

No Equal

July 23 — *Isaiah 40:1-44:5*

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

Day 204 — 161 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Trying to comprehend all that happened in these four chapters of *Isaiah* was like drinking from a fire hydrant. I consider it as one of my favorite days of reading so far, but it was still difficult to focus on just one thing. Let me briefly recap some of the key elements.

First, there was a prophecy of the fall of Judah's enemy and captor, Babylon. "The Lord, Your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says, 'For your sakes, I will send an invading army against Babylon, and they will be forced to flee...'" (43:14).

Second, the Lord promised that His people would return from captivity and again enjoy His blessings. "Forget all that! It is nothing compared to what I am going to do. I am about to do a brand new thing. See, I have already begun! I will make a pathway through the wilderness for My people to come home..." (43:18-21).

Third, there was a prophecy of John the Baptist, "Listen, I hear the voice of someone shouting, 'Make a highway for the Lord through the wilderness. Make a straight, smooth road through the desert for our God...'" (40:3; *Luke 3:4-6*).

Fourth, there were prophecies of Jesus, "Tell the towns of Judah, 'Your God is coming! Yes, the Sovereign Lord is coming in all His glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, He brings His reward with Him as He comes. He will feed His flock like a shepherd and carry His lambs close to His heart...' (40:10, 11). "Look at My servant, whom I will strengthen. He is My Chosen One (or Messiah), and I am pleased with Him. I have put My Spirit in Him..." (42:1-4).

While there is so much more to consider, my favorite verses were those in which the Lord described Himself. "**Who else has held the oceans in His hand?** Who has measured the

heavens? Who knows the weight of the earth? Who has made the stars? The nations of the world are nothing in comparison to Him. They are but a drop in a bucket, dust on the scales... **To whom, then, can we compare God? Who is His equal?** What image might we find to resemble Him? Can He be compared to an idol formed in a mold? Can God be compared to an idol that must be placed on a stand so it won't fall down? Can idols make such claims as these? If they are gods, then let them tell what will occur in the days ahead. What miracles can they perform?" (40:12-26; 41:21-24).

"The people are like grass that dies away. **The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever...** You are My witnesses that I am the only God. From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can oppose what I do or reverse My actions" (40:6-8; 42:12, 13).

Daily Reflection

What else is there to say but that **we serve an awesome God!** Centuries have come and gone but He remains. Men and nations have lived and died but, still, He is here. He saw the beginning and He will see the end. **There is no one else like Him.** He is in a category of His own.

What response do these truths provoke in you?

It gives me a great deal of comfort and confidence to know that **though I am small, my God is big.** Though I am weak, He is strong. Though I can do little, He can do much; and, though I will pass away, He will remain.

Dried Grass in a Fire

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

July 24 — *Isaiah 44:6-48:11*

Day 205 — 160 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord picked up where He left off yesterday, contrasting Himself with idols. "This is what the Lord Almighty says, '**I am the first and the last; there is no other God.** Who else can tell you what is going to happen in the days ahead? Let them tell you if they can and prove their power. Let them do as I have done since ancient times... **Is there any other God? No! There is no other Rock — not one!**'" (44:6-8).

Wow, He cannot get more emphatic than that; but, let me come back to idols in a minute. I want to make sure that we caught another key prophecy today, that of Cyrus the Great, future King of the Medes and Persians. After Judah falls to Babylon, Babylon falls to Cyrus. The Lord told His people this would happen more than a 150 years before it took place. In fact, Cyrus is not even born yet, but the Lord is calling him by name and predicting his actions!

Here is what I mean, "This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, His anointed one, whose right hand He will empower. Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear. 'I will go before you, Cyrus, and level the mountains... I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name. I called you by name when you did not know Me...' I will raise up Cyrus to fulfill My righteous purpose, and I will guide all his actions. He will restore My city and free My captive people and not for a reward..." (45:1-13). What an amazing prophecy! Remember this day. I will mention it again.

Now, back to God's condemnation of idols. He is very sharp with His words here. "**How foolish are those who manufacture idols to be their gods.** These highly valued objects are really worthless, for their idols neither see nor know. No wonder those who worship them are put to shame... Such stupidity and ignorance! **He is**

trusting something that can give him no help at all. Yet, he cannot bring himself to ask, 'Is this thing, this idol that I'm holding, a lie?'" (44:9-20).

