

## QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH – CHAPTERS FIFTY-FOUR TO FIFTY-SIX

From the illustration of Cyrus, the Persian King, Isaiah moves us on to the real Messiah. God gave Him His name, Jesus, while still in the womb of Mary.(Matt.1:21) From His mouth would come the word of God, the one weapon by which He would defeat the enemy and set His people free.(Heb.4:12; Eph.6:17; Rev.1:16, 2:12,16; 19:15) The Father would protect Him from Satan's attempts to destroy Him.(Matt.2:19-23) He would be aimed like an arrow to its target.(Hab.3:11) God would reveal His glory, what He is really like, in the life of Jesus.(Jn.14:8-14; 17:1-5) When His disciples deserted Him in the Garden of Gethsemane it must have seemed like Jesus' mission had failed. Jesus would be sent first to save Israel and then to be a light to the nations,(Jn:9:5; Matt.28:19,20) but it would only happen as He lived entirely in the Father's strength.(Jn.5:19,30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10) He would be despised and abhorred on the cross but one day the whole world would have to acknowledge Him.(Phil.2:7-11) At God's chosen time, Christ would come to save all who would listen.(II Cor.6:2) As His witnesses it is our privilege to tell them now is the time to trust Him.(49:1-13) Some people will complain that God has forgotten them, that their problems are too difficult for God, but they will be beautifully surprised by what He will do, by how royally they will be cared for. Nothing is too hard for God!(49:14-26)

As a nation Israel had been unfaithful to God, her 'husband', and so deserved to be 'divorced', and the people to become slaves. A world without God is a barren, dead and dark place.(Matt.27:45) The message entrusted to Christ's disciples can revive the weary as He speaks through us.(Matt:11:28) However to make this possible, Jesus would have to suffer terrible humiliation and pain.(Matt.26:67; 27:30) He could endure because He trusted Himself to the Father.(Lk.22:41-43) We can either trust Him to keep us in hard times or learn the hard way when we try to resist in our own strength.(50)

The next two chapters are a series of exhortations to Isaiah's readers to respond to the Messiah – Listen to me... Pay attention to Me... Lift up your eyes... Listen to Me... Awake, awake... Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself!... Please hear this... Awake, awake... Shake yourself... Break forth... Depart, depart... Behold, My servant... Faith begins with hearing the word of God.(Rom.10:17) He tells us who we are in Christ, what He promises, what He has done already for us, and what He plans to do in us and through us. He tells us also the consequence of refusing Him. He closes this section with an extraordinary contradiction of the One who will be great, yet terribly ill-treated.(51,52)

The mystery at the end of chapter 52 is soon solved in what has become one of the best known chapters in the entire Old Testament. This special Messenger from the Father who initially showed such promise would be despised and rejected by the human race.(Mark 10:33,34; Jn.1:10; 12:38; Rom.10:16) Why would this be? His horrible ill-treatment would be allowed because He would be taking the guilt of our sin as He was crucified in our place. His suffering can heal us.(Matt.8:17; Heb.9:28; Rom.4:25; I Cor.15:3; Heb.5:8; I Pet.2:24,25) All of us need the benefit of what He did because we

are all just as guilty. Not only would He suffer but He would remain silent through the whole ordeal, never excusing Himself or expressing anger at His persecutors.(Matt.26:63; 27:12-14; Acts 8:32,33; Rev.5:6) He would die between two thieves,(Matt.27:38) but would be buried in the tomb of a rich man.(Matt.27:57-60) He was without sin in all He did and said.(I Pet.2:22) God approved of what happened because by His death He became a sacrifice for our sin.(Jn.1:29) But beyond the grave He would live on in resurrection to see the joy of many being made right with God through what He did.(Rom.5:18,19) He would be the greatest man who ever lived on earth, dying between two robbers yet saving countless sinners.(53)

Q.1 Assuming that chapter 54 is based on the frequent Bible illustration of the Lord as the husband and His people as the bride,(Eph.5:22-32; Rev.21:2) what Old Testament characters and their stories is Isaiah drawing on? What in each case was their problem? What was the reason for it? How was the relationship to be restored? What would result from restoration?(54)

Q.2 Isaiah's illustration moves now to food and drink. How is spiritual bread and water used by Jesus in the New Testament to describe the means by which we grow in Him?(Jn.4:10-14; 31-34; 6:26-35; 7:37-39; Matt.4:4) What according to chapter 55 do we have to do for spiritual 'feeding' to happen? How will doing so change our thinking and the direction of our lives?(55)

Q.3 How will discovering the Lord as our husband, and our bread and water, change our behaviour? What hope does chapter 56 give to those outside of Israel in Old Testament and those outside the Christian church in the New Testament? What warning does this chapter give to those who refuse to look to Christ?(56)