

# Sovereignty of God



The  
**Helping  
Hand**  
in Bible Study

Seventh Day Baptist  
Adult/Youth  
Sabbath School Lessons

*September - November 2016*

## **Sovereignty of God**

*The Sovereignty of God is the biblical teaching that all things are under God's rule and control, and that nothing happens without His direction or permission. God works not just some things but all things according to the counsel of His own will (see Eph. 1:11). His purposes are all-inclusive and never thwarted (see Isa. 46:11); nothing takes Him by surprise. The sovereignty of God is not merely that God has the power and right to govern all things, but that He does so, always and without exception. In other words, God is not merely sovereign de jure (in principle), but sovereign de facto (in practice).*

—[theopedia.com](http://theopedia.com)

## Sovereignty of God

Lesson	Date	Page
Editor's Page		5

### Unit I — The Sovereignty of God

1. The Peaceful Kingdom	<i>Isaiah 11:1-9</i>	Sept. 3	6
2. The Mountain of God	<i>Isaiah 25:6-10a</i>	Sept. 10	12
3. Foundations of the Earth	<i>Isaiah 40:21-31</i>	Sept. 17	18
4. Everlasting Covenant	<i>Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11</i>	Sept. 24	24

### Unit II — The Sovereignty of Jesus

5. The Imprint of God	<i>Hebrews 1:1-9</i>	Oct. 1	30
6. Builder of the House	<i>Hebrews 3:1-6; Matthew 7:24-29</i>	Oct. 8	36
7. The Great High Priest	<i>Hebrews 4:14-5:10</i>	Oct. 15	42
8. The High Priest Forever	<i>Hebrews 7:1-3, 19b-28</i>	Oct. 22	48
9. Pioneer and Perfecter of Our Faith	<i>Hebrews 12:1-13</i>	Oct. 29	54

### Unit III — Alpha and Omega

10. Everything Is Brand New	<i>Revelation 21:1-8</i>	Nov. 5	60
11. I See a New Jerusalem	<i>Revelation 21:9-14, 22-27</i>	Nov. 12	66
12. Living Waters	<i>Revelation 22:1-7</i>	Nov. 19	72
13. Alpha and Omega	<i>Revelation 22:11-21</i>	Nov. 26	78
Works Cited & Bible Copyright Notices			84
Contributors			85
Next Quarter's Lessons			86

**Steve Osborn, Editor**

**The purposes of *The Helping Hand in Bible Study* are:**

- to provide for adults and older youth a quarterly for personal or group use in gaining a continually renewed knowledge of the Bible, Christian beliefs and church life, particularly that characteristic of Seventh Day Baptists.
- to enable such study of Christian convictions as will develop the students' abilities to share their faith.
- to strengthen appreciation of Seventh Day Baptist heritage and conviction of the Sabbath's truths.
- to nurture moral and spiritual aspects of daily living and decision-making.
- to provide resources for daily devotions.
- to encourage the educational ministry of Seventh Day Baptists around the world.

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## Editor's Page

The sovereign nature of God is seen through the visionary images of the authors of Isaiah, Hebrews, and Revelation. The quarter begins with a study of Isaiah's rich images of God as the one who rules the whole universe. In the Letter to Hebrews, we see how God comes to lead humankind in the person of Jesus. The Revelation of John offers the vision of God as the beginning and end of all things.

Unit I, "Sovereignty of God," has four lessons exploring how the prophet Isaiah views the reign of God over the whole world as a peaceful kingdom, a mountain of God, the foundations of the earth, and in a new and everlasting covenant.

Unit II, "Sovereignty of Jesus," is a five-lesson unit studying the images of the reign of the resurrected Christ from the Letter to the Hebrews. In these lessons, Jesus is described as the imprint of God, the owner of a household, the great high priest, a priest forever, and the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Unit III, "Alpha and Omega," develops four lessons based on the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation. John, in these lessons uses metaphors of one who makes all things new, a vision of a New Jerusalem, a river of life, and the beginning and the end of all things to explore how God reigns

I pray that these lessons will guide you in your study of and inspire you to apply the truth of Scripture to your lives.