The Lord connects idolatry to its source when He said, "The idols of Babylon, Bel and Nebo, are being hauled away on ox carts... Come, Babylon, unconquered one, sit in the dust. For your days of glory, pomp, and honor have ended... Calamities will come upon you despite all your witchcraft and magic. **Call out the demon hordes you have worshipped all these years.** Let them stand up and save you; but *they are useless as dried grass burning in fire.* They cannot even save themselves!" (46:1; 47:1, 9, 12-14).

Daily Reflection

Idolatry is demonic, Satan's attempt to steer you away from the one true God. But we don't worship idols today, do we? Of course we do. We trust in our money, which drifts away like the wind. We trust in our health, which can be snuffed out at any moment. We trust in people who fail us and forsake us. We trust in ourselves, but we all know how foolish that is.

We make gods out of athletes, movie stars, historic heroes, pastors, and politicians. We make gods of our cars, houses, clothes, and other possessions. We worship at the altar of our work, our hobbies, our entertainment, and our convenience. **Everything in life is flimsy and fragile. Why would we put our trust in any of it?** What good will it do us when trouble comes? Satan is setting us up for a fall; when the time is right, he will pull out the rug.

In whom or what are you placing your trust? **If your trust is not in the Lord alone, then you have an idol.** Satan will distract your attention with idols every day. Tear them down! Burn them! Put your faith in the one true God, alone!

Yet Even Now

July 25 — *Isaiah 48:12-52:12*

Today In Your Reading...

We continued in the book of *Isaiah*, a prophet of God who lived decades before the fall of Judah; yet, Isaiah not only foretold the fall of the nation but also of its deliverance by Cyrus the Great, as well as its physical and spiritual restoration. Of course, all of these prophecies were fulfilled, though the full restoration of Israel will not occur until Jesus returns.

This Promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, was the main character in today's passage. Much of the second half of Isaiah's book is consumed with who Jesus is, the Lord's Servant, and what He will accomplish in both His first and second advents. Consider these prophecies:

"You will do more than restore the people of Israel to Me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles (non-Jews), and **you will bring My salvation to the ends of the earth**" (49:6).

"Through you I am saying to the prisoners of darkness, 'Come out! **I am giving you your freedom!**'" (49:9).

"The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me, and I have listened. I do not rebel or turn away. I give my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pull out my beard. I do not hide from shame, for they mock me and spit in my face. Because the Lord helps me, I will not be dismayed. Therefore, I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will" (50:6, 7).

It is amazing that these prophecies followed the tragedy of Israel's rebellion to God. His people were destroyed for their rejection of Him. "Had you listened to My commands," He said, "there would have been no need for your destruction... You went away as captives because of your sins... **Yet even now, be free from your captivity!**" (48:18-20; 50:1).

"Yet even now..." are those not some of the sweetest words in the English language? In our fallen flesh, we despised God and His Word. In our sins, we rebelled against His commands. In our self worship, we betrayed Him and attempted to take His throne. **Yet even now**, He loves us, He has redeemed us, and He has made a way for us to be right with Him, **all a gift to us**, at the expense of His Servant, the Lord Jesus.

Daily Reflection

I'm sure that if you gave it much consideration, you would admit that you have thought, said, or done things for which you are ashamed. If you are ashamed of them, imagine what a Holy God thinks of them. *Yet even now*, He loves you and wants to remove that shame and guilt far from your mind and renew a right spirit within you.

"All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God's paths to follow our own. **[Yet even now]** the Lord laid on him the guilt and sins of us all" (*Isaiah 53:6*).

"The wages of sin is death, **[yet even now]** the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ your Lord" (*Romans 6:23*).

"But God showed His great love for you **[yet even now]**, by sending Christ to die for you while you were still a sinner" (*Romans 5:8*).

What has the Lord saved you from? What has the Lord saved you for? After all that He has done for you, how will you live yet even now?

For Gentiles Too

July 26 — *Isaiah 52:13-57:21*

Day 207 — 158 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

No prophecy in the Old Testament is as clear as *Isaiah 53*, when it comes to what the Promised Messiah would do when He came. Only Isaiah was given this special insight, and, as a result, scholars have labeled his book, particularly this chapter, "The Fifth Gospel." The prophet painted a picture of a suffering servant who would one day die so that men may live.

