

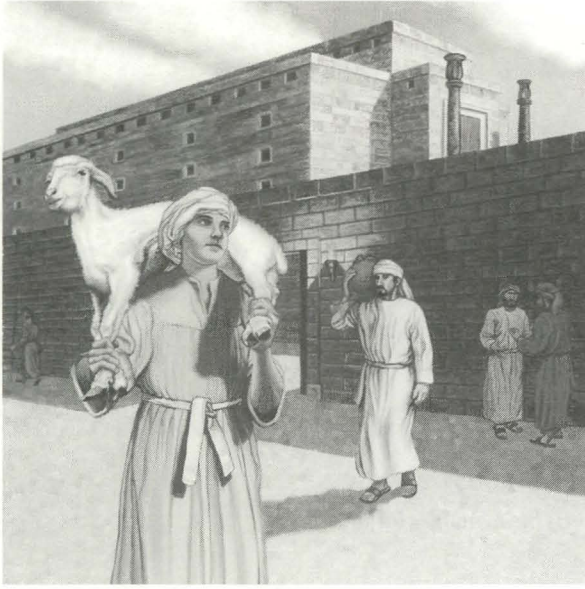
LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Isaiah, Part 2



LEADERS GUIDE



All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned everyone to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,
yet He opened not His mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so He opened not His mouth.

Isaiah 53: 6–7 ESV

Copyright © 1994, 2006 by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63118-3968

1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Revised from material by Roy H. Bleick and Edward A. Westcott; contributions by Edward Engelbrecht

Edited by Edward Engelbrecht

Rick Gallagher, Field-Test Coordinator

LifeLight field-test site: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Lakewood, CO

Developed under the auspices of the LifeLight Committee of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, with funding assistance from the International Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The quotations from Luther's Small Catechism are copyright © 1986 by Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The quotations from Luther's Works in this publication are from the American Edition: vol. 17, copyright © 1972 by Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Cover illustration by Alan Witschonke

Manufactured in the USA

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06

Contents

Introducing the LifeLight Program		5
Session 1—Lecture Leader	God's Judgment and Grace Validated in History Isaiah 34–39	9
Session 2—Lecture Leader	Comfort, Comfort My People! Isaiah 40:1–44:23	15
Session 3—Lecture Leader	God, the Maker of History—A Powerful Appeal and Witness to All Nations Isaiah 44:24–48:22	21
Session 4—Lecture Leader	The Lord's Assurance—His Salvation Is for All Isaiah 49:1–52:12	25
Session 5—Lecture Leader	God So Loved the World Isaiah 52:13–54:17	29
Session 6—Lecture Leader	The Great Gospel Call and Its Implications Isaiah 55–57	35
Session 7—Lecture Leader	Evidence of the New Life in Christ Isaiah 58–60	39
Session 8—Lecture Leader	The Church as the Bride of Christ Isaiah 61:1–63:6	43
Session 9—Lecture Leader	Look to the New Heavens and New Earth Isaiah 63:7–66:24	49
<hr/>		
Session 1—Small-Group Leader	God's Judgment and Grace Validated in History Isaiah 34–39	55
Session 2—Small-Group Leader	Comfort, Comfort My People! Isaiah 40:1–44:23	57
Session 3—Small-Group Leader	God, the Maker of History—A Powerful Appeal and Witness to All Nations Isaiah 44:24–48:22	59
Session 4—Small-Group Leader	The Lord's Assurance—His Salvation Is for All Isaiah 49:1–52:12	61
Session 5—Small-Group Leader	God So Loved the World Isaiah 52:13–54:17	64
Session 6—Small-Group Leader	The Great Gospel Call and Its Implications Isaiah 55–57	66
Session 7—Small-Group Leader	Evidence of the New Life in Christ Isaiah 58–60	68
Session 8—Small-Group Leader	The Church as the Bride of Christ Isaiah 61:1–63:6	71
Session 9—Small-Group Leader	Look to the New Heavens and New Earth Isaiah 63:7–66:24	74

Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of *LifeLight* is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be *LifeLight* participants.) While *LifeLight* does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days pre-

ceding the *LifeLight* assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by *LifeLight* begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the *LifeLight* program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish *LifeLight* overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the *LifeLight* program;
- orders materials;
- convenes *LifeLight* leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 53.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 53**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.