To God be the glory,

Steve

# 1. The Peaceful Kingdom

Isaiah 11:1-9

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### Sunday

### 1 Kings 3:3-9

Solomon, the new young king, wanted to continue honoring God as his father, David, had done. He knew the importance of worshiping God in the public places. He went to offer sacrifices and participate in worship. God appeared to him in a dream. Solomon's greatest desire was to receive wisdom from God. And though he felt strongly that he was too young and inexperienced for the task ahead, he asked God to give him the ability to distinguish between good and evil. God plants wisdom within each of us. Though Solomon received the blessings of understanding directly from God, we are also entrusted by God with the ability to follow Him and stay close to Him, allowing that wisdom to grow.

### Monday

### 1 Kings 3:10-15

God was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. And He responded generously. He made Solomon the wisest of all men. He gave him great knowledge and an understanding heart. And because Solomon had not been selfish and greedy, God also promised to give him great riches and a long life. The conditions were to keep his eyes on God and walk in the ways that God wanted, just as his father David had done. We are no less responsible for all God gives to us. Because we know God answers our prayers, we cannot turn away from Him and pursue our own selfish ways.

### Tuesday

### 1 Peter 3:8-13

We need to cultivate a friendly disposition. These verses give good advice to believers: how to live well within the community of believers and how to be an example of Christ to others. Be a blessing to others—loving and sympathetic. Do not react impulsively, instead repay hurt with love. Keep your mouth shut if you have nothing good to say. God is watching and listening to the loving and righteous person. You will be blessed and your example will be a blessing to all others.

### Wednesday

### 2 Peter 1:3-11

We have received the faith we have as a gift from a righteous God. Our precious gift is the knowledge of the love of God and Jesus Christ. We have been empowered and equipped with all we need

for this life. God offers all the tools we need to focus on His divine nature and to stay far away from the wickedness of this world. But we need to keep our tools sharp, incorporating essential ingredients: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Not using them, we quickly lose our way. Using them, we become more and more effective in His work.

### **Thursday**

### **Philippians 2:1-11**

More excellent words of advice for living a Christian life. If Christ took on the spirit of a servant, then so should we. When we adopt a true servant's heart, placing others above us and having their interests first in our minds and hearts, we are taking on the nature of Christ when He became a man and lived on earth. One of the great benefits to us of Christ coming to earth is that we have an example of how we should live. Let us be like-minded with Christ—loving, humble, and unselfish.

### **Friday**

### **Psalms 72:1-7**

It is pretty evident that Solomon desired to be an honest and just ruler. Here he implored God to empower him as King. He acknowledged that only God could make him the judge he needed to be. Without God, he would not qualify. With God's help, he could rule properly—fairly and with righteousness. Under Solomon's rule, Israel could prosper and flourish. With help from God, a just and peaceful reign could endure. These ideals from Solomon's reign parallel Christ's reign when He will come to rule on earth. As Christians, we are seeing the hope of the Peaceful Kingdom to come, when righteousness replaces sin. Only through Messiah's rule can we prosper and flourish.

### **Sabbath**

### **Isaiah 11:1-9**

The Peaceful Kingdom will come, ruled over by the Messiah, sprouting up as a tender shoot from the ancient stump of a humble family. God's Spirit will be over Him, imparting insight, so that He will judge the poor and needy with knowledge and fairness. And then will come a world of harmony and peace, where predator and prey rest and play together. The earth will be filled with the boundless knowledge and love of God. Here we are now, in a crazy world full of hatred and violence. How wonderful to realize the promise that God will come to us and bring His Kingdom of peace and stability.

**Study** Isaiah 11:1-9

**Background** Isaiah 11:1-9

**Devotional** Psalm 72:1-7

## Key Verse

They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9)

## Heart of the Lesson

We live in a world full of divisions, hatred, trouble, and chaos. Will we ever experience harmony? Isaiah's prophecy reveals that the sovereign God will bring about a world of peace.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What are some of the divisions, hatred, trouble, and chaos going on in the world around you today? What emotional pain and distress have you experienced as a result of all this? Do you believe it is possible to live a peaceful life in a hostile environment?
2. To what context of division, hatred, trouble, and chaos was this prophecy originally written? Do you think the promises given in this passage were intended for Israel or the world as a whole? On what do you base your answer?
3. How would the promised descendant of Jesse be different from those who preceded Him (v.3-5)? In what three ways would the Spirit of the Lord "rest on Him" (v.2)? How would each manifestation of the Spirit help Him to fulfill His mission?
4. What images did Isaiah use to paint a picture of a peaceful world? How do these images convey the message of an earth "full of the knowledge of the Lord" (v.9)?
5. If this is a messianic prophecy, in what ways did Jesus usher in this age of peace? How far do you think this peace will extend and when will it come? What does this teach us about the sovereignty of God?
6. In what ways can we participate in ushering in the age of God's peace into the world? What other Scriptures can you find that encourage us to do so?

