

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH – CHAPTERS FORTY-NINE TO FIFTY-THREE

In the first part of Isaiah, chapters 1-39, he set the scene by explaining our problem, rebellion, and its consequences.(1) He presented God's answer in Christ, pictured in a whole variety of ways.(2-12) He described his own meeting with God, conversion and calling.(6) He illustrated his message by reference to Israel's neighbours whose behaviour and attitudes had constantly caused trouble as those same attitudes do in us.(13-35) Finally he demonstrated how trusting God would work out in the real life situations of King Hezekiah's reign.(36-39) Now they were ready to hear in greater detail the good news of the One who would come.

THE SHEPHERD SAVIOUR

Before Jesus' public ministry began, He would be heralded by a messenger, John the Baptist,(Matt.3, Lk.3, Jn.1) who would use 40:3-5 to introduce himself as only 'the voice' who would point them to 'the Word'. He would be recognisable as a shepherd-king,(40:9-11) as a wise Creator,(40:12-17) as the all-powerful God who is so much greater than our man-made gods,(40:18-26) and as the Lord who waits to be our strength for the greatest challenges of life.(40:27-31)

THE SATISFYING SAVIOUR

In Isaiah's time, powerful empires arose in the East, which God allowed to remind His people that their only security was in Him. They would try to rely on each other for support.(41:1-7) They needed only to remember that as God's servants they could always rely on Him, their Redeemer, who would keep them at peace, strong in the face of hostility and able to enjoy Him.(41:8-16) He would give the water of His Spirit to the thirsty,(Jn.4:10-15; 7:37) and answers about life such as no other god could give.(41:17-29)

THE SERVING SAVIOUR

Israel had been told they would be the Lord's servant, but now they were in for a big surprise. The Chosen One from heaven would also be a Servant, not a powerful conqueror as they had supposed. He would be His Father's delight and empowered by the Holy Spirit to show the world justice instead of oppression and exploitation, but He would do it quietly and gently.(42:1-4; Matt.12:18-20) The Almighty Creator would take Him by the hand to make Him the light of the world,(Jn.9:5) and the one who cured the blind,(Matt.11:5) released the prisoners,(Lk.4:18) and delivered a new message.(42:5-9; Jn.13:34) His promised coming would be a cause for joyous celebration for those who welcome Him,(42:10-13) but also for quiet agony like a woman in labour,(Gal:4:19) because so many would be blind to the truth, preferring useless idols.(42:14-17) Sadly the blind and the deaf for whom Christ would come are often those who are supposed to be His servants whose wilful disobedience has made them the prisoners of habits.(42:18-22) Consequently with the good news also comes the bad news of judgement on those who refuse to listen.(42:23-25)

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

But what kind of Servant would He be? The Chosen One who was sent to be a Servant will suffer, and we His servants will suffer too, but Jesus and we can be absolutely confident of God's protection and presence because of His love.(43:1-7; Dan.3:16-18) As His servants we are first to be witnesses that He is our Creator, and Saviour.(43:8-13) He would rescue and redeem His people from future slavery in Babylon.(43:14-21) Sadly those to whom Isaiah wrote had continued to sin rather than responding in grateful sacrifice.(43:22-24) Forgiveness and cleansing from all our sin is still being offered.(43:25-28)

THE SPIRIT-FILLED SERVANT

The coming Servant and we, His servants, will have the Spirit of God poured on us to satisfy our inner thirst so that we will know we belong to Him.(44:1-5) We will know that He is absolutely unique and the only foundation of our lives. Consider by contrast the futility of worshipping self-made gods.(44:6-20) Remember and celebrate our forgiveness and how wonderfully His word makes sense of a confused world. King Cyrus will be a picture of the coming Saviour.(44:21-28)

THE SAVING SERVANT

Isaiah's reference to Cyrus is one of the most remarkable and specific prophecies of the Bible. Isaiah died around 681BC. Cyrus the Persian in partnership with Darius the Mede only appeared on the scene as the conquerors of Babylon in 539BC.(II Chron.36:22,23) Cyrus would deliver the Jews from captivity by offering them the opportunity to return to their country and rebuild the temple which they started to do in 536BC.(Ezra 1; Dan.10:1) This would end the 70 years of captivity which began with the first invasion of Jerusalem when Daniel and the other young men were taken prisoner in 605BC. As the saviour of the Jews at that time, Cyrus also becomes a picture of the Saviour of the world who would come more than 500 years later. He is called God's 'anointed' which in Hebrew is the word 'Messiah' and in Greek the word 'Christ'. His role will be to show that when God works He is Almighty and unique. He is the Creator of the universe but He knows us personally.(45:1-8) To argue with Him is like a lump of clay trying to tell the potter his business. Cyrus will show something of the character of Christ and His free grace.(45:9-13) When we trust Him, those who thought God was unknowable will realise who He is and the emptiness of idolatry and how simple it is to meet Him.(45:14-19) Some will turn to Him but everyone eventually will have to acknowledge Him when He returns in glory.(45:20-25; Rom.14:11; Phil.2:10)

THE SPECIAL SERVANT

False ideas about God, idols, cannot help us when we are struggling. Only God can and He will carry us for the whole of our lives. How can we possibly compare a self made god who does not answer us with the real God? Idols are purposeless; God knows what He plans for us and will do it completely. Only the stubborn refuse to face up to the obvious!(46) Babylon was allowed by God to enslave Judah to teach them the consequences of not trusting Him, but God had no intention of leaving the Jews in Babylon for ever. He would eventually send Cyrus the Persian to teach the Babylonians the emptiness of their arrogance, and self-belief, and the powerlessness of their superstitions.(47) Outward religion that claims credit for our idols for that which God did is only self deception. It is just another form of rebellion. We misinterpret God's patience as meaning approval. We fail to recognise the Son of God when He comes. We miss out on the blessing, the freedom and the satisfaction He promises.(48)

49-50 Q.8. Pick out all the ways in which these 2 chapters describe the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and then particularly explain His relationship with His Father, His disciples, and His enemies.

51 Q.9. Those who should have been serving the Lord are asleep! How does Jesus use the same idea in the New Testament?(Matt.26:40-46) How are we asleep as Christians? What wakes us up?

52:1-12 Q.10. Where is verse 7 quoted in the New Testament?(Rom.10:15) What does this chapter teach us is the first task of a faithful servant?

52:13-53:12 Q.11. God's servant would die on the cross. List all the clues this section gives us as to why He did it. Which New Testament character was led to Christ on the basis of this chapter?(Acts 8:27-39)