2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Isaiah

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Braun, John A. *Isaiah*. People's Bible Commentary. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004.

Delitzsch, Franz. *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans reprint. An important classic resource.

Keil, C. F., and Franz Delitzsch. *Isaiah, A Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971 reprint. A standard Old Testament commentary by two outstanding conservative scholars. A careful study of the original text and its implications for biblical theology. Although somewhat old, it is still a helpful resource.

Lectures on Isaiah. Vols. 16 and 17 of *Luther's Works*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969. Volume 16 contains Luther's lectures on Isaiah chapters 1 through 39; volume 17, chapters 40 through 66. The Reformer looks at the message of the prophet as a lesson for modern people, for all time.

Leupold, Herbert C. *An Exposition of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977. A careful exposition of Isaiah and its messianic prophecies.

Pieper, August. *Isaiah II*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979. First published in German in 1919, this English translation is a compendium of the Gospel of salvation. It shows how God's plan of salvation, revealed in Isaiah, dominates all of history.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible is tailored for lay use.

Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-72. The magnum opus of a great conservative scholar. Carefully interprets the many prophecies of Isaiah in their context; also stresses their messianic import.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

God's Judgment and Grace Validated in History

Isaiah 34–39

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God acts in history to bring judgment on sinful nations and people—all with the purpose of bringing people to repentance and faith in the promised Messiah.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will be led to

1. more fully discern the arrogance of unbelief and recognize its inevitable, terrible consequences;
2. grow in repentant trust in God, their Refuge; and
3. understand how and why God answers prayer.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and the prayer printed in the study leaflet. Hymn accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the Life-Light courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Lecture Presentation

1 The Certainty of God's Judgment on Unbelief (Isaiah 34)

Chapters 34 and 35 play a dual role, forming the conclusion to the first half of the Book of Isaiah. They also strike the introductory chords to the Book of Comfort, chapters 40 through 66. The four chapters in between form a historical appendix to the first part of Isaiah. We'll learn more about that when we get to them.

It's been said many times before, but once more won't hurt: Isaiah is the "Evangelist of the Old Testament." We have seen and shall continue to see how he continually refers to happenings and conditions as they would be at the time of Christ, the Messiah, and beyond. Isaiah makes use of New Testament ideas and pictures; or maybe Christ and the apostles and evangelists make use of Isaiah's. Either way, we have here a beautiful and powerful validation that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God in all its parts!

What Isaiah is about to proclaim is for everyone living on the earth. Four times he urges people to pay the closest attention to what God is about to say. And that, by the way, includes us today. How deaf we have become to the voice of God in history! We often see no relationship between the hand of God and the history that makes our headlines. We sing "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," but do we believe that what's going on in Sudan and Iraq [substitute other place names that best fit when this lecture is given] has anything to do with God? "Give attention, O peoples," cries the Lord through Isaiah, "to hear!" (Isaiah 34:1).

And what are we to hear so carefully and attentively? The absolute justice of God over against persistent sin and unbelief. Have you ever heard the question: "If God is so loving, how can He . . . ?" This is noth-

ing more than making God into what we want Him to be, which is idolatry no different from worshipping Baal. God is absolute love and absolute justice. The fault lies not with God but with humankind, who is responsible for the mess we see in ourselves and in our world.

Isaiah describes the holy wrath of a just and outraged God on the unbelieving peoples and nations of the world. And all of this will become crystal clear on the Day of Judgment, when Christ will visibly judge the believers and the unbelievers (see Matthew 25:31–46). The picture Isaiah uses to describe the end of the world (v. 4) is the same one used by Jesus (Matthew 24:29), by Peter (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12), and by John (Revelation 6:13–14).