## Understanding and Living Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### *The Peaceful Kingdom*

The idea of a Peaceful Kingdom exists so far from our reality that it is difficult to see it as anything other than a dream—something to be longed for but never realized. Yet anyone can read the poetry of Isaiah 11:1-9 and want that world to happen right now. As Christians, we know that God's Peaceful Kingdom is the Messiah's Kingdom. That Kingdom can only exist when the worldly powers are overthrown and replaced by, the "ideal Son of David...conceived as a new shoot from the ancient stock of Jesse" (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, biblehub.com).

Isaiah assured the Jews they would be delivered from imminent danger of invasion. It was common for prophets, and particularly Isaiah, to attempt to ease the fears of the people and to point them to the great "future deliverance" which would come with the Messiah. For people who had faced one calamity after another, it was comforting to focus on the Messiah—the inevitability of His coming, the strength and power of His character, the peace and richness of His Kingdom.

### *Strength from Above*

Previously, in Isaiah 10:5, Isaiah likened the immense

and powerful invading army of Assyria to "the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath!" (Isaiah 10:5, NIV). In sharp contrast, Isaiah began chapter 11 describing the future Savior as a stem—a tender shoot coming forth from an ancient root. It is significant that Isaiah illustrated the Messiah's ancient lineage, coming from the line of the humble Jesse rather than that from his powerful son King David. The Messiah would come out of unassuming beginnings and rise to the ultimate power. Never would the kingly traits of great earthly leaders carry God's people to His Peaceful Kingdom. Earthly might and power would fall and fade away and godly strength would reign.

Note the sharp contrast drawn in this passage. First of all, Israel heard these words at a time of exile. They had been dominated by the strength of their enemies, weakened by repression and separation from that which they valued most—their own kingdom and autonomy. The world ruled by strength. That is what people knew. David and Solomon had been rulers of strength and might. But that had not worked out very well. Even Isaiah acknowledged an emptiness within the places of power

and a sorrow “until the Spirit is poured down on us from above” (Isaiah 32:15, MSG). Now Israel would need to envision a new kingdom and a new ruler, led by and full of the Spirit of God. Having the Spirit of God upon one meant that the actions would be other than human. That is what God was promising here. A new ruler would be controlled by His Spirit. And a new kingdom would come with the new King.

### ***The Peaceful Kingdom Today***

We do long to live in peace. It seems like there are so many of the world’s problems over which we have little control. Terrorism has reached right into our back yard. Corruption, political unrest, eroding moral values, and tolerance for everything all dominate our culture. Nothing valued by the modern world brings us any closer to peace. Parents struggle against the pressures of the blatant vacuum of the culture to raise their children in a world focused on peace. What can they find to take the place of the seductive emptiness of the world? The most obvious evidence of God’s Peaceful Kingdom in today’s world is people loving and caring for each other.

Can God’s Peaceful Kingdom exist in this world? Are there signs around us that point towards a world of peace? Where

are the stories of good works and righteousness coming from the media? It can be frustrating to envision impacting those kinds of changes on a large scale. Maybe, instead, we need to take small steps and bite off small pieces.

How can we look for ways to model the Peaceful Kingdom in our immediate world? “He’ll judge the needy by what is right, render decisions on earth’s poor with justice” (Isaiah 11:4 MSG). Isaiah, describing the Messiah’s future rule, acknowledged the importance of ministry to the poor, the marginalized, those with no voice. And what matters to God in our world today is to focus on those who cannot stand on their own. We are working for that Peaceful Kingdom when we step outside and extend ourselves to others. Every time we move away from fear and model God’s righteousness to others in love, we bring the Peaceful Kingdom closer.

### ***Only One Way***

Why does the idea of the Peaceful Kingdom and the Messiah’s Kingdom matter? We need to find a way out of the trap of sin, and not just in a metaphorical way. We are better off when we do not immerse ourselves in sin and open ourselves to our worldly nature. We are better when we turn away from the desires that

pull us away from God. Simple, but at the same time challenging—turn away from sin, turn towards God. The only way to Peace is through Christ. The prophets knew it and made it clear to God’s people. Without the future hope of Christ’s coming, the future hope out of captivity for Israel was impossible. And without Christ’s ultimate rule over this world, an escape from this wicked world is impossible for us.