The promise of the Messiah had been handed down for generations, since the fall of man; but, while people knew why He would come — *to rescue them from sin* — they didn't know how He would come, much less how He would accomplish such a task. That's why Isaiah's graphic depiction of a humble servant beaten, bruised, and bleeding would have been such an alarming picture to imagine.

As gruesome and grisly as this portrait is — that of being "wounded, crushed, beaten, whipped, and slaughtered like a sheep" — it was altogether necessary, for **the punishment had to fit the crime**. To bear the punishment for the sins of mankind (for He had no sins of His own), He would have to be broken. He would have to bleed; but, by taking upon Himself the wrath of God for the crimes of humanity, our Savior transferred to us His righteousness. How, then, can we neglect "so great a salvation" as this?

This act of love is evidence that man did not write the Scriptures. He would never think to redeem himself this way; rather he would somehow earn his salvation. God's way is unimaginable, unthinkable, and marvelous. We should not be surprised, though, as He says, "My thoughts are completely different from yours, and my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine" (55:8, 9). **What a wonderful gift He has given us** — freedom from the penalty of sin because of the suffering of His Son.

It is easy sometimes, at least for me, when I read of God's great love for His people Israel, to become a little jealous. He has given so much of Himself for their benefit; even when they despised Him, He still loved them deeply. But, then, I read these words, "**My blessings are for Gentiles too**, when they commit themselves to the Lord. Do not let them think that I consider them to be second-class citizens... They are as much mine as anyone else... I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will fill them with joy... For the Sovereign Lord, who brings back the outcasts of Israel, says, 'I will bring others too, besides my people Israel'" (56:3, 6, 8). *God's love, His mercy and salvation are for all people, including me, including you.* That is good news!

Daily Reflection

Have you considered lately what it cost the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, what He had to pay to redeem you from slavery and death? "He was wounded and crushed for your sins. He was beaten that you might have peace" with God. "He was whipped so that you might be healed."

Take time to thank the Lord for sending His Lamb to be slaughtered in your place, for there is no greater love than this!

True or False?

Today In Your Reading...

We continued looking at the prophecies of Isaiah, which majored on the future glory of Jerusalem in the end times. After all that God's people have suffered in times past and will suffer in the days to come, the Lord will finally defeat their enemies and make all things right. What a glorious day that will be!

In the middle of these passages was a verse to which Jesus referred, to describe His purpose on earth. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has appointed Me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come" (61:1, 2; Luke 4:17-19). After Jesus read this verse aloud before the people of Nazareth, he said, "This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes" (4:20).

While the future of Jerusalem is interesting, I found my attention drawn to the opening section we read. I couldn't help but think of modern America as I read the list of sins that Judah was guilty of. "Listen, the Lord is not too weak to save you... but **there is a problem — your sins have cut you off from God**. Because of your sins, He has turned away and will not listen anymore. Your hands are the hands of murderers, and your fingers are filthy with sin. Your mouth is full of lies and your lips are tainted with corruption" (59:1-3).

The indictment continued, "No one cares about being fair and honest. Their lawsuits are based on lies... They cheat and shortchange everyone. They spend their time and energy spinning evil plans that end up in deadly actions... Our sins are piled up before God and testify against us... **We have turned our backs on God**. We know how unfair and oppressive we have been, care-

fully planning deceitful lies. Our courts oppose people who are righteous, and justice is nowhere to be found. Truth falls dead in the streets, and fairness has been outlawed. **Yes, truth is gone, and anyone who tries to live a godly life is soon attacked**" (59:4-15).

Sadly, these words could describe the country in which we live, a country in which the vast majority claims to be Christian; but something is wrong. *If the vast majority were indeed Christian, living conscientiously by the Word of God, seeking to glorify the Lord Jesus, living as to be salt and light in our society, and holding up the Gospel as the answer to our ills, then none of these things listed would be true.*

Our nation's problems are only the fruit of a root issue — **we have turned our backs on God**. We are a people who are Christian in name only, false worshipers, as described in *Isaiah 58*. We pay lip-service to our God but we live for ourselves. We go through the motions of religion but we neglect our relationship with the Lord. Our sins are piled up before Him. What else can He do but allow the consequences of our actions. **If we desire a nation without Him, then we will have to endure the hell that is to come.**

Daily Reflection

If the nation was a reflection of your commitment to God, what would it look like? Are you a true follower of Christ or a false worshiper, a Christian in name only? How do you know?