For those who think he is bluffing about the certainty of God's judgment on their unbelief, Isaiah prophesies what this justice of God will do to an entire nation of people in the very near future. The fate of the nation of Edom (called Idumea by the Greeks and Romans), descendants of Esau and avowed enemies of God and His people, is described in detail throughout the rest of the chapter. A study of history will reveal that the prophecy and fulfillment about Idumea are in exact agreement. Verse 10b—"From generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it forever and ever." To this day one may travel for days through former Idumea without finding one inhabited city—only desolation and wild animals.

There is a flip side to all this, which will be expanded on in great and joyous detail in chapter 35. The children of Israel understood, and it is just as important that we do. The positive message is that the enemies of the believers are also enemies of the Lord. Until the end of time Satan will continue to attack the Church. But there is no need to fear, for our God will save and will rescue those who are His.

2 The Redeemed and Their Joy (Isaiah 35)

First, the judgment of God in all its severity. Then, the love of God in all its unbelievable beauty. Isaiah's change in tone, his exuberance and joy in what the

Lord is now telling him to write, is startling. The Gospel is always startling each time it is really heard, for there is nothing found in human experience or philosophy that is equal to it. "He will come and save you," Isaiah writes (v. 4). God requests nothing, requires nothing. He will do all that needs to be done to make us His redeemed. To quote the hymn "Rock of Ages": "Nothing in my hands I bring."

Isaiah contrasts sin and grace with a picture from nature—the barren and dry desert suddenly ablaze with beautiful plants and flowers. This sometimes happens in the deserts of Arizona in the spring. When record rainfalls are recorded for January and February, in March and April the desert becomes a sea of green grass and a mass of beautiful flowers. The sight is breathtaking! And no amount of skill and ingenuity of mankind can make that happen! So the Gospel—"for God so loved" the unlovable, barren, sin-laden deserts of our hearts "that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16), the price He chose to pay that we might bloom and blossom as His redeemed.

Throughout this chapter, Isaiah is painting a majestic picture of Christ's kingdom and of the glorious future in store for "the ransomed of the LORD" (v. 10). He continues with words of encouragement. No matter how severe the danger or how threatened Christ's followers feel, they are to stand firm and hold on to the sure and certain promises of the Lord's deliverance. Part of verses 5–7 contains the same words used by Christ when He was answering John the Baptist's question about whether He was the Christ (Matthew 11:5). Among other things, Christ pointed John to His miracles—"the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, . . . the deaf hear."

However, Isaiah is using those same concepts to illustrate what happens when faith in Christ is worked in our hearts. Spiritual blindness disappears, and our ears now clearly hear and understand the sweet message of salvation. Works flow from faith joyfully and spontaneously, and a cleansed tongue sings hymns of praise and thanksgiving for the rich streams of grace and forgiveness that continually flow to us from our merciful God. Verses 6b–7—Instead of guilt and torment, there is the quiet oasis of peace and freedom.

Five times throughout his book Isaiah uses the word "highway." Each time it depicts a place where people may walk in safety from one place to another. So here, the members of the holy Christian Church walk toward their heavenly home on the highway of God's grace absolutely confident that the Lord will keep Satan and all his evil forces at bay. Is it any wonder that believers are people who walk this highway with songs in their hearts, smiles on their faces, and wings on their feet!

3 "Be Still, and Know That I Am God!" (Isaiah 36–39)

In chapters 36 through 39 we have the historical interlude referred to at the beginning of this lecture. To get all of the details of the history here recorded by Isaiah, read the almost identical accounts in 2 Kings 18–20 and 2 Chronicles 29–32. You will note that 2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 37 are identical. Whether the writer of 2 Kings used Isaiah as his source, or whether both drew from a common source and added their own points of emphasis is anyone's guess. In any case, we know the ultimate author for both is the Holy Spirit.