The words of Isaiah 11 are as relevant today as in the time of Israel’s exile. They were not looking for a divine being. They were looking for a king to come along and restore what God had promised them. He would fight their battles, rid them of the pagans, and subdue strong enemies and conquerors. They rejected Jesus when He came because He promised a different kingdom. Unfortunately, they are still looking for that king. Believers see the Messiah in the words of Isaiah. We know that God was promising, then as now, a new ruler for a new kingdom, built on the righteousness and faithfulness of God. We look forward to a time when ambitious and corrupt political leaders are replaced with the just, honest, and loving God. We know that kingdom will come for us—God’s Peaceful Kingdom.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Identify the way God acts as well as the key descriptors of God’s peaceful kingdom.
2. Look forward to the day when Christian communities will be known for their godly life of peace.
3. Identify an area of church or community life that does not meet God’s intention for peace and develop a strategy to address it.

### *Teaching Activity*

Make a T-chart. On one side, list as many “unpeaceful” things about the world as your group can brainstorm. On the other side, list examples of God’s peace, Scriptures that give hope, or promises of God’s peace. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group brainstorm ways that your church can help to establish God’s peace in your community. Bring all the groups back together and share lists.

### **Looking Forward**

Isaiah’s prophecy of God’s Peaceful Kingdom provides hope for a future free of conflict and turmoil. Next we review a message of freedom and justice for the oppressed.

## 2. The Mountain of God

Isaiah 25:6-10a

### Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

#### Sunday

**Isaiah 25:1-5**

Above all else, we must praise God. Adoration is the essential part of our relationship with the Father. Acknowledging His endless love and wonders for us brings us right up close to His face. Over and over, in ancient times and even now, God shows His love for us by destroying the sin and evil all around us. Man-made strength is laid low by His might. Ultimately, all will see God's great works and acknowledge His power. Only God can shelter and protect those who cannot protect themselves. Is there any reason that would not include us as well?

#### Monday

**Luke 14:1-6**

The time to rest from doing good is...never. No laws or traditions are more important than doing real, permanent good. We cannot let what we think is proper take precedence over what is right. And doing good is always right. We need to step away from ourselves—our pride and particular urgencies—and see the need all around us for doing good. If we spent our lives going from one healing experience to another, allowing God's work to be done through us, it would be a very different world. Jesus spent His ministry doing only the good. He brought a significant change to God's people, and they could not accept it from Him. To be about God's business is the only business that really matters.

#### Tuesday

**Luke 14:7-11**

Humility is a challenge. Wanting the best for ourselves is pretty basic to our nature. It is almost like we have to slap down the urge to take the best, to be the best, and to want the best. But that is what Jesus called us to do here. When you step aside and focus on honoring someone else, there is an additional blessing. You move aside for someone else, and even if they do not acknowledge it, you have given them a gift. And you have done something rewarding for yourself as well. Humility is very attractive. It certainly looks good on others. Why not try it on yourself?

**Wednesday****Luke 14:12-14**

If you have tried it, you know it feels good to do something for someone in need. We are certainly more comfortable with our friends and family, but it is good to step away from that comfort and make a difference in the life of someone who really needs it. No one will ever accuse most of us of extending ourselves too much, giving our lives away to others too much, or responding too much to the needs of others. These verses are written for us. God wants us to put ourselves out a bit, to be a bit uncomfortable for a while, and to see the blessings flow back to us again and again.

**Thursday****Luke 14:15-23**

This little story carries a big punch. Be careful where you put your priorities. Make sure you are ready to respond to the right invitation. Otherwise, you may put your own values above God's and miss the biggest party of all. If you say "no" when God comes calling, turning away from Him in favor of the trivial nonsense you value so highly, you may not get another invitation. God knows there are plenty of others who will welcome the offer and He wants all the seats at His table to be filled.

**Friday****1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Paul cut right to the chase here. Christ died for our sins but He did not stay dead. God raised Him up on the third day. This was an undisputed fact. Many people saw Him die and many people saw Him after He rose from the tomb. They were witnesses to His resurrection. The mystery was no mystery. There were too many rational sightings to spend time on that discussion. Paul instead focused on what truly mattered—that Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection.

