

## August 1 : Scriptures Isaiah 40-42

### SUMMARY

Whew! After all those judgments, God now speaks to Isaiah about comforting Israel. Yehovah gives Isaiah a message to comfort the Jews once they get to their prophesied Babylonian judgment/exile (Isaiah 39).

To bring you up to speed on the layout of the book, chapters 1 through 35 are Isaiah's prophecies about Israel and Judah. Chapters 36 through 39 are prose which is the King Hezekiah narratives. Chapters 40 through 66 are Isaiah's Book of Comfort. I like how my Study Bible lays the three main sections out – The purpose of peace (40:1-48:22), the Prince of Peace (49:1-57:21), and the program of peace (58:1-66:24). There are many remarkable prophecies in this last part of Isaiah both in their scope and length of time to fulfill some of them. The Messiah prophecies of Isaiah 53 are stunning! There are four Servant songs in this part of Isaiah, and I'll talk about them when we get there. Many say they point to Israel, but prophetic eyes see them as pointing directly to Jesus. Let's get to it.

Starting with Isaiah 40, I realize there is just so much to write, and it's like going through all of the nuggets in proverbs. So, I'll try to summarize the chapter and point out a few goodies along the way. I pray that God will speak to you through His text and open your mind and heart to what He's saying to both his people and us about his plan and His Messiah.

Even though Isaiah prophesied this word about 110 years before Judah's exile in 586 B.C., he speaks to the future exiles as if the Babylonian Exile was already happening. Israel's exile was because of their sin, and the Babylonian "time-out" was their covenant punishment. In Isaiah 40, Isaiah speaks of the Lord's punishment as being accomplished (40:1-2). It's time for the Exiles to come home. In a sense, Isaiah is speaking comfort in advance to the people to give them hope in their exile of a future return. Isaiah equates the Exiles' return to God's glory returning to Israel. The Lord will smooth the way for them (40:3-5), and His promise will not be broken (40:6-8). I love the picture of the almighty God approaching Jerusalem and Mount Zion, leading the Exiles as a shepherd leads his sheep (40:9-11).

The next part is a slap in Babylon's face and any other nation that thinks it can thwart God (40:12-17). Their idols are nothing as well. What nation's idols can stand in Yehovah's way? None. He is the Supreme God over all creation, and there's none like Him (40:18-26). And yet Isaiah points out the despair of the Exiles. "There's no hope of

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return," they may be saying during their exile (40:27), but Isaiah says there is. They just need to hope and wait for God, for he will come through on their behalf (40:28-31).

Chapter 41 continues Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 40. The Lord announces that He's raising a new nation from the east that will move against the other countries and their idols. That empire was the Persian empire, with Cyrus as their king. But even though Cyrus is leading the army, God is leading the Persians. So, let's not make a mistake about who is in charge here. But while the nations panic at the approaching Persian army from the east (that will take over Babylon in five 39 BC), God reassures his people, "Israel, his servant, Jacob, whom he has chosen, the descendant of Abraham, his friend," that they are still His people and He is their God. "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand" (41:10). The last line is excellent. The Lord holds Israel with His strength, so who can take them from Him? No one! The Lord will call them from their exile, and no one will stop them.

God's people have nothing to fear from the enraged surrounding nations because Yehovah Himself will put an end to those who contend with Israel (40:12). And again, Yehovah holds them and protects His people by His power (40:13). The Lord will even use His people to execute His judgment on the other nations. Although the Lord's people are poor and needy, Yehovah will step in and prepare the way for them. He'll provide ample water for His thirsty people, which is a big deal in the Middle East, where life hangs on whether there's enough water. That's why this is such a detailed description of lush, water-soaked land as a sign of God's favor toward His people (40:18-20). The rest of the chapter is about God slamming the nations' idols. His case is that he can tell the future, but they can't. Therefore, the idols are trash, and anyone who relies on them is "detestable." Yehovah will call forth the Persians who will march over other rulers "as if they were mud." Yehovah is the first and only one to announce it, so there (40:27-29)!

In chapter 42, we reach the first of Isaiah's four Servant Songs – Isaiah 42:1–9; Isaiah 49:1–13; Isaiah 50:4–11; and Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Who is this "Servant of the Lord?" As I said before, many interpret this Servant as the nation of Israel, which is true partly because God called Israel His servant. But I like the way gotquestions.org puts it.

"Isaiah initially identifies God's servant as Israel (41:8; 44:1–2), who serves as God's witness (43:10) and as a light to the Gentiles. Yet Israel could not fulfill this mission: Israel was deaf, blind (42:19), and in need of God's forgiveness (44:21–22). Israel failed again and again. *By contrast, God's Servant, the Messiah, faithfully completes all the work He is given to do (cf. Luke 13:32; John 17:4). The Servant of the Lord is God's faithful and true witness to*

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*humanity*" ([gotquestions.org/Servant-Songs.html](http://gotquestions.org/Servant-Songs.html), italics author). So, how does this first Servant Song describe Jesus? God will strengthen His Servant and will delight in him. The Holy Spirit will anoint the Servant. This anointing is unique because only Jesus has been anointed by the Holy Spirit, not national Israel. All Israel will receive the Holy Spirit but not yet. That's not until Jesus returns and the messianic reign begins (Joel 2:28-32; Romans 11:25-26). God's Servant will act justly. He won't be boisterous or obnoxious and get up in your face. He will be merciful and tender toward people who are hurt and those with weak trust in God. He'll be strong and steadfast in his mission to bring justice to the earth. God's most incredible justice is salvation.