These chapters bridge the gap between the Assyrian period and the Babylonian period. In Isaiah's day, the chief enemy was Assyria, and that is reflected in the prophecies given during the time of Ahaz, as well as in the actual invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, which is described in this section. But Isaiah's message has most to do with the coming Babylonian captivity. Chapter 39 shows how Babylon first came to have contact with Judah and foreshadows the coming exile.

We here have another opportunity to "give attention" to the strong and clear relationship between God and history then and now. These chapters, as well as the entire Old Testament, illustrate very clearly Paul's statement on this subject: (Romans 13:1) "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."

We may not always understand what God is doing (1 Corinthians 13:12). However, we can be certain that the ultimate, overriding purpose in all of the

history He allows or causes to happen is, as Hezekiah said: (37:20) "That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are the LORD."

The whole Christian Church and all its members urgently need to return to an understanding that the repentance of a sinner is the sole purpose of our existence on earth and the sole reason why the end of the world is still delayed. Christ puts this truth succinctly and clearly in this way in Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Everything that happens, whether we understand it or not, is related in some way to getting the "gospel of the kingdom . . . proclaimed throughout the whole world." When one begins to think about and analyze history with such "Gospel eyes," recent historical happenings [add or subtract current happenings] like the fighting in the Middle East and the sudden withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon will be seen in a different light. This is not mankind's doing, but God's.

A. Unbelief in All Its Arrogance (Isaiah 36)

"The fourteenth year of King Hezekiah" is the year 701 BC, the same time during which the Great Wall of China was being built! At this date, Assyria under Sennacherib had swallowed up the Northern Kingdom of Israel and, of course, considered the little kingdom of Judah an easy prey. When we realize that the city of Jerusalem was only about ten miles from the border between Israel and Judah, we see how simple it was for the Assyrian ruler to deploy his forces against it and undermine the faith of the people.

Have you ever felt frustrated because someone you've shared the Gospel with over and over again continues to reject your invitation? It's probably because we who were privileged to be members of the holy Christian Church since our Baptism have a hard time understanding the nature of unbelief. That's what this chapter is all about—the frightening blindness, arrogance, blasphemy, and stubbornness of unbelief. David calls such a person a "fool" (Psalm 14:1).

This is the result of Adam and Eve's disobedience!

Before faith we “were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Paul also says, (Romans 8:7–8) “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Verse 6—Only one thing the Assyrian commander says is true—Egypt cannot be depended upon for safety. All his other words are insults to Hezekiah’s representatives and the people standing on the wall, and arrogant blasphemy against the living God. They equated God with the gods of wood and stone of the nations already conquered. Is it any wonder that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b)? What a miracle of grace He has worked on us who believe!

B. “God Is Our Refuge and Strength” (Isaiah 37 and 2 Kings 19)

What a beautiful contrasting picture of a strong, trusting, childlike faith! Hezekiah didn’t hurl back insults or collapse in fear; nor did he go out and count his army or examine his defenses. In humbleness and faith, he goes to the Lord’s house and sends for the Lord’s prophet. And the promise of deliverance came from the Lord through Isaiah with specific details.

Deterred for a moment by the promised false rumor, Sennacherib sends another blasphemous letter to Hezekiah in an attempt to cower him into submission. Hezekiah’s strong faith leads him back to the temple, where he spreads the letter before the Lord. Now read his powerful prayer (vv. 16–20) of confession and faith. There is no doubt in his words—“God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth,” Maker of “heaven and earth”—vindicate Your honor so “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are the LORD.”

Again, through Isaiah, the Lord sends a powerful and positive answer. If you don’t think the Lord controls the affairs of people and nations, read His words in verses 28–29. See if this doesn’t help us look at today’s history in a different way. We may not have the answers, but at least we’ll begin to understand who is in control of the affairs of people and why.