**Sabbath****Isaiah 25:6-10a**

Someday God is going to take all of us to a great mountain and we will dine with Him on the best food we have ever eaten. Food is a frequent metaphor in the Bible for the richness of God's blessing. And no wonder. Everybody can relate to eating a great meal, both here in the 21st century and in Isaiah's time, 700 years before Christ. Not only will we celebrate a new life in a new place with God, but all the horrors of earth will be destroyed and replaced with His grace and peace. Lord come quickly!

**Study** Isaiah 25:6-10a

**Background** Isaiah 25

**Devotional** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

## Key Verse

He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 25:8).

## Heart of the Lesson

Oppressed people are always looking for relief from their injustices. Who will deliver them? Isaiah's prophecy reveals that the sovereign God will give deliverance from oppression.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What groups of oppressed people can you identify in the world today? What makes it easy or difficult for you to identify with these groups? Are there things you could do to make identifying with them easier for you?
2. Isaiah 25 is a response to the announcement of devastation from chapter 24. Describe the mood and attitude of Isaiah 25:1-5. What personal traits and behaviors are attributed to God in those verses? What human reactions are described?
3. What was the cultural significance for Israel of the celebration feast (v.6)? A feast of fatness, of the richest foods and best wines, usually followed the ceremony of sacrifice and was reserved for the priests. What would be different about this feast? What similarities do you see with the banquet Jesus described in Luke 14:15-24?
4. What is the significance of the covering or veil referred to in verse 7? How would God swallow it up? How would He wipe "tears from all faces," and "remove the reproach of His people," in verse 8?
5. What hope does this passage bring to oppressed groups and individuals today? What will you do to help eliminate injustice while we are waiting for God's great banquet?

## Understanding and Living Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### *A Change of Fortunes*

Isaiah 25 begins with a hymn of praise. There can be an assumption here that, between the woeful declaration of Isaiah 24 and the thankful poetry of Isaiah 25, God was turning away from the wrath of His judgment towards His forgiving love and the hopeful reward of the future. God was going to deliver Israel from the oppression of captivity and return her to the celebration of joy on His Mountain. What the Israelites wanted most was to get their lives back. Seeking an end to a long oppression, they looked to God to restore their lands and possessions and to establish their kingdom on earth—autonomous, sovereign, and free.

The feast described by Isaiah in 25:6-10 celebrates all of God's people meeting with God Himself at the most sacred of places. Isaiah 2:2 describes "that the mountain of the Lord shall be established...and all nations shall flow unto it" (KJV). It is on this mountain that God will prepare an amazing feast. This is a banquet provided solely by God, where His people receive gifts that only He can bestow. In addition, as in verse 7, God will remove the veil of sorrow and death that has covered man in his sin. The best will be offered at this feast. Those rich morsels

formerly reserved for a select few will be lavished on all. In order for this great repast to be enjoyed, "[H]e will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8, NIV).

### *Oppression Near and Far*

Christians are martyred for their faith around the world—some say as often as every five minutes. Oppression on such a scale is a concept that is almost impossible to comprehend, let alone relate to our lives. But it is there. Our oppression as Christians where we live may take on a much subtler hue and we may not recognize it happening in our world. Still, Christians suffer in our modern culture and many Christians suffer personal oppression that goes unnoticed.

What does oppression look like closer to home? It is certainly true that our modern culture pushes itself further away from the principles of faith and the righteousness that God desires for our world. Can the pressures and barriers set up by our secular world create oppression for believers? We know of people all around us living, if not in outright oppression, certainly surrounded by difficulties, complications, and worries. Though these may pale in comparison, just as in the time of captivity in Babylon, there are no answers apart from God. And as humans,

we struggle every day to solve our own problems.

In Isaiah 24, God had just about had it with Israel. He seemed determined “to lay waste the earth and devastate it” (Isaiah 24:1, NIV). The sense of hopelessness, then and now, could probably seem insurmountable. When there seemed only despair, God came through with a promise of restoration and renewal. And believers today can stand on the same promise in their lives.

### ***For All Peoples***

Who do we believe are “all peoples?” All means all. It is inclusive. The invitation is an open one. The Jews of Isaiah’s time would not have understood that. Yes, some distant day Messiah would come and then acceptance of all people would come to pass. Inclusion would mean something someday to Israel. People who were an anathema to Jews, the most hated Moabites and Ammonites would one day sit alongside at the banquet table. We need look no further than Matthew’s genealogy to recognize Ruth as one notable example.