Furthermore, God's Servant will specifically be called by God and directed by Him to be a covenant for the people. This description is so clearly about Jesus because He's the core of the new covenant. God's Servant will also be a light to the nations. What this means is he will bring God's revelation to the world. This revelation of God will help people see him and free those prisoners to spiritual death, freeing those trapped in Sheol, the holding place of the righteous dead. This freedom happened when Jesus' sacrifice opened the way to heaven, and the righteous dead could now live in His Father's presence (42:1-9). A pretty powerful description of Jesus, right?

A magnificent song of praise begins in verse 10, which praises God for acting as a warrior on His people's behalf. Isaiah depicts God as having kept silent, but now the Lord rises to act. He takes down the high places and prepares a way for his blind people to return to him. Remember, Isaiah's message was to his people who were blind to their God because of idolatry. Now God acts on their behalf to lead them back to him. "This is what I will do for them, and I will not abandon them" (42:16). But those who stay with their idols will be ashamed.

When Isaiah began his ministry in chapter 6, he asked the Lord how long he had to prophesy. The Lord said until his judgment upon his people was completed. To keep the people of Israel from turning back to God and thwarting God's purpose to punish them for idolatry, God would allow spiritual blindness to fall over them. As I said before, Isaiah's ministry was to speak God's truth to spiritually blind and deaf people, but they wouldn't repent until after their punishment. The last part of this chapter explains why God's punishment happened before his forgiveness and restoration for His people. "Who gave Jacob to the robber, and Israel to the plunderers (i.e., their exile)? Was it not the Lord? Have we not sinned against him? They were not willing to walk in his ways, and they would not listen to his instruction. So he poured out his furious anger and the power of war on Jacob. It surrounded him with fire, but he did not know it; it burned him, but he didn't take it to heart" (42:24-25). And at the end of today's reading, we leave Israel

“in the dark” and their captivity. Is there hope for God’s people? Yes. Tomorrow’s reading will show that there is!

### **INSIGHT**

Are the Servant Songs about both Israel and Jesus? Yes and no. While we can see Israel in the Servant Songs, there are parts of those songs that just can’t be applied to national Israel or the Jews. However, they can be applied easily to Jesus. Why the possible double interpretation and application? Because Jesus is the embodiment of what Yehovah wants Israel to be. So we could say about the Servant Songs, what God says about His servant, Israel, finds its fullest expression and ultimate fulfillment in His quintessential Servant, Jesus.

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## August 2 : Scriptures Isaiah 43-45

### SUMMARY

Chapter 43 opens with a grand opus on Israel's restoration from exile. As God went with them into their exile (41:10), so He will accompany them back to their land (43:2). Neither water nor fire will impede their return. Yehovah loved them so much that He was willing to give other nations to Cyrus in return for releasing His people (43:3-4). God's people will return from the north, south, east, and west. Why? Because Yehovah made them and what He makes belongs to Him. Verse 8 begins with a type of courtroom preceding. God's witnesses are His blind and deaf people, and He challenges the nations to "could tell the significance of past events" (43:9, HCSB commentary). God's witnesses to His existence are His people, though blind and deaf. The nations have no witnesses but blind and deaf idols that are nothing. When God acts, no one can stop Him (43:13).

This next part is incredible. "Because of you, I will send an army to Babylon and bring all of them as fugitives" (43:14). Think about this and understand what Yehovah is saying. Babylon's fall was centered on freeing a remnant of Israelites from Babylon's grasp. Under God's leadership, the Persians took down the entire Babylonian empire for the sake of a small group of God's people and turned some of the Babylonians into fugitives. God is going to do something new for His people. 43:16-17 describes the Egyptian exodus. But, Isaiah says, what God is doing for the exiles is a new exodus, but this one is from Babylon. There will be no crossing of waterways but crossing land with rivers, metaphorically of God providing for His people so they can return home safely. This was indeed the case with Nehemiah and Ezra.

Isaiah switches his prophetic eyes back to his present day. Israel has sinned because rather than bringing offerings, all the people have offered to God is their unrepentant sin. And yet, Yehovah, in His mercy, swept away their sin and forgave them even though their nature was to sin against Him. The Lord addressed their sins by punishing them, "So I defiled the officers of the sanctuary, and set Jacob apart for destruction and Israel for scorn" (43:28).

Chapter 44 opens with Yehovah addressing Israel as "Jacob, my servant." This verse is a case where "servant" doesn't mean Jesus. God's word to His chosen servant (43:1-2) is one of tremendous spiritual and physical renewal. As I read it, I see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit equated to rain which falls on the land and flows in streams that will bring forth the fruit of the earth. So God's Spirit will bring forth people who affirm that Yehovah is their God and He "owns" them.

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And what a God Yehovah is! Here in 44:7, we find one of the Lord's most distinguishing features. *He alone can foretell the future!* Let's see some broken down, god-wannabe idols to that. There is no God but Yehovah (43:8). Isaiah describes idolatry's utter ridiculousness. A man creates his "god" and then bows down to it. He burns the same wood to make bread as he used to make an idol and doesn't see how stupid that is. "No one comes to his senses; no one has the perception or insight to say, "I burned half of it in the fire, I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and ate. Should I make something detestable with the rest of it?" (44:19). God tells Israel through Isaiah to not forget how absurd idolatry is and to not forget their God, who will not forget them. He's forgiven their sins, so let Israel turn and embrace their God (44:21-23). Why? Because he is their almighty God, who made everything, who confounds those who seek other gods, foretells Judah and Jerusalem's restoration, opens the way for His people's return, and who calls *BY NAME the Persian king who will make it happen almost 180 years ahead of time.* (mic drop!)