Then was surely no different than now. More than likely, many in Jerusalem doubted or wondered at the prophecy that God gave through Isaiah in answer to Hezekiah’s prayer. The Assyrian army just outside the city walls certainly appeared capable of carrying out their purpose of capturing the city. But both the Assyrians and those who may have doubted left God out of the picture. Verse 35—“I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for the sake of My servant David.” Three short verses at the end of the chapter (36–38) graphically tell how the Lord did this.

C. “With God All Things Are Possible” (Isaiah 38 and 2 Kings 20)

The best scholars place Isaiah 38 either at or very shortly after the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC, making Hezekiah about 37 or 38 years old at this time. Hezekiah becomes gravely ill. The Lord sends Isaiah to tell him that he would not recover, but would die. Verse 1—“Set your house in order,” choose your successor and properly dispose of your possessions. Good advice to all believers, so that no matter when or where the Lord calls us home, our earthly affairs are in order.

But Hezekiah isn’t ready to die. He is in the prime of his life, he is still without an heir and successor, and his country is in grave danger. Without hesitation, he tells the Lord so, pointing to his past faithfulness in serving the Lord. Before Isaiah gets out of the palace, the Lord answers, extending Hezekiah’s life by fifteen years. By the way, divine miraculous healing (v. 21) does not necessarily exclude the use of known remedies.

For the second time (Joshua 10:13 and here in v. 8) our almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, interrupts the sun’s regular course (2 Kings 20:8–11) so that Hezekiah would know “that the LORD will do this thing that He has promised.” The shadow on the sundial moves backward 10 degrees. In awe, we join the psalmist: (135:6) “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth.”

Hezekiah’s psalm of praise is a beautiful confession of faith. Note how in verse 17 he recognizes that his

spiritual salvation is far more important than his physical recovery and in fact is the only basis for his healing. And, again, what a beautiful description of forgiveness. Verse 17—"You have cast all my sins behind Your back," beyond reach so they cannot be brought back! Remember that the next time you hear those beautiful words: "I forgive you all your sins."

A comment: Because the future is hidden from us, not all requests the Lord may grant may prove to be a blessing. Three years later, Hezekiah has a son and successor to the throne, Manasseh, whose wickedness and idolatry would bring down on Judah God's wrath and lead to the Babylonian captivity and exile (2 Kings 21:1-6).

D. "And Lead Us Not into Temptation" (Isaiah 39 and 2 Kings 20)

And, finally, in chapter 39 we see that this great hero of faith still has feet of clay as he succumbs to the sin of pride. Sad but true—how quickly and easily we forget the past goodness and mercies of God. Think about yourself for a moment. Some new, unexpected trouble or illness strikes. Instead of remembering the myriads of times the Lord has bailed us out and answered our prayers, we complain, throw up our hands in despair, or try to do something about it on our own. Finally, when all else fails, we remember and turn to our God and Lord. It is at that moment that His acceptance and forgiveness is so precious and sweet. But why does it so often take us so long?

In 2 Chronicles 32:31, we learn that the incident of the Babylonian envoys was permitted by God as a test, and Hezekiah dropped his guard and failed the test. When confronted by Isaiah, Hezekiah made an open acknowledgment of his sin, grateful that he would be allowed by the Lord to finish his reign in peace (2 Kings 20:20-21).

Peter has some important words to say to us in this connection: (1 Peter 5:8-9) "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith." All the more reason for us to heed the Savior's instruction and to pray every day, (Luke 11:4) "And lead us not into temptation," there-

by asking the Lord to "guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us nor mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory" (explanation to the Fifth Petition, Luther's Small Catechism).

Concluding Activities

Speak a brief prayer, confessing to God our oftentimes grumbling and lack of trust in His guidance; asking for His forgiveness for Jesus' sake; and asking for His Spirit to renew in us a spirit of thankfulness and trust in His guidance.

Thank God for those who have come together to study this second part of the Book of Isaiah, and ask Him to bless your study of His Word.

Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

Comfort, Comfort My People!