But Christians know differently. We know there are no automatic exclusions. We can see strong parallels between this passage and the parable found in Luke 14:1-24. When the preferred guests turned Him down,

Jesus urged them to invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13, NIV). We do not want to sit down and eat a meal with people we do not respect. But this renewal, effected by God, has to include everyone. If it did not, we would not be invited either.

As Christians, it is essential that we believe that God is the God of all nations and all peoples. We have been included as part of His people, and so must they. We need to find ways to perpetuate inclusion and continue the celebration as one great people, existing without oppression. It has been most comfortable for us to exclude others and even more comfortable for us to ignore God. We have to look outside our own comfort at those who need to be included. We also have to be aware of how we may be contributing to the oppression of others. God wants us to step out in faith to do a good work for Him.

As we live a relatively comfortable life of the twenty-first century, we may not see ourselves as “oppressed.” But people of faith hold to God’s promise for the end of all oppression. In simple terms, Isaiah 25 says that there is going to be a great reward for God’s people. Whatever form oppression takes, even the marginalization and

disrespect of a faith-based life, God promises destruction of those forces working against His righteousness and compensation to those who remain faithful. There is going to be a renewal of all things. Gone will be the beliefs that have enforced an exclusion that is natural to us: fear and assumptions, and a belief that our story is better than God's story. In its place will be an everlasting celebration, where God will continue to show His deeply personal faithfulness.

Isaiah 25 speaks about a time of change when God's banquet is set on His holiest mountain—symbolic for all peoples gathered together in celebration of the end of oppression. But it is relevant in our lives right now as well. It needs to be as important today as it was then to understand the nature of God's perfect faithfulness, realizing that God intends destruction of the ruthless oppressors of our time as well, and that there will be a time of great confession of our need for God and a call for rejoicing. God is going to overcome those with earthly power and strengthen those who are weak. The salvation that has been greatly needed and anticipated will come at last. "This is the LORD, we trusted in [H]im; let us rejoice and be glad in [H]is salvation" (Isaiah 25:9b, NIV).

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Understand that God acts in the best interests of all peoples and all nations.
2. Appreciate that God removes barriers that cause people to feel separated from God and one another.
3. Rejoice that God gives hope to all oppressed peoples.

### *Teaching Activity*

Read Isaiah 25. Have partners or small groups work to make two lists. On one list, identify all the verbs in the passage that relate to God's work. On the other list, identify all of the verbs that relate to people. Discuss how that relates to oppression we face and other things groups noticed in this activity. Give each group a large piece of chart paper to list examples of oppression—both physical and spiritual. Site ways God frees the oppressed using Scripture, characteristics, promises of God, and real life examples.

### **Looking Forward**

In this lesson we have understood the promise of freedom and justice to those who are oppressed. Next we will be challenged to understand God's absolute power.

# 3. Foundations of the Earth

Isaiah 40:21-31

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### Sunday

**Luke 3:2-6**

Isaiah and John the Baptist, two great prophets with the same wonderful message: the earth will be changed. The crooked ways of man will go away and the clear and straight ways of God will take their place. The high places of sin will be made low and the coarse ways of evil will be made smooth. The salvation that God has always promised for all will be there for everyone to see. Christ will bring that Salvation to man. Are you ready for Christ to impact your life with this change?

### Monday

**Isaiah 38:9-20**

Hezekiah could be a godly, pious man. Here he wrote his thanksgiving to God for being with him during his illness and recovery. God sometimes allows serious illness to teach us to live a life more focused on Him. Illness can change our perceptions, narrowing those things that really matter down to a very few. If we are given the gift of recovery, we need to hold fast to what we may learn: God is good and the life He gives us can be good. In His love, God reaches down and draws us back from the illness and gives our new life to us.

### Tuesday

**Isaiah 40:1-8**

This chapter begins the prophet Isaiah's focus on the distant future—the eventual coming of The Messiah, the creation for Jews and Gentiles alike of God's kingdom on earth. Even though Isaiah wrote after the conquest of Israel by Assyria and before the Babylonian exile, he saw Israel's suffering as already accomplished. He called God's people to turn from disobedience and prepare for the coming of the Savior. The lowliest would be raised up and the high-and-mighty laid low. Then, God's glory would be revealed to all and His Word would endure forever.