Again, we hit a chapter number that messes with the flow of the text. Ignore it. Go back to the end of chapter 44 and read straight through. The subject is Cyrus and what the Lord will do for him. The Lord will go before Cyrus to blast his enemies and hand their leaders and kingdoms over to him. And this part blows my mind. God calls Cyrus by name in advance and strengthens him to gain victories so that he will know the God of Israel (45:3).

After defeating the Babylonians, I've sometimes wondered why Cyrus decided to send the Jews back home, loaded with gold and supplies, to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. First, God's prophet, Daniel, was already in Babylon and was one of three rulers when the city fell, and Daniel knew God's timeline for the Jews' exile. Furthermore, Isaiah's prophecy was already written down and likely taken to Babylon for preservation. It's possible that Daniel or someone in his circle presented this part of Isaiah's prophecy to Cyrus. If I was a king and someone read a nearly two-hundred-year-old scroll with a prophecy calling me by name and confirming all I had done – yeah! I'd sit up and take notice and let God's people go home and build a Temple for Him so they could pray for me. With all this said, go back and read 45:1-7 as if you were Cyrus hearing this for the first time. There is only one God. He's so powerful that He created light and darkness and causes success (for Cyrus) and disaster (for Babylon) at will.

There's a woe in verse 9 to those who would object to Yehovah using a pagan king to accomplish His work of restoring His people. Those objectors are likened to pots talking back to the potter or a child questioning their parents. Yeah, that doesn't work out so well. God does what He wants because He's the Sovereign who created everything

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(45:12) and can do with them as He pleases. Therefore, "I have stirred him up in righteousness, and will level all roads for him. He will rebuild my city, and set my exiles free, not for a price or a bribe," says the Lord of Armies" (45:13).

The rest of the chapter is about a coming time when the residents of the Nile region (Egypt and Cush) and an Arab people (Sabeans) will acknowledge Yehovah as the only God, Israel's God (45:14). Isaiah agrees. Even though God has hidden from humanity, He will humiliate idolaters who create their own gods that can't help them. But Yehovah will save His people. Yehovah again calls snarkily to the Gentiles who make idols to come before Him and present their case for the validity of their gods (45:20-21). What? Can't their idols predict the future as He can? Aww, too bad. That proves Yehovah is the only God of all creation; the heavens and the earth. Those who buck Him will be shamed. "All the descendants of Israel will be justified and find glory through the Lord" (45:25).

Has that last part ever happened in history? Have all the descendants of Israel been justified and found glory through the Lord?" No. This shows this prophecy has a "present, near future, and far future" application.

### INSIGHT

As I was reading through this today, especially chapter 45, I was reminded how so many Newer Testament writers drew on God's word in the Hebrew scriptures, the Older Testament. 45:23 has the phrase, "*Every knee will bow to me, every tongue will swear allegiance.*" The context is Yehovah declaring that He's the only God and daring anyone to come forward to prove Him wrong by their idols. That reminded me of what Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9-11. "For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." See the similarity? I wouldn't doubt if the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use Isaiah's words to refer people back to Isaiah's prophecy, implying Jesus is of the One True God. To bow the knee and confess is to swear allegiance to someone. Therefore, the parallel is clear, at least to me. As the world nations will pledge allegiance to Israel's God, the entire world will swear allegiance to Jesus, which is the same thing.

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## August 3 : Scriptures Isaiah 46-48

### SUMMARY

Chapter 46 continues the Lord's words through Isaiah of His incomparable majesty. No god is like Him, and all the idols are nothing before Him. Bel and Nebo are Babylonian gods; the image is the idols being taken captive after Babylon's defeat. It was common to take a defeated nation's idols as victory trophies (46:1-2, see 1 Samuel 5:1-5). While Babylon's idols go into captivity, Babylon's captives, the faithful remnant of Yehovah's people whom He's been protecting in exile, are set free from their captivity. I love the tenderness of 40:3-4, where the Lord says, "I've taken care of you your whole life, House of Jacob (Israel), and will continue into your old age." Yehovah can do that because He's the living God. The idols can do nothing. They won't even answer. They're just stupid wood and metal statues that can't talk or hear and can't do a dang thing for their makers. Yehovah, on the other hand, can tell the end from the beginning (40:10, revealing His eternity which the idols don't have) and is the divine Sovereign who calls for one nation to attack another to execute justice on the oppressor nation and restore His people to their land (40:11).

Chapter 47 is about Babylon's fall. But first, a few words about the Babylonians and the Chaldeans (47:1). How do they relate?

Here's a quick bit of info: "The Babylonians, formerly known as the Amorites, ended Sumerian rule in Mesopotamia around 1700 BCE to become another ancient civilization with far-reaching influence" ([mometrix.com/academy/early-mesopotamia-the-babylonians](http://mometrix.com/academy/early-mesopotamia-the-babylonians)).

"The Chaldeans were people who lived in southern Babylonia which would be the southern part of Iraq today. Sometimes the term Chaldeans is used to refer to Babylonians in general, but normally it refers to a specific semi-nomadic tribe that lived in the southern part of Babylon" ([gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org), "Chaldeans"). The designation "Chaldean" became synonymous with the name Babylon. There you go.

Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon/Chaldea starkly contrasts what the Babylonian empire will grow to be by the time it conquers Jerusalem and Judea. Babylonia's immense capital city, Babylon, had outer walls so wide a chariot could drive on them and make a U-turn. Those walls were so well fortified in Babylon that the city was nearly impregnable. However, there was a weak point. Babylon straddled the Euphrates River. The river flowed under the north city wall, through the city, and out under the south wall. If needed, the north and south river gates could be closed, forcing the river to split east and

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west, flow around the sides of the city, and rejoin on the south side. What was Babylon's weakness? The Persians diverted the Euphrates, and the army walked along the river bed under the wall. Babylon fell to the Persians in one night.

Now grasp how amazing Isaiah's prophecy is. He's foretelling Babylon's rise and fall. Yehovah will judge Babylon and bring the empire down because of how they treated God's people when He handed them over to the Babylonians for their exile punishment (47:6-7). Therefore, Babylon will fall in a day despite their reliance on occult practices (47:8-11). There is no hope (47:12-15).

In chapter 48, Yehovah says He will act on behalf of His exiled people, His stubborn and rebellious people. The Lord is telling Isaiah about this far in advance so that His people can't claim they knew it was coming or give glory to idols for their release (48:4-7). Nope. This far-reaching announcement is for God's glory and proof of His supremacy over idols. The biggest thing the Lord declares is that He loves Persian King Cyrus and will use him to defeat the Babylonians successfully (48:14-15). Yehovah reminds Israel that had they listened to Him, they would have seen the Abrahamic blessing of a multitude of offspring "as countless as the sand, and the offspring of your body like its grains" (48:19). But they didn't. However, Isaiah prophesies a time when God will say that it's time for the exiles to return home, and it will be like the time when the Lord redeemed His people from Egypt and led them home through the wilderness (48:21).

### INSIGHT

In our reading today, God declares He's the only God that exists. Period. As we've learned, there are lesser "gods," but that designation designates their supernatural nature rather than any claim to divinity on par with the One True God. "Remember what happened long ago, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and no one is like me" (46:9)

Yehovah's declaration leaves no wiggle room. Either He is the only God, or He isn't. If He isn't, then Allah (Islam) or Baal (Canaanite) or Osirus (Egyptian) or Gaia (ancient Greek), or any other god stands with or above Him. If He is, then all other gods are not gods but created supernatural beings created by Yehovah and are nothing compared to Him. But we know from the Bible that no other god matches His divine nature or characteristics.

And here's the one that's featured in our reading. "I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: my plan will take place, and I will do all my will" (46:10). That is a hallmark of the Almighty One True God. He knows from the

beginning how everything will end. He knows the end from the start and everything in between. He sets His plan in motion and ensures it succeeds according to His will. Can Allah do that? No. Can any other god do that? No. So, if someone says their god is on par with Yehovah, challenge them to prove it by showing how their god has Yehovah's level of knowledge. Then take them to the Bible and show them the many prophecies God made through His prophets and how He brought them to pass. Then tell them about the prophecies and the things yet to come – like death and judgment. Ask them if they would like to take a moment to “switch sides” to the Supreme God.

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## August 4 : Scriptures Isaiah 49-52

### SUMMARY

Chapter 49 opens with someone speaking about God's servant. This part is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Servant Song (49:1-13). Who is it? At first, it sounds like Isaiah is talking about himself. But when we come to verse 3, we find it's Israel, God's servant. However, some things God says about His servant sound like they would fit more with the Father speaking to His Son, Jesus, because Israel wouldn't be able to do the things spoken. That would be things like, "And now, says the Lord, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him so that Israel might be gathered to him" (49:5) and "It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth" (49:6). So is it Jesus or the nation of Israel? Both, I believe. God called the nation of Israel to be a light to the nations. The Gentile nations had turned their back on God at Babel (Genesis 11), so the Lord created a people for Himself; He used an elderly man and an infertile elderly woman to miraculously create a family line that would expand into the people of Israel over many generations. Among all the nations on the earth, only Israel was created by a miracle, hand-picked by God to accomplish His task of revealing Himself to the rest of the Gentile nations. The light of this revelation made Israel a "light for the nations" (49:6). However, Jesus was the fullest revelation of God in a form that we could understand – human. That would make Jesus the quintessential "Light of the World," the ultimate revelation of God (John 8:12). Think of it this way; Jesus is what God wants His people, Israel, to be. Therefore, prophecies about the people of Israel often find their best expression in the person of Jesus. Isaiah 49:1-13 is one of those passages where Israel and Jesus seem to be interwoven. Yes, the Lord brought forth Israel as a light for the nations, but it was so they could bring forth *the* Light for the nations. Jesus is the cornerstone of the "covenant for the people" (49:8, the New Covenant), who will help restore the land and the exiled Jews to their land.

However, in 49:14-21, Zion responds that the Lord has forgotten them, and the Lord responds that He will never forget them! What's the proof? God will bring many of the exiles back from Babylon, and in the future, the Lord will bring them all back to their God-given land. Zion will be populated like a bride who wears jewelry (49:18). There will come a day when Zion (in fact, the people) will be surprised at the *massive* number of Jews returning home from their exile (Babylonian and Roman). So much so that it will be hard to find living space for all of them (49:20). Today, many Jews are returning to Israel from the nations, and it gets tough to absorb all the *olim* (immigrants). Ministries like *Bridges For Peace* ([bridgesforpeace.com](http://bridgesforpeace.com)) do a great job helping newcomers to get established. Check them out!

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To close out the chapter, Isaiah continues with his vision of Israel's return, and it's lovely. The Gentiles will have a part in helping the Jews emigrate (49:22), and leaders will assist as they bow down and acknowledge Yehovah as God (49:23). The Lord assures His people that when He starts the process, no nation will be able to stand in His way of accomplishing His task.