Isaiah 40:1–44:23

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God's grace in Christ is unique. The message of that grace, the Gospel, creates faith and the comforting assurance that nothing can separate us from His love.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will be led to

1. grow in wonder at and trust in God's strong and beautiful promises in Christ, and find comfort in them;
2. forsake all idols that would lure them from the worship of the one true God;
3. tell others about this gracious God and His deeds; and
4. with all creation, praise Him.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Hymn accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments

for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Can you think of a time when you truly needed comfort? Maybe a time when you lost your job. Maybe a time when you failed at something you really wanted to succeed at. Maybe a time when you lost something or someone precious to you. Can you think of a time like that?

All of us need comforting in uncomfortable situations like these. Today's reading from Isaiah begins with words (40:1) that probably many of you recognized as you read them: "Comfort, comfort My people, says your God." What has brought about their discomfort? The same thing that lies, ultimately, behind all the pain in every circumstance that hurts every human being—sin.

The chapters from Isaiah you read for today all speak God's Word of comfort to people made uncomfortable by the knowledge of their sin. These chapters ring with Good News, with "good news of a great joy" (Luke 2:10), which God intends for all people everywhere.

Luther comments on these four chapters: "Here the prophet is the most joyful of all, fairly dancing with promises. The next four chapters prophesy the most joyful things concerning Christ and the church in our time" (p. 3).

Volume 17 of the American Edition of Luther's Works contains 416 pages of lectures the Reformer delivered on Isaiah 40–66. If you can obtain a copy, take the time to read it. You will be richer for it. All of Luther's quotes in these lectures are from this vol-

ume and will be referenced only by page number.

The key word appears in 40:1—*comfort*. Isaiah repeats it twice: Comfort! Comfort! Don't miss this point! God wants to speak peace to every human heart—to your heart.

1 Comfort—God Will Deliver His People (40:1–11)

"Comfort My people," God says. How intimate and personal are these words. To catch their full import, we must remember they were first spoken to a whole nation exiled because of flagrant sin and rebellion against God. Yet the Lord says to His prophet, His preacher, in verse 2: Now is not the time for Law and condemnation, for My people are oppressed and guilt-ridden because of their sins. Now is the time to speak tenderly, to speak to the heart of Jerusalem. And what is the tender message the preacher is to proclaim? An unbelievably beautiful, totally unexpected message.

Look carefully at verse 2: "her warfare is ended . . . her iniquity is pardoned." Do you see the passive verb? "Is ended." Nothing we have done, but something done for us has ended our "warfare." We could not pay our own debt. We could not free ourselves from the burden of our slavery to sin. Someone else had to do that for us. And the preacher is to leave no doubt as to whom. The Lord has done it all for us, giving us "double" for all our sins. We have received the gifts of His undeserved favor—forgiveness, peace, and eternal life.

Our warfare is ended. Our iniquity is forgiven. Drink deeply and believe firmly, for this is the heart of our Christian faith. The war is over. We need no longer fear that God will hold our sins against us. The warfare by which we tried and tried and tried to make ourselves acceptable to God is over. We're already acceptable, made so by grace through faith in the Savior God has sent.

And now (v. 3) Isaiah leads us to the one chosen to announce this Good News. The New Testament clearly links the "voice" in verse 3 with John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). "Pre-

pare the way of the Lord," the voice calls. Just like campaign workers today who serve their political candidate by arriving in town days or even weeks in advance to plan for the candidate's arrival, the Ancient Near East understood the custom of sending representatives ahead to prepare the way for the visit of a monarch. The picture Isaiah paints here (vv. 3–5) is one of preparing a processional "highway" for the Lord, the Lord who is coming to His people.

With his call to repentance in Matthew 3:1–12, John the Baptist identifies the "highway" to be prepared for the Lord's coming to our hearts. And equally as clearly he identifies the "road grader" essential in preparing our hearts—repentance and sorrow over our sins. Then the "highway" is ready for our Savior to come to us with His comfort.