### Wednesday

**Isaiah 40:9-11**

Isaiah encouraged the prophets of his time to let the people know that the preparations had been completed and that God's promises would come to pass. They were to go to the highest mountain and yell in the most commanding voice: God is here! The Lord has come with power and strength. But He will also

come with gentle comfort and security. As a shepherd tenderly cares for his flock, God comes to collect and protect His people. Are you ready to proclaim it on the mountaintops?

### **Thursday**

### **Isaiah 40:12-14**

God's strength and might cannot be fully understood by man. The power of God overshadows the weakness of man and the impotence of idols. Nothing exists that is greater than God. God needed no help in creating the vastness of the heavens or the intricacies of earth. God depended on nothing else to aid and assist Him, to guide Him, or to teach Him. So often we turn to the wisdom of the world, looking to the voices of others for answers to the complex questions of the world. How much better to seek first the wisdom of God and surrender fully to Him?

### **Friday**

### **Isaiah 40:15-20**

Nothing created by man can compare to the greatness of God. The most powerful nation cannot match the strength and majesty of God. The most potent force generated by man weighs as much as dust on the scales to God. Anything we might offer to Him is worthless to Him. We seem anxious to compare our earthly powers to God's because we place them above Him in our lives. Everything we worship on earth is an idol. And no matter how we gild our possessions and glorify our worldly desires, they are nothing to God. They have no strength and they are going to topple.

### **Sabbath**

### **Isaiah 40:21-31**

What powerful verses! Our world is a scary place and we can easily be overwhelmed by the political, social, and spiritual warfare that goes on all around us. God wants us to remember what He has been saying all along: He is above and around us everywhere. He sits as a king, ruling over everything. No terror of this world has more power than God. Nothing that takes control here will last. If we look around at what He has created—the heavens, magnificent mountains and seas, changing seasons—we know the symmetry of it all is from Him. Because God is everlasting, we do not need to call out in fear. He will never turn away from us, get tired of us, or stop watching out for us. We are weak and He is strong. And with His strength, all things are possible.

**Study** Isaiah 40:21-31

**Background** Isaiah 40

**Devotional** Isaiah 40:1-8

## Key Verse

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable (Isaiah 40:28).

## Heart of the Lesson

We often place loyalty in people or systems to sustain and guide our lives. Are these systems able to sustain us? Isaiah declared that God is the absolute power in whom we should depend.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What people or systems do people typically trust to sustain them? What happens when those people and/or systems let us down? Have you ever faced a situation like this?
2. Compare and contrast the rhetorical questions used in verses 12, 21, and 27-28. What is the purpose of these questions? What assumptions are made about the listener/reader?
3. List the various references in this passage to God's power. How were these designed to increase the people's trust in Him? Even though we cannot fully understand God (v.25), how does this passage claim God can be known?
4. What reasons are given why the people should not trust in manmade power and order? How do these same reasons apply today?
4. What four basic convictions of Israel's faith can be identified in verse 28? How would these contrast the belief systems of those who worshipped foreign gods in Babylon? How would this be an encouragement to the Israelites living in captivity?
5. What kinds of personal reassurances can the reader get from the final verses of this chapter? In what specific ways can you demonstrate that you trust in God's power more than people and systems in your life?

## Understanding and Living Jennifer Lewis-Berg

Isaiah 40 begins what some believe are discourses of hope and consolation, encouraging Israel to turn back towards God and accept the assurance of the restoration of their kingdom (and ultimately the promised creation of God's everlasting kingdom). Verses 1-2 speak of comfort for Jerusalem, assuring them that captivity will end and God will bless them doubly with renewal and reinstatement. God's blessings would be coming, and despite the faithlessness of man, God's promises would endure forever.

### ***Trust That Becomes Idolatry***

After years of captivity in Babylon, Israel was all too familiar with a culture of idol worship. It was essential that God's people intentionally turn away from what was the acceptable way, "to set up an idol that will not topple" (Isaiah 40:20, NIV). God wanted them to remember what they had been told from the beginning—that God is everlasting, the Creator of everything, of inexhaustible strength, and One whose insights are beyond human understanding.