Isaiah continues his prophecy about Israel's exile and return. God answers Zion's objection that she is alone and her children are forgotten in exile. Not true, says Yehovah? Where's the divorce certificate? Where are the creditors to which the Jews were sold? There is no certificate and no creditors. The people were exiled because of their sin, but not permanently. Therefore, God Himself will redeem His people (restore them to their family land).

We come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Servant Song (Isaiah 50:4–11), and the Servant is doing the talking. Some see this Servant as Israel, purified after her covenant punishment. Others see the Servant as Isaiah, to whom God has given words to speak. However, it really talks about Jesus. How do we know? Because Israel is depicted as God's servant even though Israel's been disobedient, punished, and will be restored after her exile (Babylonian 516 B.C. and Roman, in our day). She believes she's been forgotten by the Lord (50:1). But a Servant who will hear and obey the Lord (50:4-5) is coming. The word this Servant speaks will encourage many (of His people), even though His audience abuses the Servant (beaten on His back, beard pulled out, scorned and spit upon – Matthew 20:19; 27:26, 30 ), He will remain obedient.

The final section is the Servant declaring his/His trust in God/Father and the vindication he will receive while his attackers are put to shame for trusting in their own understanding ("walk in the light of your fire and of the torches you have lit!" 50:11)

Speaking of trust, Isaiah redirects his audience, God's people, to not look to themselves as in 50:11 but look to their first ancestor, Abraham, *the* man of faith in Yehovah (51:1). God blessed him and Sarah for their trust and faithfulness to Him by fulfilling His promises to them. Yehovah will do the same for Israel as He makes their land like Eden one day. On that day, Yehovah will also bring His word and justice to the nations as well (51.0:5). Again, not the use of "salvation" (*yeshua*, related to Jesus' name Yeshua). Sometimes I read Isaiah and substitute Jesus' name for the "salvation"; the verse is stunning. Check this out. "My righteousness is near, my Yeshua/Jesus appears, and my arms (a euphemism for Jesus, as you'll soon see) will bring justice to the nations. The coasts and islands will put their hope in me, and they will look to my strength." See what I mean? This technique is a great thing to have in the back of your mind over the coming

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chapters because they'll describe God's Servant as a crucified man and why He was crucified.

From Isaiah 51:6 onward, God declares that heaven, earth, and all their inhabitants will wear out, but God's "righteousness will last forever and His salvation (Yeshua) to all generations." Israel need not fear the enemies because they'll pass away, but they will continue and return to their Promised Land with God's Servant leading the way (51:6-11). (Oh, this is such a powerfully moving section!) God is the one who comforts them. Why should they fear man? God is on their side, saying they are indeed His people. He prophetically prods them to get up and get going home. They've gone through all the punishment the Lord has set for them, and now it's time to return. He knows how weak they are after their terrible ordeal. The Lord will now take the "cup of punishment" and serve it to Israel's oppressors (51:22-23).

In chapter 52, we now embark on some of the most powerful prophecies in the Bible. The Bible reading and chapter numbers (52-53) cut Isaiah's prophecy in two. Do me a favor. After you read through this section, read through both chapters tomorrow, one after the other, without a break. Ignore the chapter heading because Isaiah 52 *must* be joined to 53. So, here we go.

Isaiah 52 starts with God commanding Zion/Jerusalem to arise from its lowly state. The spiritually unclean will not enter anymore. Jerusalem will be a holy city, free from captivity to the Gentiles. The reference to Egypt is about the Egyptian exile and imprisonment (Exodus), and the reference to Assyria refers to the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom of Israel. Why does God say His name is blasphemed among the nations? Because they knew God promised Israel the land of Canaan. If Israel is not in their land for whatever reason, it looks like God's promise failed. Saying that God lied blasphemes His name (person and character). Therefore, it's not for Israel's sake that He acts on their behalf but for His reputation's sake. He will reveal Himself to His people, though they think He's forgotten them.

Then with joy, messengers will run to the people of Israel with the news that their God reigns and that He's come to restore them to their home. Again, check out 52:7 with our Yeshua technique, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims *YESHUA*, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Israel, above all nations, should hear of their Messiah's deliverance and promise of complete restoration through Him – personal and national. "The Lord has displayed his holy arm (Jesus) in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the *YESHUA* of our God." Wow! This section is about JESUS, Israel's

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Messiah and Savior, who will save and restore them, *and the Gentiles get to be a part of it!* That's God's plan – world restoration, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). With God leading them, Israel should arise, embrace their God, and rejoice!

I'm going to stop here because I want you to get the fullness of what's about to be shared. Up to this point, God prophesied Israel's redemption. Now we'll see how God the Father plans to set the foundation for Israel's redemption/restoration, the Good News for Israel. As I go, I will change my name designations a bit. For this part, I'm going to change things from Yehovah/God/Lord to Father/Son/Suffering Servant to capture the immensity of what Isaiah saw almost 800 years before it happened and to the end of the age when Jesus returns. Get ready.

### INSIGHT

“To hear” in a Hebraic sense means to hear and obey (Isaiah 50:4-5). The Shema, the Jews' scriptural declaration of faith, is, “Hear, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (or The Lord is our God, the Lord is the Only God, Deuteronomy 6:4). There is only one God and according to Jesus, God manifests Himself as three persons in one – the Father, the Son, and God's Spirit. Israel is to listen to their God and obey Him. But Israel struggled with the obeying part. But as Isaiah points out in 50:4-5, a Servant who will listen and obey without fault will come. This Servant will obey even if it kills Him, which it did. “He (Isaiah's Servant) humbled himself by becoming *obedient* to the point of death— even to death on a cross” (Philippians 2:18). This Servant, Yeshua our Salvation, now only served His people, Israel, but all people, for we are all God's children. Those who embrace Him will be saved from death to live forever with God. Will *you* hear Jesus' call and *obey*?