Isaiah 40:5 promises that "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." So often in both the Old and New Testaments we see that God's grace is, indeed, His glory. He intends to reveal His gracious love to "all flesh." These words open the door for you and me, both as receivers and as sharers.

How easy to receive. How apt we are to forget the sharing! But how else will the "glory of the LORD" be made visible to those who are not yet receivers? In only one way—through you and me. The "glory of the LORD," His love, grace, forgiveness, and peace are made visible to the unbeliever through believers. What an awesome and exciting responsibility!

Who is (v. 9) to go up to the top of a high mountain so that all may hear the "good news"? Who should shout the joyful news for all to hear? Who but "Zion" and "Jerusalem." Who else but those who have tasted and seen the grace of God in Christ.

And what are we to shout? (v. 9) "Behold your God!" And what a God! He is not only all-powerful, but He is also gentle and caring as a shepherd. The Lord, who is our Shepherd, "will tend His flock," carrying the most helpless "in His bosom" and gently leading those who need special attention and care.

2 Comfort—God Is Great and Greatly to Be Praised (40:12–41:29)

And what a great God our Good Shepherd is! The next section of the text describes in graphic terms the character and the power of the One who created the world and who rules over it to this day.

Listen to the prophet's questions:

(V. 12) Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?

(V. 12) [Who has] marked off the heavens?

(V. 12) [Who has] enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure?

(V. 12) [Or] weighed the mountains in scales?

(V. 13) Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD?

(V. 13) Or show[n] Him his counsel [instructed Him]?

(V. 14) Whom did [the Lord] consult?

(V. 14) Who . . . taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?

Someone has estimated that the world's oceans contain 340 quintillion gallons of water. Scientists now "mark off the heavens," measuring the universe at 30 billion light-years, a figure almost certain to be revised—doubtless, upward. These answers to only two of Isaiah's questions fill us with the kind of awe appropriate for finite creatures who encounter the incredible majesty of our infinite Creator!

And how very comforting to know—to know!—that our Lord uses His power on our behalf. He rules the universe for the sake of His people, His Zion, His Church.

In light of this majesty and love, (v. 16) the great forests of Lebanon don't have enough trees or animals to offer in a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Even if we burned it all in one great offering, it would never be enough to thank our great God for His strong and beautiful promises.

But even in the face of such majestic goodness, some continue to make and worship idols. Note the sarcasm in verses 18–20 and the total condemnation of

idols and those who worship them in verses 21–24. More important, note again in 41:1–4 the One who creates history, who enthrones and deposes rulers, kings, and presidents: (4b) "I, the LORD . . . I am He."

When the time comes for God's people to return from captivity, the Lord will (41:2) raise up a Persian king, "one from the east," who will do God's bidding.

How often throughout Scripture is this great truth repeated; yet how seldom does our Lord receive any recognition from Christians today as the author of all history. But as the Lord so clearly states in this chapter, so it is today. The sole purpose of everything He allows, permits, or causes to happen comes about only and always for the growth and protection of His Church.

When it comes to us, individually and corporately as His Zion, His Jerusalem, there are simply no limits to His love, power, and care. Look at the promises He makes to us in 41:10 and 13. Drink deeply from these two strong, beautiful, and intensely personal promises. In Isaiah's time as now, God's people sometimes feel forsaken and downtrodden. We despair of ever seeing our homeland again, just as ancient Israel despaired of seeing Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Still, Israel—then and now—hears the reassuring voice of our Lord, telling her not to be afraid. He has taken Israel by the right hand, and He will help her.

We don't reach up to Him; rather, He reaches down to us. He takes our right hand with His right hand of strength, power, healing, forgiveness, and love. Come what may, we never walk alone—never! If only this confidence and peace were visible in all Christians today! Once again, the Church would (Acts 17:6) turn "the world upside down" for Christ!

