choose our spiritual 'food' carefully because there will be many messages around which are false and unsatisfying. His food will satisfy for ever!(Acts 13:34) As a result we can be his witnesses to all the nations.(Matt.28:18-20) He will glorify us,(Jn.17) that is show

Himself in us in such a way that all nations will be drawn to Him. Therefore we are urged to seek Him with the promise that we will find Him.(Matt.7:7) There is an essential condition, true repentance. As we are fed by Him we will be led into a way of thinking, a wisdom, which is so much greater than that of the smartest people on earth.(I Cor.2) We now have a message for others which will never be wasted even if they do not seem to be listening for the moment.(Matt.24:35; II Cor.9:10) We will see abundant fruit.

How then are we to live in the light of this message?(56) Justly and faithfully. Foreigners who previously felt left out of Israel will be drawn to Him. Eunuchs who felt they could never be fruitful will discover how effectively God can use them like the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 who was also a foreigner. He became the means of his whole nation learning of the love of God, beginning with the reading of Isaiah 53. He therefore came to have over the centuries, many sons and daughters in Christ. In the light of this message, on the basis of the cross, all of us will be welcome in His presence. Jesus quoted 56:7 when in righteous anger He reclaimed His temple from the traders who had turned it into a market place and replaced its message of grace by hard bargaining.(Matt.21:13) The message of the cross would be the way Jesus would call His other sheep from all over the world.(Jn.10:16) But wild beasts would be awaiting the opportunity to take the sheep if the shepherds were preoccupied with their own wealth and comfort.

Q.1 How does chapter 57 contrast the heart, the behaviour and the fate of the believer and the unbeliever? What does God look for in anyone seeking His peace?(57)

Q.2 Why does religious observance often go unnoticed and unheard by God? How then should we express our love for God? How will He respond?(58)

Q.3 Why according to chapter 59 may our prayers go unheard? Who are the main victims of our sin? How does the New Testament develop the explanation of sin given in this chapter?(Mk.7:21,22; Lk.1:79; Rom.3:13-15) What is the link between our treatment of the needy and our relationship with God? How will God respond? How are we in Eph.6:14,17 to be His means of carrying this message to the world?(59)

Q.4 Compare chapter 60 with Rev.21. What are the features in common between them? How does the setting of Rev.21 explain what Isaiah was anticipating? How does this chapter encourage us as we begin to appreciate the meaning of the cross of Christ?(60)

Q.5 How did Jesus explain chapter 61?(Lk.4:18) What would be the consequence of the Messiah's coming for different groups of needy people? To what extent is this happening in our world today? What may those who are part of the Messiah's programme expect? How should we respond to God in the light of these promises?(61)