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## August 5 : Scriptures Isaiah 53-55

### SUMMARY

This reading will go from Isaiah 52:12-55:13, and I'll let you read through 52:12-53:12 first. Then come back to this *Cruisin' Through the Bible* part.

Okay, I'm going to show you what I see in this section as it pertains to Jesus/Yeshua. God tells us His servant, Jesus, will succeed, although everything that's about to be revealed seems to be He failed. The failure part is the Servant's torture and death at His Father's command and man's hand. The success part is "raised and lifted up and greatly exalted" (52:13). God's Servant/Jesus will be so disfigured by the process He'll go through that people will be appalled (stunned and stupified) at His appearance. The Servant will barely be recognizable. And yet, He will sprinkle (the same word for sprinkling sacrificial blood on the altar to cleanse people in the Temple service) "many nations," meaning Jesus' sacrifice will cleanse not just Israel but those of the Gentile nations who come to Him. 52:15 means that although the Gentiles did not have this prophecy, they would understand when the Good News came to them.

Isaiah's prophecy is so astounding and counter-intuitive that it's nearly unbelievable. He's right. For Jewish people, how can their anointed King (Messiah) die when He's supposed to reign and restore the nation? Jesus died, so He can't be their Messiah. For Gentiles, how can a man be raised from the dead? Ridiculous! It's so utterly impossible that "Who has believed what we have heard?" (Isaiah 53:1). The next question is, "to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" First, "arm" is *zeroah* in Hebrew. The lamb's shank bone used in the Passover celebration is called the *zeroah*. Also, "the arm" is an idiom for strength. So this can be interpreted as "To whom has the strength of the Lord, the Passover Lamb, been revealed." The answer comes in verse 2. The Father revealed it to His people first.

The Suffering Servant will be a Jew, growing up among His people. He won't stand out by His looks or stature, and he'll be unimpressive, looking like an ordinary man. By today's standard, there's no way He would classify as an influencer. On the contrary, people will despise and reject the Suffering Servant. He will know the suffering and sickness that are part of life. This awareness of the human condition speaks to the complete human nature Jesus had, even though He was fully God as well. His people will disregard Him.

Despite that, God's plan will roll ahead. The Suffering Servant will suffer on behalf of others, but we won't recognize it as such. People will think His suffering is just God's

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judgment on Him; *in fact, it is!* It's a divine trade. The Suffering Servant will suffer for us so we can receive His Father's blessing and favor that's upon Him. *We* deserve to be struck down, stricken, and afflicted for our sins against the Father. But He allowed the Suffering Servant to take the hit for us so we can receive the blessing from our Father (53:4-5). This transfer will happen when the Suffering Servant is "pierced" for us (Jesus' crucifixion). Jesus will take the piercing, punishment, and crushing for our rebellion and iniquities (offenses) against the Father. His punishment is our peace, and our healing (body, soul, spirit) comes only through His obedience to the process. We've gone astray, but the Suffering Servant will bring us back through his painful submission to His Father's plan to do away with sin and pour out forgiveness and blessing (53:6).

The Suffering Servant will submit to the punishment on behalf of His people (crucifixion, 53:7-8). He'll be buried in a rich man's grave (a tomb carved out of rock, Joseph of Arimathea's future burial place, Matthew 27:57-61), signifying that Jesus is innocent and deserves better than the tortuous and humiliating death He will receive.

Many will think this is the Father's curse on His Son. Still, it was His Father's and His plan all along (53:10) to make Jesus a sacrifice whose forgiving and cleansing power will continue until sinning against the Father no longer is possible. When the Suffering Servant's work is complete (dying on the cross), He will be resurrected (53:11) and satisfied with His job well done. People will be saved when they come to know what Jesus has done for them (53:11). The Father's Suffering Servant, His Son Jesus, will be exalted because "he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels" (53:12). Can it be any clearer who the Suffering Servant is?

Isaiah now shifts in chapter 54 to Israel's future glory. To me, this implies that because of what Israel's Messiah has done on Israel's behalf, Israel will become what God promised them from Abraham's day and His intention from the start. Remember, Israel is God's miracle nation, and He has promises and blessings that belong to them alone that Yehovah has yet to fulfill. One of these promises and blessings is for numerous descendants, which 54:1-3 says will come. Israel will need to extend her boundaries to accommodate all her people. God will reclaim His wife, whom He had to discipline for her spiritual adultery. "I deserted you for a brief moment, but I will take you back with abundant compassion. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but I will have compassion on you with everlasting love," says the Lord your Redeemer" (54:7-8). He promises, "Though the mountains move and the hills shake, my love will not be removed from you and my covenant of peace will not be shaken," says your compassionate Lord" (54:10). *And Yehovah's promise is irrevocable*, like His promise to

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Noah that He would never again destroy the earth by water (54:9). They will prosper greatly, the Lord will never again send enemies against them, and any enemies who do come against Israel will not prevail (54:11-17).