Of Time and Space

Today In Your Reading...

We finished the book of *Isaiah*, who ended with prophecies about the last days, the end times, when a new Jerusalem will be built amidst the new heavens and new earth. "Look, I am creating new heavens and a new earth, so wonderful that no one will even think about the old ones anymore! Be glad and rejoice! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness... The sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more" (65:17-19).

The Lord continued describing what those days will be like, "No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life... For My people will live as long as trees and will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains... The wolf and lamb will feed together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. In those days, no one will be hurt or destroyed on My holy mountain" (65:20-24).

While it is fun to ponder on those future days, I am more struck by the fact that **God talks about them like they've already happened.** It is as if He were looking at them presently and describing them for us, as I would sit on my couch and describe to you what my living room is like. But, of course, when we consider what we know of God, that He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, that He is the everlasting God who was and is and is to come, then we recognize that this observation is not strange or unbelievable.

God sees the past just as well as He sees the future; and, since He has seen and can see it all, from beginning to end, then it makes sense that He would be able to describe it for us. What a marvelous mystery, an incredible thought! Perhaps that is why Isaiah wrote, "Since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you!" (64:4).

I must admit, while I believe these things to be true, they are difficult to imagine, that **our God is so vast that He is not contained by time or space.** Though they might restrain us, to Him they are nothing. "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Could you ever build a temple as good as that? Could you build a dwelling place for Me? My hands have made heaven and earth, and they are Mine!" (66:1).

Daily Reflection

You might plan a day, a week, or even a month, but **the Lord has plans for all of time!** He has already written a script by which all things will play out. Are you not awed by the scope and knowledge of your God in light of your finite and short-sighted goals?

How do these truths encourage your faith?

How exactly should your plans and goals fit into His plans and goals?

"I am God. I alone! There is no one else like Me. **Only I can tell you what is going to happen before it happens.** Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish..." (46:9-12).

No Barriers

Today In Your Reading...

We advanced the timeline of Judah by three kings — Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah. These three are heirs of the good king Hezekiah. Manasseh started out doing what was evil in the Lord's eyes but later repented of his actions. Amon also did what was evil but did not repent; he was assassinated only two years into his reign. Josiah was very much like Hezekiah; unfortunately, he will be the last righteous king of Judah. The nation will be destroyed soon after.

Here, also, is where the next prophet comes into the picture — Jeremiah. He began his ministry during the reign of Josiah and prophesied up until the last king of Judah. In other words, Jeremiah was the prophet that witnessed the fall of the country. Though he would do everything the Lord asked of him and warn His people of their doom, they would not listen to him. As a result, they will be handed over to their enemies and Jerusalem would be decimated.

What I love about King Josiah and the prophet Jeremiah is that their call to serve the Lord began at a young age. "Josiah was eight years old when he became king... but during the eighth year of his reign (at 16), he began to seek the God of his ancestor David" (2 Chron. 34:3). When God called Jeremiah, He said, "Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as My spokesman..." but Jeremiah said to the Lord, "I am too young!" (Jeremiah 1:5, 6).

Daily Reflection

We have seen many times in the Old Testament that **God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things for Him**. Neither age, nor gender, nor social status, nor physical handicaps are deterrents to the God of heaven, if He so desires to use a person for His service. Much like Moses, who used his speech impediment as an excuse not to be able to serve the Lord, Jeremi-

ah used his age as a barrier; but, **with the Lord, there are no barriers**. As He told Moses, He told Jeremiah, "You must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. Don't be afraid, for I will be with you and will take care of you." Then, He touched Jeremiah and said, "See, I have put My words in your mouth" (1:7-9).

Have you ever given God an excuse for not being able to serve Him? Have you erected barriers to keep Him from using you for His ministry? What were they?

Why did you avoid God's call to serve Him? What are you afraid of? What are you avoiding?

Using excuses is just another way of saying no to God. While you may voice commitment or devotion, you really don't want to be used by Him. You are scared. You lack confidence in God's abilities. You do not trust Him. But, remember, with God there are no barriers! **The barriers that exist are only of your own making**. As the sovereign God, He is able to do that which you cannot imagine. He is able to overcome all obstacles to accomplish His purposes, but you must take your guard down and trust that He knows best. **No excuses! No barriers! Just faith.**