It is human nature to place trust and loyalty in institutions that man has created. We look for powers in the world to protect and sustain us and have enough respect for systems of

authority to surrender control to them, hoping that they can affect the change we want in our lives. We look to national leaders that can govern and guide us. And that is placing a lot of trust in people we not only do not know, but may not even be pointed in the right direction.

It seems a lot more obvious to us that in Isaiah's time, the world turned towards idols and placed their care and trust in those powers. They built a culture around the idols. They had a more fundamental belief that their idols did in fact control them and did have the ability and authority to influence every aspect of their lives. They looked to something that they had created to take care of them. What they knew was what they saw, especially in nature, and they erected physical idols but also brought the strength and power of those idols into their hearts.

### ***Our Idols, Our Weakness***

So what is so different now from then? Look around at all our culture has created as idols. Entertainment has an enormous influence on our lives and we have given the values that movies, television, music, and the internet present to us great worth in the way we live. Things that would have

been unheard of a few decades ago are now commonplace and we are urged to tolerate them. Temptations of the world shine brightly and they seem impossible to ignore.

Let us not forget that idol which we place above all others. Our number one idol is our *self*. We may not always admit that we think we know best, that the decisions we make for ourselves are the right ones, but we really do worship “the work of our hands.” We still create idols in our own images. And our culture insists that the image is as far away from God as possible. We reserve a place of honor in our hearts for greed and selfishness. Even as believers, we push God from the throne in our hearts and substitute His will with our own. We stop paying attention to God. And what we are paying attention to is what we are worshipping. The idol in our lives is where we spend our time, where we draw our comfort, and what we value the highest. If it is not God, then it is an idol, the same as in Isaiah’s time. Israel worshipped idols because those idols were something that they could control. They fashioned gods in their images, to suit their desires, to be replicas of themselves.

If God was speaking through Isaiah to Israel to turn away

from the idols they worshipped and to understand the might and power of God, then He must certainly be saying the same words to us all these centuries later. We experience strong pressure to yield to the world’s answers to our problems—everything can be solved with enough money and power. We are immersed in a culture that promises solutions. But when do we ever hear any political or social leader acknowledge God’s power as the answer? Certainly those who speak of God’s control are not taken seriously. The world does not trust God enough to give up control and surrender to Him. As believers, we know that only God can create and sustain what is good.

### ***Trusting Only in God***

In this passage, we are told with great certainty of the everlasting, magnificent greatness of God. Isaiah spoke frankly to the idolatrous Israelites about things they should already have known. The word picture here is very vivid: God sits above the earth on His throne, stretching out the vastness of His creation. And we, His people, are like insects. Nothing created on earth stands up to God. Man creates his idols on earth and God reduces them to dust. Nothing lasts except as created by God.

How can we compare anything on Earth to God? Nothing can equal Him. All we have to do is look around at the heavens—the incredible Milky Way, each individual planet and star that we see in the sky. There is such perfection in God’s creation. Nothing of God’s is out of place. And nothing of God can ever let us down. God never grows tired. He will never stop caring for us. When we fear that God has forgotten us, Isaiah reminds us that God will understand and acknowledge us in ways we cannot fathom. We all will get tired and want to give up. We will certainly stray and fall away. But God promises that if we hope in Him, our strength will be renewed. We cannot understand God, but we can recognize His qualities in everything He does to sustain us.

Isaiah 40 concludes with inspirational words. Isaiah wanted Israel to realize that God would not fall down on the job. God is incapable of failing and these words remind us that God’s strength will become our strength as well. By hoping in God, believers are renewed and revitalized. It is only through the strength of God that we receive any power for anything. God promises to fortify us to continue our race through to the finish.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Contrast God’s power to control and effect change with human inability to do the same.
2. Reflect on the poetic imagery the writer uses to witness to God’s sovereign power and personal presence with the people.
3. Embrace God’s sovereignty and ability to address situations and needs that humans face.

### *Teaching Activity*

Make a list of people, organizations, etc. that are seen as powerful and to whom people will give their loyalty. Discuss why they are seen as powerful and what are the dangers of placing trust/allegiance in those powers. Conversely, discuss the benefits of placing trust/allegiance in God and His power. Have small groups or partners look at Isaiah 40: 21-31 and identify the images that speak to God’s power. What do those images reveal about God’s ability to sustain us?

### **Looking Forward**

In this lesson, we have been challenged to depend on God’s absolute power over manmade powers. Next we will reflect on God’s unbreakable, eternal covenant with His people.