The Lord continues His gracious and comforting call to His beleaguered people in chapter 55. God's offer is free and open to all who want to come to Him. He offers a perpetual covenant with His restored people, as permanent as the one He made with their king, David. As Yehovah made David a witness and leader for the people, Israel will be a witness for God and the leader of the nations in the future (55:4-5). Therefore, they should return to Him, for His arms are wide open to receive them! Let them turn from their sin and return to the Lord "so he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will freely forgive" (55:7). Does this seem unthinkable to Israel? Of course. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways." This is the Lord's declaration. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (55:8-9). God will accomplish *everything* He says He will do (55:10-11). Israel's restoration *will* happen!

### INSIGHT

In Jewish thought, there are two messiahs in scripture after the pattern of Joseph (Jacob's son), Messiah ben Yosef, and King David, Messiah ben David. That means Messiah, son of Joseph/David. Why two Messiahs?

They see Joseph as the Lord's anointed man who suffered much on behalf of His family so that they could be saved during a life-threatening time (the famine that forced Jacob's family down to Egypt). In a sense, Joseph is Israel's Suffering Servant.

The Jews see David as the Lord's anointed man who triumphed over Israel's enemies and reigned over the nations, bringing great peace and prosperity to his people. David is Israel's Exalted Servant.

In Jesus, we see both the Suffering and Exalted Servant. When Jesus came to earth for the first time, He suffered and accomplished His Father's great work on humanity's behalf, for all who would come to salvation in Jesus. He is Israel's Suffering Servant. When Jesus returns, He will come to fulfill His prophesied role as Israel's Exalted Servant, their King.

Rather than two messiahs that appear once, there is one Messiah who appears twice. Check this out in parallel with what you just read.

“Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth— and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11). Amazing, huh?

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## August 6 : Scriptures Isaiah 56-58

### SUMMARY

Chapter 56 has a striking comparison between verses 1-8 and 9-12. Yehovah, the God of Israel, declares that He will embrace and bless Gentiles who join themselves to Him and Eunuchs (castrated men) who follow His commands. This is a remarkable declaration! Why? Because the foreigners are Gentiles, who have converted. Yet to some Israelites, they weren't "by birth" children of Abraham, and foreigners were to be excluded from worship and other ritual celebrations like Passover. But this wasn't true. God fully embraced those who embraced Him via conversion. Lineage had no bearing on being acceptable to the Lord, only the heart of faith and proper conversion. What about the eunuchs? They were typically denied access to Tabernacle/Temple worship because their bodies had been altered, something the Torah forbade (Deuteronomy 23:1). However, some eunuchs had become so accidentally, and eunuchs who were so *before* they converted (and it's not like the condition could be reversed). Again, God said He loved and allowed them to come near because they obeyed Him and chose what pleased Him. The foreigner and eunuch could be considered second-tier compared to the native, unaltered Israelite. But not if they were faithful and obedient. They were first-class with the Lord. However, Yehovah has a scathing rebuke for the Israelite leaders who abused their position and the people they were supposed to lead and serve (56:9-12). They lived to satisfy their appetites.

Chapter 57 is more comparison. Verses 1-2 talk about the righteous and the expectation that God takes away the wicked but leaves the righteous. But what if the righteous die before the wicked? Reread the verse. "The faithful are taken away, with no one realizing that the righteous person is taken away because of evil. He will enter into peace—they will rest on their beds—everyone who lives uprightly." For the righteous, the afterlife is an escape from evil, and the righteous don't face judgment after death. So being "taken away" is not the bad thing most people think. However, Yehovah turns now to the wicked, those of His people who are embroiled in pagan worship. Verses 3-13 describe their practices and His condemnation of them. Since His people are so enamored with the pagan idols they've adopted, then they should let the idols save them when the time comes for the wicked to be "taken away." But for those who repent, Yehovah is ready to forgive and restore (57:14-21). God will lovingly forgive those who found it hard to turn to Him (57:17-18) by helping them. But for the wicked who refuse God? No rest for the wicked (57:21)!

Finally, chapter 58 continues the Lord's correction to His people, those who follow Him but not as He would want them to do (58:1-2). The particular example that's called out is

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fasting. Because the way fasting is described as “the day of your fast... fast as you do today... A day for a person to deny himself,” it could refer to the Day of Atonement, or it could be a chosen day to fast. Either way, what’s the purpose of fasting? God answers it. “To deny oneself” and do righteous works to benefit others, not a day to make a religious show and do unrighteous works to help oneself. If they fast the right way, with the right intentions, in honor of the Lord, they will reflect His glory. He will protect them (57:8). His people will show the world what it means to be God-followers, and they’ll stand out in the world.

As we read through this, we see the stark contrast between religious veneer to cover ungodly living vs. being dedicated to living for the Lord, living as He wants us to. Even the Sabbath is a focus. Yehovah gave the Sabbath to His people to rest from their work and to focus on Him. However, self-interest always finds a way to mess things up. What messes up the Sabbath? “Doing whatever you want on my holy day... going your own ways, seeking your own pleasure, or talking business.” What does the Lord want from His people? “Keep from desecrating the Sabbath... call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it...”. Whether you call Saturday your Sabbath (which biblically it is) or Sunday is your time for Sabbath rest, use it to worship God. Perhaps schedule a time to help others on that day or look for opportunities to be a blessing in Jesus’ name. “Then you will delight in the Lord!” (58:14).

## INSIGHT

God created all humanity for Himself. Due to sin and God’s plan, there arose a distinction between the Gentiles and God’s Chosen People, the Jews. But keep this in mind. God’s Chosen People aren’t better or the Gentiles worse in God’s eyes. The Jews are His Chosen People because Yehovah chose them for a purpose – to bring forth the Messiah who would end sin and death and restore all humanity to Himself, all who would embrace His plan for redemption through His Jesus. Apostle Paul sees this disappearing distinction. “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28), and “In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:11). And at Iconium, both Jews and Greeks believed and were swept into God’s Kingdom (Acts 14:1). See? The only distinction is whether we accept the Lord and walk in His way.