3 Comfort—God Will Send His Servant, His Son (42)

We can only stand in awe and humility as the Lord's love for the entire human race continues to unfold like petals on a magnificent flower. As Isaiah 42 begins, the Servant of the Lord strides onto center stage. This "servant" is none other than Christ Him-

self. At His inauguration, God the Father spoke almost the exact words we read here. Isaiah writes, "Behold My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights." Luke records the words spoken by God the Father at Christ's Baptism: (3:22) "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

This Servant of the Lord, His dearly loved Son, will carry out the work assigned to Him by His Father in meekness and humility. He will protect the "bruised reed" and "faintly burning wick," the hearts of those who are broken and contrite.

Verse 7 makes Christ's assignment crystal clear.

Once again we read the entire Law and Gospel summed up in so few words. The total depravity and helplessness of the human race is described in just three words—blindness, prison, and darkness. Throughout the Scripture, these words are used to depict the damnable consequences of sin on the human race. Unable and, what's worse, unwilling to do anything about our condition, we love the darkness rather than the light. But in love unimaginable, the Servant Christ paid the price necessary to open our blind eyes, to free us from the captivity of sin, and to flood the dungeons of our hearts with light. No wonder that in response to all this Isaiah exclaims: (v. 10) "Sing to the LORD a new song!"

4 Comfort—God Will Redeem His People (43:1–44:23)

Could any words bring more comfort, or sweeter comfort, than the words we've already read? Is it possible for the Lord to speak to us any more intimately and strongly than He has already done? See for yourself.

(Read Isaiah 43:1–3a, or have a volunteer read aloud to the group.)

Do you see it? You are not just a face in the crowd, merely a Social Security number in heaven's computer banks. You need never, ever wonder if the Lord really knows who you are, if He really has you by the right hand. Listen! Hear God's Word: "I have redeemed you," Susan, John, Sylvia, Richard. "You

are Mine." And because I paid the price to make you My own, nothing, absolutely nothing, will ever be able to separate you from Me and My love for you. Even in trouble or calamity, I will keep you safe. The rivers may flood (43:2), but you will pass through the water and arrive safely on the other shore. The fires may blaze all around you (43:2b), but you will not burn up. I will bring you safely through, for (v. 3) "I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

The Lord had done all this and more for Israel down through her history. He had led them through the Red Sea and the Jordan River on dry land. He had provided food and water for them in their desert wanderings. And still, despite all the signs and wonders the Lord worked among and for His people, Israel often refused to acknowledge Him as Lord and God and to worship Him.

But even though (43:22–24) they have burdened the Lord with their sins and wearied Him with their iniquities (v. 4), the Lord still loves them. He considers them precious. He honors them. And (43:25) He will forgive them and take them back. The eternal patience of and love of God always astounds us, even as it comforts us. How glibly we say, "to forgive is divine." But no human being can forgive the way the Lord forgives. He (43:25) "blots out" our transgressions and "will not remember" our sins. When the Lord forgives, our yesterdays disappear. Before us stretch unlimited tomorrows of blessing. What a way to live!

Yes, what comfort! The God who by all rights should be our judge and executioner has become (44:6, 22, 23) our Redeemer. He has bought us back from the slave market of our sins. He has (44:3) poured the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit onto the dry ground, the thirsty soil of our hearts.

By the power of that Spirit, we (44:5) can call ourselves "the LORD's." And we can (44:8) be faithful witnesses to our God, our Rock, the One who takes our fear and who, in its place, gives us rock-solid security.

What comfort! The Lord (44:23) has done this! We

hear in these words echoes of Christ's own on Calvary: "It is finished!" Our salvation is secured. "The LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel"—that's us! Our very existence witnesses to His greatness. Our lives and our words, by His grace, reveal His glory. We are His eternal trophies, the children of His love.

(44:23) "Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel."

Closing Activities

Distribute study leaflet 3. Encourage participants to read the enrichment magazine. That's a good way to launch you on your study of the next portion of Isaiah.

If time permits, sing a stanza or two of "Beautiful Savior" (*Lutheran Worship* 507) or the common doxology or some other well-known hymn of praise to God.