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## August 7 : Scriptures Isaiah 59-62

### SUMMARY

In chapter 59, Yehovah says it's not His fault that His people are estranged from Him. He listens and is more than able to help, but our sin puts a barrier between Him and us (59:2). So let me be blunt. Do you want to have an authentic experience with the Living God? *Then stop sinning.* Stop living like hell because God doesn't live there. How's that? I can tell you from experience that when I clean up my act, dedicate my day to the Lord, and keep my mind set on Him, I'm much more aware of His presence, voice, and help. Period.

For Israel, in Isaiah's day, the prophet declares the terrible sins that Israel wallows in, sins that have separated them from God and caused Him to separate from them (59:3-8). Because of their sin, there is no justice and righteousness. Rather than the light God promises in chapter 58 (58:8), Israel lives in the dark, i.e., spiritual darkness – insensitive and unresponsive to God, yearning for His help and interaction but getting none (58:9-10). What a horrible state of life. I remember days when I lived like this. My outlook was bleak, and I didn't know where I was headed. When I turned back to the Lord, my life cleared up, and I could see what I needed to do and how better to live for Him. For Israel, they're so far gone with no one to help (according to Isaiah's prophecy) that only God could help them (59:16). When His help arrives, Yehovah will hammer Israel's enemies, and they'll fear Him. The Lord will come to His people and protect those who return to Him. So, what does this "Spirit on you...words in your mouth" promise mean? It hearkens to Isaiah's call back in chapter 6. To cleanse a person's lips means to cleanse a person inside, "For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Matthew 12:34). Isaiah prophesies that the Lord will renew His covenant with His people in the future and that covenant will mean His Spirit will reside with them. They will be faithful to follow it.

Again, don't let the chapter 60 heading interrupt the flow of Isaiah's words. The renewed covenant of chapter 59 will bring the results in 60. We could take this whole chapter as a metaphor; light is a picture of God's righteousness vs. the darkness of the ungodly nations. But to be consistent, we would then have to say that the return of God's people to their land along with the world's nations' wealth is also just metaphorical. On the other hand, we can take it literally (which I believe it is), and what we have is an utterly remarkable description of a time when the earth will be changed by God living on our planet with us as it was in Eden and greater than Tabernacle/Temple times. This description is the messianic age when Jesus has returned, Israel is restored, and righteousness rules the earth.

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God's glory will hover over Israel (60:1-3). The Gentile nations will be dark by comparison. God's people will return with great wealth, and the nations will contribute their wealth as part of their offering to Yehovah. God's people will arrive by air and sea (60:8-9). The nations will help rebuild Jerusalem, and its gates will never be shut. What about the Sabbath? This section describes it as one eternal day. The Temple (God's palace) will be rebuilt with the famous trees of Lebanon (60:13). Israel's foes will humble themselves before their former enemy. There will be righteous government, peace, and everlasting light. Here's what tells us that this is a prophecy yet to be fulfilled – The Jews will never again be uprooted from their God-given land (60:21). They will fill the land quickly once it starts (60:22). Wow!

Speaking of the messianic age, chapter 61 reveals the Messiah. Even though Isaiah writes in the first person, he's not writing about himself. Jesus tells us plainly that the person Isaiah refers to is Him. "He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is on me...He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:16-21). Through Jesus' work, Israel will be rebuilt both now and when He returns, and His people will serve Him as the priests do with direct access to their divine King-High Priest. No longer will Israel endure shame and disgrace (61:7). *They will be doubly blessed.* Israel will become the most famous and highly esteemed nation in the world, and every person on earth will know it! Israel will become the epicenter of righteousness and praise (61:11). Seriously, I can't wait for that day!

The nation and people of Israel won't be the only things restored. Chapter 62 describes the restoration and glorification of the epicenter – Jerusalem and Mount Zion. Jerusalem will become the premier city on earth! In the meantime, Isaiah calls for Israel's watchmen (intercessors and people of prayer) to pester God until this grand Jerusalem glorification happens (62:6-7). The rest of the chapter is about the confluence of differing streams – On that day, God will bless Israel's agriculture as He calls His people home and arrives to welcome them (62:8-12). Remember our "Salvation-Jesus" substitution method of interpretation? Check this out and let it thrill you! "Look, the Lord has proclaimed to the ends of the earth, 'Say to Daughter Zion (Jerusalem): Look, your (Jesus) is coming, his wages are with him, and his reward accompanies him.'" (62:11). It's almost too wonderful to think. Lord, please bring that Day soon!

## INSIGHT

61:7 says, "In place of your shame, you will have a double portion; in place of disgrace,

they will rejoice over their share. So they will possess double in their land, and eternal joy will be theirs.”

Don't miss the “double portion” reference. A double portion is the standard portion given to the family's firstborn son, and it's his rightful inheritance. What is he to do with it? Part of it belongs to him, and the rest is to be used to care for the vulnerable family members – the surviving mom and any unmarried sisters. When Israel inherits its double portion, the nation will enjoy God's blessings and have enough to spare to help its brother and sister nations. That's the firstborn's God-commanded duty. Yes, Israel is God's nation, but God has significant responsibilities for His people to carry out. I believe that just as Jesus did not come to be served but to serve (the Suffering Servant) and give his life for others, it's the same with Israel as God's Servant among the nations. Jesus is what His Father wants Israel to be. They are both God's firstborn sons.